

# Japanese Defense White Paper stokes tensions with Beijing over Taiwan

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Japan released its annual Defense Ministry White Paper on July 13, once again raising tensions with China. The document not only includes an inflammatory statement over Taiwan but more broadly outlines Tokyo's justification for war preparations, in alliance with the US, aimed at Beijing.

The White Paper includes a reference to Taiwan for the first time. It states, "Stabilizing the situation surrounding Taiwan is important for Japan's security and the stability of the international community. Therefore, it is necessary that we pay close attention to the situation with a sense of crisis more than ever before."

Implicit in this statement is Japan's preparedness to intervene militarily over Taiwan on the pretext that events on the island represent a threat to Japanese security. The paper falsely places sole blame for the growing danger of war on Beijing, which Tokyo accuses of attempting to alter the status quo in the region.

This passage is not a one-off statement, but codifies Tokyo's stance on Taiwan and questions of the "One China" policy. Under the "One China" policy, Japan recognizes Beijing as the legitimate government of all China including Taiwan. Beijing has stated that it will go to war to reunite with Taiwan if the island ever declares independence or if countries like the US and Japan attempt to overturn the policy.

Deputy Prime Minister Taro Aso and State Minister of Defense Yasuhide Nakayama have made similar comments in recent weeks. Aso stated on July 5 that Japan would have to militarily "defend" Taiwan alongside the US against Beijing. Nakayama, deputy to the Defense Minister, directly questioned the "One China" policy during a speech on June 28 and called the island the "red line of the 21st century."

These remarks as well as the White Paper directly contradict the claim that Beijing is upending the status quo in the region. The "One China" policy has been the basis for diplomatic relations with Beijing since the 1970s when Washington and Tokyo broke off formal ties with Taipei and acknowledged Beijing. Now the world's two largest imperialist powers regard China as a threat to their interests and are seeking to subordinate Beijing if necessary through war.

The White Paper praises the former Trump administration for doing precisely what it alleges against China. "Based on the 'America First' policy and the realist concept that power plays a central role," it stated, "the Trump administration has significantly changed the patterns of US involvement in the world. The administration set out a clear stance of emphasizing strategic competition with China, in particular, and also with Russia."

The document also made clear that President Biden is continuing this agenda. "The Biden administration clarified its intent to conduct a global posture review of the US forces, and announced that the United States would counter China over the long term, which the administration considers the only competitor potentially capable of sustainably challenging the international system, putting the highest priority on the military presence in the Indo-Pacific region."

The White Paper accuses Beijing of being a threat to the "rules-based order" in the Indo-Pacific, but the "rules" are set by Washington to meet its interests. In his introduction, Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi stated that Japan will uphold the "free and open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)"—the pretext used by the US to stage provocative "freedom of navigation" exercises either in or very near waters and airspace claimed by China.

The paper brands China as a threat not only in the

Indo-Pacific region, but in technology spheres like artificial intelligence, in outer space exploration, and in the cyber domain, reflecting fears in Tokyo and Washington that China is gaining the technological edge.

The document also highlights the growing relationship between Australia and India, asserting that it is pursuing the quadrilateral relationship between the two countries and the US. The “Quad” is a quasi-military alliance aimed at surrounding China and preparing for war.

Beijing responded angrily to the White Paper. Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian stated, “The Japanese side grossly interfered in China’s internal affairs, groundlessly blamed China’s normal defense construction and military activity, pointed fingers at China’s maritime activity, and hyped up the so-called China threat, which is wrong and irresponsible.”

The White Paper’s focus on Taiwan has a particular significance. Its claim that Japan needs to defend democracy in Taiwan is simply a pretext. The Japanese ruling class has long seen the island as a crucial stepping stone for projecting its power into Southeast Asia.

There are historical parallels between today and Japan’s colonization of Taiwan in 1895 following the First Sino-Japanese War, a conflict launched to remove China as a strategic competitor on the Korean Peninsula. Tokyo claimed at the time to be defending Korea from China. During the negotiation of the Treaty of Shimonoseki ending the war, Japan forced China to surrender the island, which had been part of China since 1683.

Japan waged a brutal campaign on the island to suppress opposition to the annexation. What followed were five decades of dictatorial rule justified by pseudo-scientific assertions that the Taiwanese were biologically different from the “superior” Japanese. This racist argument was put forward by Shinpei Goto, who became head of civilian affairs on the island in 1895.

Following World War I, Tokyo cultivated a layer of the island’s elite to assist in the exploitation of the island’s young working class and the peasantry. This involved an assimilation campaign to try to erase Taiwanese culture. In 1936, as Japan prepared to invade China, Governor-General Seizo Kobayashi introduced a

policy requiring Taiwanese people to adopt Japanese names, language and culture. Taiwan was one of the locations from which the Japanese army coerced young women into becoming “comfort women,” a euphemism for sex slaves, a fact the Japanese establishment today denies.

Japan’s involvement in Taiwan today must be seen in this light. As it attempts to remilitarize, Tokyo simultaneously attempts to whitewash its past war crimes in Taiwan and elsewhere in the region. Like the US, Japan has no interest in promoting democracy in Taiwan or anywhere else in the region. Rather once again, the imperialist powers are exploiting the island as a pawn in the preparations for a conflict with China.



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