

Veteran filmmaker Hayao Miyazaki denounces government plans to remilitarise Japan

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Acclaimed animator and filmmaker Hayao Miyazaki last week denounced Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's moves to undermine the country's nominally pacifist post-World War II constitution and called for an unambiguous apology to China and Korea for Japanese war crimes committed during World War II.

Miyazaki made the comments last Monday, a few days before Abe's right-wing Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) government, with the backing of its ally Komeito, pushed 11 new "collective self-defence" bills through the parliament's lower house.

The measures, which are expected to be rubber-stamped during the next two months in the upper house where the LDP has a majority, are based on the government's "reinterpretation" of the constitution in July last year.

Final passage of the new legislation will allow the foreign deployment of Japanese troops with the US and other military allies and are in line with a US-Japan military agreement signed in April and Washington's "pivot" to Asia aimed at militarily encircling China.

"I think we are going in completely the wrong direction," Miyazaki told a meeting hosted by the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan and streamed live over the Internet.

Japan's challenge, he said, is to find a new means of creating peace and stability in the region. "Prime Minister Abe seems to want to be remembered in history as the man who revised the constitution and remilitarised Japan, but this is despicable," the 74-year-old animator said.

During the hour-long press conference Miyazaki also noted the approaching 70th anniversary of the end of WWII, and said Tokyo should make "very clear that

[Japan's] aggressive war was a complete mistake and that we have deep regret for the great damage it caused the people of China ...

"Regardless of the political situation, Japan has to have deep remorse over a long period of militarist activities in China. There are many people who want to forget this, but it is something that must never be forgotten."

Miyazaki, a liberal pacifist, has carved out a five-decade career as an animator, filmmaker, writer and manga artist and founded Studio Ghibli. While his meticulous, hand-drawn animations have always been popular with millions of Japanese youth, international releases of his full-length features—*Princess Mononoke* (1997), *Spirited Away* (2001), *Howl's Moving Castle* (2008), *Ponyo* (2008) and *The Wind Rises* (2013)—brought him a global audience and numerous awards, including an Academy lifetime achievement award, the first anime director to receive the prize.

Miyazaki's denunciations of the Abe government are another indication of widespread anti-war sentiment in Japan and, in particular, the mass opposition to the government's efforts to legitimise overseas operations by the Japanese military.

According to a Kyodo News poll conducted on the weekend, the Abe government's approval rating plunged by 9.7 points to 37.7 percent, the lowest since it was elected in December 2012. More than 70 percent of those surveyed were opposed to the way the security legislation was pushed through the parliament.

Last month about 25,000 people demonstrated outside the Japanese parliament against the government's new self-defence laws. Over 20,000

marched to the parliament last Tuesday and another 6,000 demonstrated on Saturday over the lower-house passage of the new legislation and carrying placards stating “We will not tolerate Abe’s politics.”

Miyazaki’s anti-war views are well-known. He refused to visit the US to receive an Oscar for *Spirited Away* in protest against the US invasion of Iraq and is an official spokesman for the Henko campaign group, which is opposing the construction of a new US marine base at Onaga in northern Okinawa.

The popular animator and filmmaker’s political outlook, however, is a confused combination of pacifism, Japanese liberalism and environmentalism.

In a lengthy interview in 2013, Miyazaki forthrightly denounced Abe and others “who mess around with our [pacifist] constitution,” appealed for the government to pay compensation to Chinese, Japanese and Korean “comfort women” enslaved by the Japanese military during WWII and called for a negotiated solution to the territory conflicts with China and Korea.

In the same interview, however, Miyazaki declared that he supported previous Japanese military missions in Iraq and the Persian Gulf, repeating the official lie that Japanese involvement had been “humanitarian.” He also called for national self-reliance and blamed “overpopulation” for war.

In his comments last week, while opposing militarism, Miyazaki also tacitly accepted the official line in Washington and Tokyo that Chinese expansionism is to blame for rising tensions. He declared that it was “impossible to curb China through military force. We have to find another way and I think that’s the purpose of having a pacifist constitution.”

Obama and Abe have both exploited claims of Chinese expansionism to justify their military build-up against China. While Miyazaki made no reference to the US, the Obama administration is centrally responsible for stoking tensions in Asia through its military “rebalance” to the region and by encouraging allies such as Japan to take a more aggressive stance towards China.

Miyazaki’s denunciations of the Abe administration last week no doubt struck a chord with millions of Japanese citizens. But his utopian appeals for a peaceful resolution of tensions in Asia ignore the bloody lessons of the past century that resulted in the deaths of millions in two world wars, the Korean War

and the Vietnam War.

The source of war is not to be found in “overpopulation” but in the capitalist system and its outmoded division of the world into rival nation states which is once again fuelling the drive to a new global conflict.

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