

Japanese cabinet approves policy to double military spending

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Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's government is set to significantly increase its military involvement in the Indo-Pacific region, according to annual policy guidelines adopted by Kishida's cabinet on June 7.

These new guidelines come in the wake of United States President Joe Biden's summits with Kishida and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) in Tokyo at the end of May, aimed at preparing for war with China.

The Basic Policies for Economic and Fiscal Management and Reform policy package calls for doubling Tokyo's armed forces spending "within five years," without specifying a specific numerical target. The guidelines state that Tokyo will aim for the standard set by NATO countries by spending more than 2 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) on the military. Japan currently spends about 1 percent of its GDP on the armed forces.

Tokyo's military budget for the 2021 fiscal year reached 6.17 trillion yen (\$US46 billion), which included the initial and supplementary budgets. If doubled this would make the Japan the third largest military spender in the world, surpassed by only the US and China.

In addition, the new guidelines allow increased weapon exports, with regulatory laws likely to be changed by next March, according to *Nikkei Asia*. In 2014, Japan eased regulations that banned the export of weapons, though this ban had been undermined in the past.

Now, Tokyo is trying to eliminate the prohibition altogether. Tokyo hopes this will allow it to more cheaply produce weaponry, such as the fighter jets and anti-aircraft missiles it is developing with the US and the United Kingdom, as well as procure weaponry at cheaper costs.

Tokyo intends to use exports to deepen military cooperation with countries in the Indo-Pacific region, such as Australia and India. Japan also hopes to sell fighter jets to countries throughout Southeast Asia in a bid to offset Chinese influence.

The policy guidelines do not make clear where the money will come from to pay for this increased spending because the working class will be forced to foot the bill through increased attacks on living and working conditions.

The main opposition Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan (CDP) offered only milquetoast criticisms of the guidelines, and refrained from addressing the pro-war agenda. The CDP's head of its policy research committee Junya Ogawa, stated: "We can spend that money in a more sensible way."

Tokyo is using supposed Chinese and North Korean aggression to run roughshod over widespread anti-war sentiment in the public and justify remilitarization. Calls for increased spending are not new, having been part of the right-wing and ultra-nationalist program for years.

The US has likewise urged Tokyo to accelerate its plans for remilitarization to better integrate Japan into Washington's war plans with China. During Biden's visit to Tokyo from May 22 to 24, Kishida pledged that Japan would "considerably expand its defense spending to drastically bolster its defense capability."

In line with this, some of the most vociferous proponents of remilitarization within the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), including former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, demanded more explicit commitments to a military buildup in the policy package than what appeared in a May 31 draft. This included adding the five-year timeline for increasing spending and specifically referencing the 2 percent of

GDP that NATO countries pledge to spend on their militaries.

While Abe left office in September 2020, he remains a lawmaker in the National Diet and wields a great deal of influence in the LDP. He has been particularly belligerent over Taiwan, calling into question the “One China” policy, which states Taiwan is part of China, and to which Tokyo and Washington formally adhere. He also sparked debate in February within the LDP over Japan possibly hosting US nuclear weapons.

Abe, speaking on June 5 at the 13th Axios Outlook Symposium, reportedly called on Japan, the US, and other allies, such as Taiwan and the Quad—including Australia and India—to create a situation that forces Beijing to give up the idea of militarily seizing Taiwan. According to *Taiwan News*, Abe stated: “We must not underestimate their (Beijing’s) efforts. Any infringement on Taiwan is an infringement on Japan.”

Washington and its allies have accused Beijing, without evidence, of preparing to invade Taiwan. Biden declared while in Japan that Washington had made a “commitment” to intervene militarily in such an event.

In reality, Beijing has stated that if the island declares independence or is acknowledged as such by Washington, Beijing would use force to prevent Taiwan from becoming a base for US imperialism. Having steadily chipped away at the “One China” policy, seeking to goad Beijing, it is the US and Japan that risk war.

Furthering this imperialist agenda, the Kishida government’s new policy package included a “very rare” reference, according to an LDP official, to Taiwan in a footnote, saying Tokyo “underscores the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and encourages the peaceful resolution of cross-strait issues.”

The decision to include that comment followed the reference to Taiwan in the joint statements issued at summits between Biden and then-Prime Minister Yoshida Suga last year and again between Biden and Kishida last month. The Biden-Suga statement was the first time that leaders from the US and Japan had directly mentioned Taiwan in such a declaration since 1969. This was not an innocent remark, but a calculated inclusion meant to undermine the “One China” policy and Beijing’s legitimacy as the government of China.

Japan’s right-wing *Sankei Shimbun* reported on June

4 that Tokyo’s defense ministry is planning for the first time to station an active-duty military attaché at the Japan-Taiwan Exchange Association, Tokyo’s de facto embassy on Taiwan, to aid with intelligence gathering. The report claimed the attaché would be a civil servant with the defense ministry rather a military officer. Since 2003, Tokyo has dispatched a supposedly retired military official to fill this role.

Beijing has reacted with anger to these developments. A June 8 editorial in the state-run *Global Times* stated: “Japan is literally doing something that threatens China’s core national interests, and China will not remain indifferent. We must remind Japan of what this step [questioning the ‘One China’ policy] means. The Taiwan question is China’s internal affair. If an outsider wants to step in, we will ‘break its leg.’”

The Japanese government’s move to double military spending, following its German counterpart’s decision to triple its military budget this year, is a further sign of preparations for another disastrous world war, with all the imperialist powers re-arming at an accelerated rate.



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