

US Congress applauds Japan's militarist prime minister

Peter Symonds
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Yesterday's speech by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to a joint session of the US Congress was a highly provocative event aimed at cementing the collaboration of the two imperialist powers as they prepare for war in Asia. While not mentioned by name, China was unmistakably the target—a conclusion that will certainly be drawn in Beijing.

The entire spectacle was laden with symbolism, not least the choice of day, the birthday of Emperor Hirohito. This could not have been mere coincidence. As head of state of Japan's wartime regime, Hirohito was directly responsible for the horrific war crimes and mass atrocities of the Japanese armed forces during the 1930s and 1940s, which found their most concentrated expression in Japan's rape of China.

Two days before Abe addressed congress, he and President Obama codified the new so-called “collective self-defence” in a military agreement signed Monday that will allow the Japanese armed forces to act alongside the US military beyond the shores of Japan, which already houses huge American military bases. Already in train are provocative moves to establish joint air patrols over areas of the South China and East China seas disputed by China.

The new security guidelines are another demonstration of the utter recklessness of American foreign policy. Having launched a new war in the Middle East and set in motion a dangerous confrontation with Russia over Ukraine, the US has sealed military agreements not only with Japan, but throughout the Indo-Pacific with Australia, India, Singapore and Vietnam, placing the entire region on a hair trigger. A relatively minor incident, involving, for instance, Japanese and Chinese warplanes over the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islets, could set off a train of events that culminate in a clash between nuclear-armed powers.

The significance of the US congress unanimously

embracing Abe, the most right-wing nationalist prime minister in post-war Japan, will not be lost in ruling circles in Tokyo. Abe received standing ovation after standing ovation as he repeatedly spoke of the US and Japan as part of the “free world,” implicitly underscoring their alliance against China.

Abe began his address with a quote from his maternal grandfather, former Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi, who signed the highly contentious US Japan Security Treaty in 1960 before being forced to resign amid mass protests. Abe has always regarded Kishi as his political lodestone—a man who, as a wartime cabinet member, was directly implicated in war crimes for which he was arrested but never tried.

Great attention was paid to what Abe had to say about World War II. As every member of the US Congress was well aware, his government's boosting of the military budget and aggressive stance against China have been accompanied by a concerted ideological campaign aimed at whitewashing Japanese war crimes. Playing to a right-wing audience both in Washington and Tokyo, Abe avoided any direct apology and effectively dismissed the issue, declaring, “History is harsh. What is done cannot be undone.”

It goes without saying that no one rose in the US Congress to challenge Abe. No less than the Japanese ruling class, the American ruling elite is determined to bury past crimes—not least the incineration of tens of thousands of civilians in the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki—as they prepare new wars and new atrocities.

The international working class, however, cannot afford to forget the atrocities that Abe now dismisses as the exigencies of war. What is known as the Rape of Nanjing, which Japanese ideologues minimise or deny even happened, involved an orgy of killing, rape and looting after Japanese troops seized the city in December 1937.

The number of dead is estimated as high as 300,000—just part of the more than 10 million Chinese slaughtered during the war.

Within Japan itself, the militarist regime enforced its demands for unquestioning loyalty with a reign of terror directed above all against the working class.

Now Japanese imperialism is returning to the road of militarism and war. Abe told the US Congress that Japan would take “more responsibility for the peaceful stability in the world” and would shortly enact “all the necessary bills” to play that role. Under the guise of preserving “peace,” the Abe government, encouraged by Washington, has “reinterpreted” the country’s post-war constitution to further undo the formal restraints on the Japanese military.

Beijing can interpret the lauding of Abe in Washington in only one way: that the US is engaged in an inexorable military build-up throughout Asia that can only end in Beijing’s complete capitulation or war. Utterly incapable of making any appeal to the working class in China or internationally, the Chinese government, representing the ultra-rich oligarchs who have emerged from capitalist restoration, is engaged in its own military build-up alongside futile attempts to appease Washington. Its actions only intensify the risk of war.

On the eve of May Day 2015, the international working class confronts great dangers. Behind the backs of the world’s population, military preparations are being made now, not for wars in the distant future, but for conflicts that could rapidly emerge at any time. The International Online May Day organised by the International Committee of the Fourth International for this Sunday embodies the only program and perspective that can stop the plunge towards war—the revolutionary mobilisation of workers around the world to abolish the capitalist system, the root cause of war.

We call on all readers and supporters of the *World Socialist Web Site* to **sign up** and play your part in developing a socialist anti-war movement of the world working class.



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