

Trump encourages Japanese militarism against North Korea and China

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US President Donald Trump flew out of Japan today for the second leg of his 12-day Asian tour—a formal state visit to South Korea. Prior to leaving Tokyo, he repeatedly voiced support for a more militarist and aggressive foreign policy on the part of Japanese imperialism, against which the United States fought a devastating war between 1941 and 1945. Already, under nationalist prime minister Shinzo Abe, the Japanese ruling elite is casting aside the constitutional limits on the use of military force, imposed on the country after World War II.

At a joint press conference with Abe, Trump repeated his assertion that the “era of strategic patience” with North Korea was over. Abe declared full Japanese support for the US ultimatum that, if North Korea failed to abandon its nuclear and missile programs, “all options are on the table.”

Voicing his government’s backing for Trump’s policy of escalating provocations against North Korea, Abe declared: “Now is the time not for dialogue but for applying a maximum level of pressure.”

Questioned about North Korean missile tests, Trump proceeded to announce—whether the Japanese leader had agreed to it or not—that “he [Abe] will shoot them out of the sky when he completes the purchase of lots of additional military equipment from the United States. The prime minister is going to be purchasing massive amounts of military equipment, as he should.”

Abe, temporarily taken aback, nevertheless responded that he would order the shooting down of North Korean missile tests “if necessary.” The Pyongyang regime has threatened on multiple occasions that such an action would be viewed as an act of war and lead to retaliation.

The exchange was prompted by a question concerning Trump’s reported confusion about the fact

that “a country of samurai warriors” had not shot down earlier missile tests. The leaking of the statement, on the eve of the trip, appears to have been an attempt to highlight the American president’s ignorance of history. The feudal samurai caste was abolished in Japan in the late 19th century, as part of the reorganisation of the country’s economy and state on capitalist foundations.

In an interview with Fox News on November 3, prior to his departure for Asia, Trump had provided an even greater demonstration of his contempt for the historical experiences of the masses of the region. He threatened China with a remilitarised Japan if it did not collaborate with the US in disarming and overturning the North Korean regime.

Japan, Trump declared, “is a warrior nation, and I tell China and I tell everyone else who will listen ... you’re going to have yourself a big problem with Japan pretty soon if you allow this to continue with North Korea.”

The “warrior” militarist regime that emerged in Japan during the late 1920s, under conditions of global economic slump and growing conflict with the US, brutally repressed the Japanese working class and unleashed a war of colonial conquest in China and later across Asia. Between 1931 and 1945, it is estimated that at least 20 million Chinese lost their lives at the hands of Japanese imperialism.

These invasions and wars were also a catastrophe for the Japanese people, who suffered as many as 3 million dead and the virtual destruction of the country by US imperialism—including the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. For decades, the attitude of the Japanese working class to any hint of militarism has been resolute opposition and the sentiment, “never again.”

Trump displayed utter indifference to anti-war

sentiment in Japan, as he strutted alongside Abe, a leader whose government is full of right-wing nationalists who glorify Japanese militarism and apologise for, or openly deny, its crimes.

During his time in office, Abe has enacted legislation allowing for so-called “collective defence”—meaning the deployment of the Japanese military in offensive operations on the pretext that they are “defending” their US allies. He has ramped up spending on the “Self Defense Forces,” already one of the most technically advanced and well-equipped military forces on the planet. His government has aggressively pursued territorial conflicts with China over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea, to the point where Japanese and Chinese military aircraft encounter each other on virtually a daily basis, and has forged close independent military ties with India, while strengthening them with Australia and other regional countries.

Abe has faced no meaningful opposition to this agenda from the various parties and organisations that were once described as the “left” of official Japanese politics, including the misnamed Japanese Communist Party (see: “Japan’s Stalinists seek to head off anti-war movement ahead of election”).

Mass alienation, and the absence of any genuine alternative for the working class, saw turn-out in the October 22 election at barely 53 percent. Under these conditions, Abe’s Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and its coalition allies were able to win over two-thirds of the seats in the lower house of parliament. As a result, his government has been able to push ahead with its support for the US war drive against North Korea, and the longer-term perspective of provoking a confrontation with China, to shatter its growing influence in Asia.

In a sign of just how far Japanese remilitarisation could go, top-ranking LDP figure Shigeru Ishiba used Trump’s visit to Japan as the backdrop for a November 6 speech, in which he declared: “Japan should have the technology to build a nuclear weapon if it wants to do so.” Ishiba, who also advocates the establishment of a Japanese Marine Corp, massive increases to military spending and repudiating the pacifist constitution, has previously made similar calls for a nuclear arsenal.

While Trump’s visit to Tokyo was dominated by rhetoric on the closeness of the US-Japan alliance, the

reality of underlying, objective conflicts—and the driving force for Japanese remilitarisation—surfaced on several occasions. Trump raised the sharp competitive struggles that have developed between the transnational corporations of the two great powers, complaining of Japan’s trade surplus with the US and the lack of American access to certain Japanese markets.

In perhaps the most revealing exchange, the US president, in the full glare of the media, lectured Abe about the determination of the US to remain the dominant world power. Referring to the Japanese economy, Trump stated: “I don’t know if it’s as good as ours. I think not. OK? We’re going to try to keep it that way. And you’ll be second.”

Japanese imperialism is more than prepared, at this stage, to function as the junior partner of the US in the destruction of North Korea, and in its efforts to contain and undermine the strategic and competitive challenge posed by the rise of China.

The least likely outcome of the growing struggle for geo-strategic and economic advantage, however, is that Japan and the other major imperialist powers will continue to accept a subordinate position to Washington.



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