

Japanese defense official questions the “One China” policy

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Japan’s State Minister of Defense, Yasuhide Nakayama, has called into question the “One China” policy, which states that Taiwan is a part of China and has been the basis for Tokyo’s relations with Beijing for nearly 50 years. Nakayama, who serves as deputy to Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi, was taking part in an online event hosted by the rightwing Hudson Institute think tank in Washington on June 28.

Speaking in imperfect English, Nakayama, who serves as deputy to Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi, commented, “In the 1970s, the United States policy and also all over the world, [thought] China would become one, so it [tried] the ‘One China’ policy... The decision at that time and now since the 1970s...what happen[ed] and the results of the decision-making...Was it right? I don’t know.”

Nakayama’s challenge to the “One China” policy is in line with Japan’s efforts to remilitarize, and build up for war in alliance with the United States. The Japanese ruling class is attempting to abrogate Article 9 of the constitution, known as the pacifist clause, which bans Tokyo from waging war overseas. In doing so, the ruling class wants to be free to use military means to advance its imperialist interests and offset three decades of stagnant economic growth.

Nakayama justified Japan’s involvement in a future war with China over Taiwan, saying Okinawa Prefecture in the East China Sea would be impacted by events on the island. Tokyo claims that Beijing was acting aggressively in the region and represents a danger to Japan. In reality, Washington has steadily ramped up its confrontation with Beijing since the Obama administration, turning minor territorial disputes into flashpoints, is using Taiwan to further demonize China.

Tokyo is also using the supposed China threat to

increase military spending, beyond the self-imposed ceiling of one percent of GDP. Echoing his remarks in May, Defense Minister Kishi stated on June 24, “Our defense spending should be based on what equipment and personnel the country needs for its defense, as well as the national security situation.” Tokyo’s military budget for 2021 is already a record high 5.34 trillion yen (\$US51.7 billion).

China’s Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin sharply criticized Nakayama on June 29, saying, “The politician in question flagrantly refers to Taiwan as a ‘country’ on multiple occasions, severely violating principles set out in the four political documents including the Japan-China Joint Communiqué (of 1972) and its solemn and repeated commitment of not seeing Taiwan as a country. We ask Japan to make crystal clarification, and ensure that such things won’t happen again.”

In his comments, Nakayama called Taiwan the “red line of the 21st century,” effectively threatening war over the island. Echoing Washington, Nakayama repeatedly claimed it was necessary to “protect Taiwan as a democratic country.”

Neither Tokyo nor Washington is concerned about democratic rights in Taiwan, which Japan ruthlessly ruled as a colony from 1895 to 1945. The characterization of Taiwan as “democratic” ignores the island’s history of military dictatorship, and is aimed at poisoning public opinion towards China, in preparation for war.

Taiwan first reverted to China’s control after World War II. Chiang Kai-shek and the Kuomintang (KMT) then fled to Taiwan, following their defeat in the 1949 Chinese Revolution. As throughout China, the KMT was deeply unpopular on the island. As many as 28,000 people had already been killed by government troops

two years earlier, in what became known as the February 28 Incident. Declining economic conditions and anger towards government corruption had erupted in mass protests, leading to the massacres.

These killings marked the beginning of a decades-long period known as the White Terror. In 1949, the KMT imposed martial law on the island, which would not be lifted until 1987. Some areas of Taiwan continued to be under martial law until the early 1990s. This was ignored by Washington, which saw the island as a bastion of anti-communism, and a base of operations against the People's Republic of China.

Despite the US rapprochement with China in 1972, directed against the Soviet Union and its tacit acceptance of the "One China" policy in establishing formal diplomatic relations with Beijing in 1979, Washington maintained ties to Taipei and supplied it with arms against China.

Under martial law, the government suppressed free speech and the right to assembly. It strictly controlled newspapers, even down to the number of pages, with anti-government sentiment barred from publication. New political parties were also banned. The Taiwan Garrison Command, the island's secret police until 1992, arrested at least 140,000 people, with many of them sentenced to long prison terms and tortured. Approximately 8,000 people were executed. The real totals are believed to be much higher.

In 2007, while marking the 20th anniversary of the lifting of martial law, Michael Hsiao, a sociology professor at Academia Sinica, and now senior advisor to current President Tsai Ing-wen, told the BBC that the KMT government "put a lot of effort to control people's thinking, people's reading. Economic and everyday social life wasn't so tightly controlled, but in political life, things were strict. They put people in jail—there was no freedom of expression."

Facing growing popular opposition, the government of Chiang Ching-kuo, the son of Chiang Kai-shek, who had died in 1975, lifted martial law in 1987, but the KMT ensured that many of the same restrictions and anti-democratic provisions were included in a new National Security Law, which remains in effect to this day.

The KMT turned to the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), illegally established in 1986, as a means of controlling popular discontent. However, the DPP,

Taiwan's current ruling party, does not speak for the democratic aspirations of the Taiwanese working class and youth, but instead for a layer of big business that seeks greater access to wealth, through the removal of restrictions imposed by the "One China" policy.

While the DPP and its supporters suffered under martial law, it follows in the anti-democratic KMT's footsteps. In December 2019, Taiwan's lawmaking body, the Legislative Yuan, controlled by the DPP, passed a so-called "anti-interference" law to heighten penalties for those accused of acting on Beijing's behalf. The law focuses on political donations, lobbying, disrupting elections, aiding elections, or disrupting social order.

The anti-democratic framework established under the KMT dictatorship remains in place today, supported by the DPP. As workers in Taiwan and throughout the Asia-Pacific region increasingly move into confrontation with capitalism, these same anti-democratic laws will be used to clamp down on political dissent.



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