

France, Japan boost military ties directed against China

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Visiting Tokyo on Friday, France's foreign and defense ministers signed deals with their Japanese counterparts after "two-plus-two" talks on diplomatic and national security issues. Japan is the only Asian country with which France has implemented such a diplomatic-military exchange.

The deal allows Paris and Tokyo to step up broader military cooperation and anti-terrorism efforts and exchange military technology. French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius praised the deal, saying, "It will set the framework for our collaboration." According to Fabius, France and Japan will collaborate on the development of weapons technology, including "drone systems, helicopters, and space."

French Defense Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said, "France and Japan have a lot in common." He proposed collaboration on minesweeping technology, saying: "We are both maritime nations, and we have high-tech companies in this field. Together, we can find a win-win solution."

Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida said, "We were able to bring our bilateral security and defense cooperation one step forward. It is a major achievement that we have agreed on specific plans of cooperation."

France and Japan also pledged to work toward concluding an acquisition and cross-servicing agreement (ACSA), allowing logistical cooperation between their armed forces. Japan already has signed ACSAs with the United States, Australia, and Britain.

The military deal comes after Japan and France agreed to collaborate in Africa, where French imperialism is mounting military interventions in many of its former colonies, currently Mali and the Central African Republic (CAR). During their first "two-plus-two" talks in Paris last year, Tokyo pledged to support French military interventions in Africa, which aim to

undercut China's rising influence there. (See: France, Japan form alliance targeting Chinese influence in Africa)

In forging a military alliance with Japan, France pouring fuel on the escalating tensions in Asia driven by the Obama administration's "pivot to Asia." As Washington tries to solidify a military-strategic alliance with Japan, Australia, India, and other regional powers, aimed at isolating and preparing for war with China, Japan and China are locked in a bitter military standoff over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands in the East China Sea.

Japan is also moving to end its post-war pacifist policy and constitutional restraints on the use of military force, allowing Tokyo to export military weapons, forge military ties and wage wars. Last July, Japanese cabinet approved to remove a ban that has kept the military from fighting abroad since 1945. It has been the most dramatic policy shift evidencing the revival of Japanese militarism.

The revival of Japanese militarism is accompanied by stepped-up efforts by Tokyo to whitewash the crimes and atrocities committed by Japanese imperialism in Asia during the 1930s and 1940s. This has drawn escalating protests and criticisms in the countries Japan occupied, including China and Korea.

France's alignment with Japan and Obama's "pivot to Asia" also points to significant differences emerging between the European powers—particularly between France and Germany, which has greater commercial ties to China. Annual trade flows between China and Germany exceed Chinese trade with France, Britain and Italy combined.

While French officials make no public comment on Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's decision to whitewash the crimes of Japanese imperialism, German officials are taking a different tack. As it carries out its

own program of rearmament and legitimization of militarism, Berlin is warning Tokyo that it would be better to make a show of penance for its wartime crimes as a cover for the reassertion of a militarist foreign policy.

Visiting Tokyo last week, German Chancellor Angela Merkel urged Japan to change its attitude to its wartime past. In a speech at the headquarters of the *Asahi Shimbun* newspaper in Tokyo last Monday, Merkel said Germany's acceptance into the international community after 1945 was possible because the country had dealt with its past.

Following a meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Merkel told a news conference that settling wartime history is "a prerequisite for reconciliation."

This drew a sharp retort from Kishida, who dismissed her comment as "inappropriate."



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