

Japanese PM snubs China's World War II victory ceremony

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An announcement by Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga on Monday ended speculation that Prime Minister Shinzo Abe might visit China and take part in official ceremonies on September 3 to mark the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II.

Suga told a press conference that Abe would not attend the ceremonies and had no plans for a trip to China immediately before or after that date either. "The decision was made based on the circumstances of the Diet [Japan's parliament] and other considerations," he said, a reference to unpopular security bills that are due to be debated in the parliamentary upper house.

An unnamed senior official told the *Japan Times* that the government had consulted with other countries before making a decision. US President Obama and top European leaders will not be in attendance, but will be represented instead by government ministers, former leaders and diplomatic envoys in Beijing.

While Suga claimed that Japan was trying to "set the stage for the leaders of the two countries to engage in candid discussions," Abe has only twice met Chinese President Xi Jinping briefly for one-to-one talks. Abe was elected to office in December 2012 while Xi was installed as president in March 2013.

Abe's rebuff to China's invitation is bound up with continuing sharp tensions between the two countries, including over his whitewashing of the Japanese military's crimes and atrocities during the 1930s and 1940s. Abe's attempts to revise history are part and parcel of his government's remilitarisation of Japan. The two security bills are aimed at undercutting constitutional restrictions on the capacity of the armed forces to engage in "collective self-defence"—that is, to participate in US-led wars of aggression.

Abe's presence at a Chinese military parade held to

commemorate victory in what Beijing refers to as the "Chinese People's War of Resistance to Japanese Aggression" would have been unacceptable to right-wing militarist layers to whom he panders in Japan. Earlier this month Abe told Japan's public broadcaster NHK that he would only attend commemorative events that were conciliatory and not "anti-Japanese."

The extreme right continues to justify Japan's brutal subjugation of China and other Asian countries as a "war of liberation" to free Asia from Western colonialism and its puppet regimes as part of Tokyo's "Greater East Asian Co-Prosperty Sphere."

Abe's own speech on August 14 to mark the 70th anniversary of Japan's defeat was a carefully crafted exercise that paid lip-service to past, limited apologies issued by previous leaders for Japanese aggression, but insisted that Japan should not continue to apologise indefinitely. Moreover, the speech was evasive on Japan's responsibility for the war and on specific crimes carried out by the Japanese military, including the systematic sexual abuse of hundreds of thousands of women.

While acknowledging that Japan had become "a challenger to the international order" in the 1930s and 1940s, the phrase was carefully chosen to reinforce current US and Japanese propaganda directed against China. As part of its "pivot to Asia" against China, the Obama administration has deliberately stoked up tensions throughout the region, accusing Beijing of not abiding by the "rules-based international order"—that is, by the post-war order established under US hegemony.

In China, the *People's Daily*, the main mouthpiece of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), criticised Abe's speech as lacking in sincerity. "Up to this day, Japan has yet to manage a clean break with its disgraceful past," it declared. The state-owned Xinhua news

agency described Abe's statement as "watered down" and a "retrogression" that was "rife with rhetorical twists."

While the criticisms were relatively muted, the CCP leadership, having all but ended its previous socialistic and anti-imperialist posturing, relies on whipping up Chinese nationalism, aimed against Japan in particular, to deflect rising social tensions outwards. It is using the ceremonies on September 3, marking the day after Japan formally surrendered to the US and its allies on board the USS Missouri in 1945, for that purpose.

Rehearsals have already been underway for a military parade that will include thousands of troops as well as tanks and missile launches and an aerial display of military aircraft and helicopters. Reflecting the hopes of the CCP bureaucracy, the hawkish state-run *Global Times* reported: "It was a feast for the eyes. The populace is embracing the parade with excitement."

Chinese academic Song Luzheng told the *Guardian*: "The West tends to perceive the parade from the perspectives of realpolitik and international relations... [T]he first purpose of the parade is to remind the world of China's status as a victorious nation, which came at a huge cost."

It is certainly the case that Japanese imperialism, which seized Manchuria in 1931 and invaded the rest of China in 1937, inflicted immense suffering and hardship on the Chinese people. At least 15 million Chinese soldiers and civilians died in the war. The CCP leadership, however, which represents the tiny super-wealthy stratum of China's billionaires and millionaires, exploits these terrible experiences to try to legitimise its own rule.

The regime's only other crutch for political legitimacy has been the country's high level of economic growth which is now fading fast amid turmoil on China's share markets.

The US "pivot to Asia" confronts the Chinese government with a sustained US diplomatic and economic offensive aimed at undermining its global and regional influence, as well as a US military build-up throughout the Indo-Pacific. The CCP's response is to engage in an arms race with Washington and its allies and to stir up anti-Japanese chauvinism as the means for shoring up its narrow social base at home.

The resort to Chinese nationalism not only divides Chinese workers from their class brothers and sisters in

Japan and internationally, but plays directly into the hands of US imperialism and its allies, including Japan. Abe is justifying his rearming of Japan and ending of legal and constitutional constraints on the military by whipping up fear and uncertainty over the China "threat."



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