

Japan's security laws: Another milestone in the drive to world war

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Japan's new military legislation comes into force today, allowing the country's armed forces, under the guise of "collective self-defence," to fully participate in wars abroad for the first time since the end of World War II. The implementation of the laws is a major step in the revival of Japanese militarism, which has been encouraged by Washington as part of its "pivot to Asia" and preparations for war with China.

The legislation is in flagrant breach of the Japanese Constitution, which, under Article 7, renounces war forever and affirms that land, sea and air forces will never be maintained.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe last month dismissed the advice of legal experts that the legislation was unconstitutional, declaring that the constitution, not the new laws, had to be changed. Abe is pressing for an end to all restraints on the military and the transformation of Japan into a "normal nation"—that is, one that can aggressively pursue its economic and strategic interests by armed force.

Since coming to power in 2012, the right-wing Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) government has boosted military spending, concentrated war powers in a US-style National Security Council and refashioned military planning to focus on conflict with China. As part of its "island defence" strategy, Japan is building up military forces on its southern island chain adjacent to the Chinese mainland. On Monday, a new radar station became operational on the island of Yoniguna, just 150 kilometres from disputed islets in the East China Sea known as Senkaku in Japan and Diaoyu in China.

The entire Japanese political establishment, not just the LDP, is responsible for the extreme tensions over the Senkakus. The previous government, headed by the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), provoked widespread

Chinese protests in September 2012 by "nationalising" or buying the uninhabited rocky outcrops from their private owner. Abe has refused to countenance any negotiations with China over the future of the islands.

In 2014, US President Barack Obama upped the ante by declaring that the US-Japan Security Treaty covered the Senkakus. This was tantamount to committing the US to intervene militarily in support of Japan should war break out between it and China over the islets. Hundreds of dangerous encounters took place last year, as Japan mobilised fighter jets and coast guard vessels to challenge Chinese "intrusions," heightening the risk that a mistake or miscalculation could lead to conflict.

The implementation of Japan's "collective self-defence" laws is another milestone in the drive to war being fuelled by the global breakdown of capitalism. Japanese imperialism is presently operating under the patronage of the United States, but it is an alliance of convenience. Japan and the US have already fought one war in the Pacific that cost the lives of millions to determine which power would dominate Asia, and the two could come to blows again.

The remilitarisation of Japan underscores the warnings made by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) in its February 18 statement "Socialism and the Fight against War" that the world is being drawn once again into a catastrophic global conflict. Behind the backs of their populations, capitalist governments are gearing up for war and becoming increasingly bellicose.

"As in the years that preceded the outbreak of World War I in 1914 and World War II in 1939," the statement declares, "political leaders and military planners are approaching the conclusion that a war between major powers is not a remote possibility, but, rather, highly probable and, perhaps, even inevitable.

At a certain point, such military fatalism becomes a significant contributing factor to the outbreak of war.”

As is today the case in Germany, the road to war is being prepared in Japan with a reactionary campaign to revise history and whitewash the monstrous crimes of Japanese imperialism in the 1930s and 1940s. Abe, whose maternal grandfather Nobusuke Kishi was part of the wartime Japanese cabinet, speaks for broad sections of the ruling elite who justify Japan’s role in World War II as a struggle to free Asia from Western colonialism. Abe appointees have dismissed the wartime sexual slavery of hundreds of thousands of “comfort women” by the Japanese military and downplayed or denied such atrocities as the Rape of Nanjing, in which up to 300,000 Chinese civilians and prisoners were slaughtered.

The government is whipping up Japanese patriotism and a climate of fear over the Chinese “threat” so as to justify rearmament. At the same time, it is seeking to project mounting social tensions outward against a foreign enemy. A quarter century of slump has been compounded by the failure of so-called Abenomics to revive the Japanese economy. Wages remain at the level they were two decades ago, and many young people are condemned to a future of unemployment or low-paid casual work. This week, the *Financial Times* reported that large numbers of elderly people are committing petty crimes in order to get themselves jailed because they cannot survive on their meagre pensions.

The same crisis of global capitalism that is fuelling the drive to war is giving fresh impetus to socialist revolution. Opposition to war and militarism is deeply embedded in the Japanese working class, which suffered not only the police-state rule of the wartime militarist regime in Tokyo, but also the murderous US bombing raids. The Japanese people remain the only population to have experienced the horrors of nuclear incineration in the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Some of the largest anti-war protests in Japanese history took place last year as the Abe government rammed its military laws through the parliament. At their height, the demonstrations swelled to 120,000 in Tokyo, with smaller protests in hundreds of other cities and towns. That anti-war sentiment, however, remained trapped within the parliamentary framework, as the

Japanese Communist Party and various pseudo-left organisations have subordinated the protests to the capitalist Democratic Party of Japan, which has no fundamental disagreement with the military legislation.

Workers and youth in Japan, like their counterparts around the world, can halt the slide towards world war only through the construction of an international anti-war movement of the working class based on the program of socialist internationalism. The spread of war can be ended only by abolishing the social order that is its root cause—capitalism, with its archaic nation-state system. The ICFI is the only political organisation on the face of the planet fighting for this perspective. We urge our readers in Japan and throughout Asia to take up the struggle to build this anti-war movement.



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