

Japan's cabinet approves draft budget that boosts the military

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23 December 2017

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's cabinet yesterday approved a record-high draft budget for the 2018 fiscal year. The plan includes increased spending on the military as Tokyo continues to rearm. The money allocated to the armed forces has steadily risen under Abe throughout his five years in office.

Total government spending in 2018 will reach 97.7 trillion yen (\$US862.3 billion), setting a record for the sixth straight year. The cabinet also approved an additional 2.9 trillion yen (\$25.6 billion) as part of a supplementary budget for 2017. Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga claimed these funds would allow the government to address "economic recovery and fiscal soundness."

However, the spending is being driven by a 2.5 percent increase over the current military budget, setting a record-high in its own right at 5.2 trillion yen (\$45.9 billion). Abe is exploiting the supposed threat posed by North Korea to justify buying new weaponry, including offensive technology. In the past, Tokyo has been cautious of acquiring offensive weapons that breach the country's constitution and could provoke public opposition.

With Abe fully backing the Trump administration's threat to "totally destroy" North Korea, this arms buildup includes cruise missiles that would allow the military, formally known as the Self-Defense Forces (SDF), to strike targets abroad. Tokyo claimed earlier this year that it could even launch a preemptive attack on North Korea as a supposed defensive measure, an act that would, in reality, violate the constitution and international law.

The Abe administration has requested 2.2 billion yen (\$19.4 million) to purchase the Joint Strike Missile (JSM) from Norway's Kongsberg Defense and Aerospace, and is examining buying additional missiles

from Lockheed Martin. The missiles from Norway and the United States would be mounted on the Air SDF's F-35 and F-15 fighter jets respectively.

Members of Abe's cabinet, including Defense Minister Itsunori Onodera, have claimed that acquiring cruise missiles would not alter the supposedly defensive nature of Japan's military. Yet, Onodera, before becoming defense minister, headed a commission of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) earlier this year that examined the possibility of obtaining cruise missiles that could strike North Korean targets.

Hiroshi Imazu, head of the LDP's security committee, similarly stated in March: "Japan can't just wait until it's destroyed. It's legally possible for Japan to strike an enemy base that's launching a missile at us, but we don't have the equipment or the capability." Imazu claimed Tokyo could launch an attack also if an ally were targeted, under the spurious notion of "collective self-defense."

Last Tuesday, Abe's cabinet approved the purchase of two land-based Aegis shore missile batteries from the US, adding to its Patriot missile systems and Aegis-equipped destroyers. A cabinet statement asserted: "North Korea's nuclear and missile development has become a greater and more imminent threat for Japan's national security, and we need to drastically improve our ballistic missile defense capability to protect Japan continuously and sustainably."

The government intends to have the batteries, which each cost approximately \$900 million (2.1 billion yen), operational by 2023. Possible deployment sites include Akita Prefecture in the north and Yamaguchi Prefecture in the southwest. Japan will become the third country to host the system after Romania and Poland, as the US seeks to encircle Russia and China.

Tokyo plans to join the US Integrated Air and Missile Defense (IAMD) program, aimed specifically at China. A senior SDF official told the *Asahi Shimbun* recently: “[The move] is partly intended to bolster Japan’s defenses against North Korea’s ballistic missiles, but the real aim of introducing the IAMD is to counter China, which has been upgrading a number of its missiles.”

The US announced the IAMD in 2013 under the Obama administration and intends to have it operational by 2020. Tokyo’s budget includes 2.1 billion yen (\$18.6 million) to purchase SM-6 interceptor missiles, a core component of the IAMD.

Abe is continuing to push for the revision of Article 9 of the constitution, commonly known as the pacifist clause, by 2020. In a December 19 speech, Abe claimed this “would serve as a catalyst for creating a reborn Japan”—in other words, a Japan capable of projecting military power abroad at a greater intensity than at any time since World War II.

The claim that remilitarization is necessary for defense recalls the rationale advanced by the Japanese militarist regime in the 1930s and 1940s when it insisted that the aggressive annexation of surrounding countries was a defensive measure. In recent years, the history of Japanese expansionism and its war crimes has been officially whitewashed to further an image of Japanese imperialism as a victim and obfuscate the causes leading to war today.

Abe has emphasized “maximum pressure” on North Korea, an impoverished country with limited and unproven nuclear and ballistic weapon programs. Over the past two decades, Pyongyang has repeatedly attempted to reach accommodations with the US and Japan, only to be targeted again as a supposed threat that can only be dealt with militarily.

Any war on the Korean Peninsula could drag in China and Russia, both nuclear-armed countries. Ultimately, China is Tokyo’s true target as it attempts to offset Japan’s relative economic decline. Japan’s Defense Ministry stated in its 2017 White Paper that China “continues to display what may be described as a heavy-handed attitude, including its attempts to alter the status quo by force.” In the East China Sea, the territorial dispute with Beijing over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands has been utilized to whip up public fears and justify the deepening military alliance

with Washington.

Funds are being allocated in the 2018 budget to send more troops and weaponry to Japanese islands near Taiwan, part of an agenda announced at the end of 2015. The Defense Ministry has requested 26 billion yen (\$229.5 million) to deploy and maintain some 700 troops on Miyakojima Island. Troops and surface-to-ship missile systems are also expected to be deployed to the Amami and Ishigaki islands.

There is widespread opposition to this remilitarization and the alteration of Article 9. A recent poll by Jiji Press found that 68.4 percent of people opposed the current proposals by Abe and the LDP for revisions to the constitution in 2018.



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