

Japanese cabinet approves new military legislation

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The Japanese cabinet signed off on two new bills on Thursday that will accelerate Japan's remilitarization. The legislation corresponds to joint-military guidelines agreed to by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe during his recent trip to the United States. The bills will be presented to the Japanese parliament, or Diet, shortly and a vote is expected by July.

The legislation consists of one new bill and a second that contains 10 revisions to existing laws. The ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and its junior coalition partner Komeito formally agreed to the bills on Monday, setting up their submission to the Cabinet. The LDP-Komeito coalition has a firm parliamentary majority, virtually guaranteeing the bills will pass.

Abe claimed that the laws would "ensure peace for Japan and the world." Likewise, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga couched the bills in defensive terms, saying they would allow the government "to protect the peaceful lives of the public." He continued, "We need legislation that would enable (the country) to address every situation in a seamless manner."

The bills have nothing to do with ensuring peace or protecting the public. The Abe government, encouraged by the US, is seeking to remove all restrictions on the operations of the Japanese military, in particular its ability to participate in Washington's wars under the guise of "collective self-defense."

The new law has been dubbed the "international peace support law." It will allow the government to dispatch the Self-Defense Forces (SDF)—the formal name of Japan's military—abroad without the enactment of a special law or regular extensions from the Diet. While the LDP sought to do away with all restrictions, Komeito insisted that parliamentary approval still be required initially for each new military mission.

The ten revisions to existing legislation include allowing the SDF to be deployed anywhere in the world to provide logistical support to an ally, namely the United States. Washington has pressed for such a law in order to allow Japan to support the US wars in the Middle East.

Another revision would allow Japan to use military force for actions such as minesweeping even if Japan were not under attack. As the bills were being prepared, Abe regularly cited the Strait of Hormuz to justify such a deployment.

However, central to so-called "collective self-defense" is Japan's integration into the US military build-up throughout Asia against China as part of its "pivot to Asia." Speaking last month, Abe explained why, from Washington's standpoint, the present situation was untenable.

"If there were an attack against the US [Aegis] destroyer [near Japan], Japan would not be able to prevent that from happening under the current law," he said. "In the future, the Japanese Aegis destroyer will be able to protect the US Aegis destroyer."

There is nothing "defensive" about Japan's remilitarization. Under both the LDP and previous Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) government, Tokyo deliberately inflamed tensions with Beijing. In 2012, the DPJ government of Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda sparked the current tense standoff over the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea by "nationalizing" the rocky outcrops.

Since coming to office, the Abe government has boosted military spending, redrawn military guidelines to focus on China, established a US-style National Security Council and enacted an anti-democratic secrecy law. At the same time, Abe has been waging an ideological campaign to whitewash the crimes of

Japanese militarism in the 1930s and 1940s to condition public opinion, particularly young people for new wars.

Last summer, the government “reinterpreted” the country’s post-war constitution to allow for “collective self-defense”—negating Article 9 which formally renounces war and the maintenance of armed forces. The latest legislation is the means by which this “reinterpretation” is to be put into effect.

Article 9 has been flouted for decades to permit Japan to maintain “self-defence” forces. However, the Japanese ruling class no longer wants any, even nominal, restrictions on its use of the military to pursue its economic and strategic interests.

Hajime Funada, the head of the LDP’s panel on constitutional revision, told Reuters last month, “The Cabinet resolution and legislation being crafted now have gone right up to the limits of what is possible under the constitution as it is now. If we want to have more flexibility, it is necessary to revise Article 9.”

The LDP has stated it is seeking to revise the constitution by 2018 when the next lower house elections are scheduled. However, any constitutional change requires a two-thirds majority in both the upper and lower house in the Diet as well as the approval of a majority of Japanese voters via a referendum.

The US has fully backed the new laws and Japan’s broader remilitarization. In his recent meeting with Abe in Washington, Obama reaffirmed the US commitment to its military alliance with Japan, again stating the US would back Japan in any war with China over the disputed islands in the East China Sea.

China is understandably concerned about the Japanese government’s new legislation and its close involvement in the US war preparations in Asia. Foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying stated, “We hope that Japan can earnestly learn the lessons of history, uphold the path of peaceful development... and play a constructive role in the region.”

There is widespread public opposition to the new legislation in Japan, reflecting deep-seated hostility in the working class and among young people to militarism and war. A poll by Japan’s public broadcaster NHK this week found that 50 percent of the public is opposed to Japan’s expanded role under the new joint military guidelines with the US.

On Tuesday, 2,800 people gathered in Tokyo’s

Hibiya Park to protest against the legislation. Another demonstration involving 500 people was held on Thursday morning in front of Abe’s office. A 23-year-old graduate student told the media, “If a war starts, it will be our generation that will be dispatched. I cannot tolerate this.”

Members of the opposition DPJ took part in Hibiya Park protest. The DPJ, however, has no fundamental opposition to the LDP government’s remilitarization of Japan. Its “nationalization” of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in 2012, which sparked sharp tensions with Beijing, opened the door for the Abe government to pursue even more aggressive policies.



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