

# Japan's new cabinet line-up to promote remilitarisation

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In the wake of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) gains in last month's upper house election, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe reshuffled his cabinet on Wednesday in a move that presages further steps towards remilitarisation and pro-market restructuring.

The most significant promotion was that of Tomomi Inada to the post of defence minister. Inada, a protégé of Abe, is well known for her extreme right-wing nationalist views. Although in parliament for just 11 years, she has already been mentioned as a possible future prime minister.

Inada, a lawyer by training, is an outspoken advocate of revising the country's constitution to remove or modify Article 9, which renounces war and affirms that land, sea or air forces will never be maintained.

Successive governments have already eviscerated Article 9 by allowing for the establishment and expansion of the military as "self defence forces." Last year, the Abe government took a further major step by enacting legislation allowing for "collective self defence"—that is, for Japan to more directly participate in US-led wars.

Abe, however, is keen to press ahead with a full-blown constitutional revision, having obtained the necessary two-thirds majority in the upper and lower houses of parliament. The LDP has long sought to not only revise Article 9, but also restore the emperor to his pre-war role as linchpin of the state apparatus and make inroads into democratic rights presently guaranteed in the constitution.

In pressing ahead with this agenda, Inada is a key political ally. She is a member of Nippon Kaigi or Japan Conference, the parliamentary group that promotes the lie that Japan went to war in the 1930s to liberate Asia from Western imperialism. It calls for the

revision of school textbooks to promote "patriotic values" and remove all references to war crimes such as the Rape of Nanking.

In 2014, a photo surfaced in the media taken in 2011 of a smiling Inada alongside Kazunari Yamada, leader of the fascist National Socialist Japanese Labor Party and open admirer of Adolf Hitler. Inada claimed that she did not know who Yamada was or the politics he expoused.

Inada has a long history of defending the crimes of the Japanese military during the 1930s and 1940s. She has supported figures such as Takashi Kawamura, who, as Nagoya mayor, suggested that the 1937 Nanking massacre, in which the Japanese army murdered up to 300,000 captured Chinese soldiers and civilians, did not happen. She is also a visitor to the Yasukuni Shrine to the country's war dead, a notorious symbol of Japanese militarism.

As the newly appointed defence minister, Inada will play a prominent role in the expansion of the Japanese armed forces and their integration into the US "pivot to Asia" and its preparations for war against China. Her denial of past war crimes and support for constitutional revision are in line with Japanese imperialism more aggressively prosecuting its economic and strategic interests, including by force.

Inada is the second woman to become defence minister. Yuriko Koike quit her post in June to run for the powerful position of Tokyo governor, which she won last month after defeating the LDP's endorsed candidate. Koike is a prominent member of Nippon Kaigi, visitor to the Yasukuni Shrine and supporter of constitutional change. Senior LDP figures, including Abe, maintained neutrality during the election campaign, thus tacitly supporting Koike.

The other new ministers in the Abe cabinet were

selected with the aim of reinforcing so-called "Abenomics," which has faced criticism as the Japanese economy has continued to stagnate. A survey of economists by the Japan Centre for Economic Research suggested that annualised growth has slumped to just 0.1 percent in the second quarter, down from 1.9 percent in the first quarter.

Abe installed one of his close economic advisers, Kozo Yamamoto, as minister in charge of regional revitalisation. Yamamoto has been an outspoken advocate of Japan's version of quantitative easing—that is, pumping huge amounts of ultra-cheap credit into the financial system. In a 2015 interview, he declared that he was worried that Bank of Japan (BoJ) Governor Haruhiko Kuroda might be facing a “den of conspirators” opposed to his policies of monetary stimulus.

Yuji Shimanaka, chief economist at Mitsubishi UFJ Morgan Stanley, told Bloomberg.com: “Yamamoto is a mastermind of Abenomics and coming into the cabinet makes him a closer adviser. Monetary policy and the BoJ are his lifework and his beliefs won't waver at all.”

However, Japan's version of quantitative easing has been no more successful than in other countries in reviving productive activity. Rather, it encouraged speculative activities that have benefited a thin layer of the upper-middle class and wealthy at the expense of the majority of the population, which confront worsening job opportunities and declining living standards.

On Tuesday, the Abe government announced another huge stimulus package that included 7.5 trillion yen (\$US73 billion) in new spending in a desperate effort to revive the economy. While making cash handouts of 15,000 yen, or about \$147, to 22 million low-income people, the main thrust of the package is to provide assistance to business via new infrastructure projects.

In an extraordinary parliamentary session beginning in September, the government is seeking to pass a second supplementary budget and also to ratify the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a far-reaching US-led economic pact aimed at shoring up American domination in Asia and undermining China.

Yamamoto is also in charge of pushing through the necessary legislative changes to implement the TPP, which will impact heavily on highly-protected sectors

of the Japanese economy such as agriculture. The LDP has relied heavily on its base of support in rural areas, which have had strong electoral weight as a result of a gerrymander against urban electorates. Another Abe adviser, Hisoshige Seko, will also promote the TPP as the newly-installed minister for economy, trade and industry.

Abe, however, is determined to exploit the TPP as the means of ramming through major pro-market structural changes that will hit not only farmers and other small businesses, but sections of the working class. Successive governments over the past two decades have already substantially dismantled the post-war life-long employment system, with 38 percent of the workforce now in low-paid casual and part-time jobs.



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