

Ex-Japanese Prime Minister Abe suggests Japan host US nuclear weapons

Ben McGrath
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In a February 27 television appearance, former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe made several inflammatory statements directed above all at China. Abe, who remains highly influential in Japanese politics and the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), is seizing on the current crisis in Ukraine to further the right-wing nationalist agenda of remilitarization.

Abe appeared on a Fuji Television Network program calling for Tokyo to discuss hosting US nuclear weapons. “In NATO, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands and Italy take part in nuclear sharing, hosting American nuclear weapons,” Abe stated. “Japan is a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and has its three non-nuclear principles, but it should not treat as a taboo, discussions on the reality of how the world is kept safe.”

Taking advantage of the anti-Russia war hysteria, Abe claimed that if Ukraine had kept some of the nuclear weapons on its soil after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, it could have used the weapons as a deterrent to the current Russian invasion. Abe went on to say that hosting nuclear weapons in Japan was one possible way to deter supposed threats from China and North Korea.

In reality, the spread of nuclear weapons, far from preventing war, only increases the danger of their use in a conflict that does break out. In the case of Japan, the permanent placement of American nuclear weapons on its territory will only heighten tensions with China in conditions where successive administrations have been engaged in an aggressive military build-up throughout the region against Beijing over the past decade.

The placement of US nuclear weapons in Japan would likely begin an arms race in the Indo-Pacific, increasing the risk of conflict. Abe’s purpose is not to provide for the defense of Japan, but to prepare it for a

US-instigated war against China.

Abe did not stop there. He called on Washington to further challenge the “One China” policy and firmly state that it would come to Taiwan’s aid militarily in a conflict with the mainland. In establishing diplomatic relations with China, the US tacitly acknowledged that Beijing was the legitimate government of all China and broke off formal ties with Taipei.

At the same time, Washington called for peaceful reunification and declared it would oppose the use of armed force. Its policy of “strategic ambiguity” left open the question as to whether the US would support Taiwan in a conflict with China. On the one hand to act as a deterrent to an invasion by Beijing, and on the other to discourage Taipei from declaring independence—a move that would provoke a war. For the US to openly abandon that policy would greatly heighten already sharp tensions with China.

Wang Wenbin, China’s foreign ministry spokesman, responded to Abe’s comments, saying “Japanese politicians have frequently spread fallacies related to Taiwan and even blatantly made false remarks that violate the nation’s three non-nuclear principles. We strongly ask Japan to deeply reflect on its history.” He urged Tokyo to “be cautious in words and deeds on the Taiwan issue [and] to stop provoking trouble.”

This is not the first time Abe has made inflammatory statements since leaving office. Last December, Abe called for a diplomatic boycott of the Beijing Winter Olympics, which concluded last month, citing US allegations of “human rights” violations in Xinjiang. In separate remarks the same month, Abe also stated that any emergency in Taiwan would constitute an emergency in Japan, essentially declaring that Japan should be prepared to go to war over the island.

As prime minister from 2012 to 2020, Abe pushed

through record annual increases in military spending and laws to implement a “reinterpretation” of the Constitution to allow for “collective self-defense.” The laws were another breach in Japan’s so-called pacifist constitution allowing the Japanese military to support other countries—particularly its US ally—in conflicts.

Abe is also notorious for his whitewashing of the crimes and atrocities committed by the Japanese military in the 1930s and 1940s in China and Korea in particular. These crimes include the 1937–1938 Rape of Nanjing and the exploitation of approximately 200,000 “comfort women” as sex slaves. The aim is to condition the population especially young people for imperialist war on overseas battlefields.

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However, the Japanese working class remains deeply opposed to remilitarization and hostile to nuclear weapons in particular, as the only country in the world that has suffered a nuclear attack. The US took the criminal decision to drop atomic bombs on the civilian populations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, despite the fact that the Japanese government had already offered to surrender.

Well aware of the widespread opposition to nuclear weapons, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida quickly dismissed Abe’s suggestion as “unacceptable given our country’s stance of maintaining the three non-nuclear principles.”

Abe’s comments, however, indicate that the issue is being more widely discussed behind the scenes in ruling circles. Abe maintains a great deal of influence in the LDP. He remains a member of the National Diet’s House of Representatives and leads the Hosoda faction the largest in the LDP. Prime Minister Kishida is from the rival Kochikai faction.

The three non-nuclear principles, first outlined in 1967, are not legally binding and have been violated in the past. These principles state that Japan will not possess, produce, or allow nuclear weapons on its territory. A 1969 memorandum declassified by the US in 2017 confirmed that Tokyo officially gave Washington its consent to bring nuclear weapons into Okinawa on an “emergency basis.” The agreement helped pave the way for the end of the US occupation of Okinawa and its return to Japan in 1972.

As with the current crisis in Ukraine, the growing

danger of war in East Asia is the result of years of US efforts, working in concert with allies like Tokyo, to subordinate China to the demands of American imperialism.

Even though Japan and the US are allies, the interests of the Japanese bourgeoisie ultimately differ from those in the US. For the time being, Tokyo views its alliance with Washington as a stepping-stone towards remilitarization and reasserting itself militarily on the Asian continent, even at the risk of a catastrophic war.



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