

Australia and Japan boost military ties against China

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11 December 2022

In a meeting of foreign and defence ministers on Friday, the governments of Australia and Japan agreed to substantially increase their military cooperation in yet another aggressive move aimed at preparing for a US-led war against China.

The “2 + 2” ministerial consultations in Tokyo involved Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong and Defence Minister Richard Marles, along with their respective Japanese counterparts Hayashi Yoshimasa and Hamada Yasukazu.

The Australian Labor leaders travelled directly from Washington to Japan. In the US they had held top-level Australia-United States Ministerial Consultations (AUSMIN) with the Biden administration. Those meetings sketched out plans for a further militarisation of Australia, particularly the country’s north, including the deployment of key US strike capabilities and the expansion of basing arrangements.

The AUSMIN statement placed particular emphasis on Japan’s key role in a web of US alliances throughout the Indo-Pacific encircling China. It resolved to invite Japan to “increase its participation in Force Posture Initiatives in Australia.”

This was the message that Wong and Marles took with them to Tokyo. In the space of a day, they outlined an historically unprecedented expansion of military collaboration between the two nations, which battled one another in World War II.

The readout of the “2 + 2” meeting confirmed that among the subjects under consideration was Japan’s F-35 fighter jets visiting Australia. More significantly, that would be just the first step in “future rotational deployment,” a euphemism used by the US for military basing in Australia for significant parts of the year.

Australia’s F-35s will also participate in Japan’s next Exercise Bushido Guardian for the first time. The

bilateral war games, featuring aerial combat, were initiated in 2019 but then involved Australian F-18 warplanes.

Japanese participation in Exercise Talisman Sabre, huge biennial war games in northern Australia, will be expanded in scope and “complexity.” Also under consideration is joint “training between the Japan Maritime Self Defense Force and the Royal Australian Navy,” as well as “amphibious operations, exercises and guided weapon live-fire drills.”

The readout covers virtually every area of military preparation, including intelligence and cyber collaboration.

Notably, an entire section is dedicated to ways of deepening military cooperation between Australia, the US and Japan. This would include “increase(d) training opportunities with the US Forces in northern Australia,” as well as for Japanese forces, and “promote the participation of the Australian Defence Force in Japan-US bilateral exercises and the participation of the Japan Self Defense Forces in US-Australia bilateral exercises.”

In his public comments, Marles outlined potentially the most significant shift under discussion. He stated: “My intent is to grow defence industry integration with Japan, bilaterally, through our trilateral mechanisms with the United States, and, when ready, via our advanced capabilities work in AUKUS as well.”

That signals possible Japanese inclusion in AUKUS, the militarist pact between Australia, Britain and the US unveiled in September, 2021. It is a fulcrum of the preparations for an aggressive war against China, and its explicit purpose is to rapidly expand the militarisation of the region to that end.

Under AUKUS, Australia is to acquire a new fleet of nuclear-powered attack submarines and other offensive

weaponry such as hypersonic missiles directed against Beijing. Marles' reference to "advanced capabilities" hints at discussions behind the scenes for the development of missile and other weapon systems in Japan, which would have major implications for China given Japan's geographical proximity.

The integration of Japan into AUKUS would have major geopolitical implications, deepening the encirclement of China by US allies in the region. Japan is already a part of the Quadrilateral Strategic Dialogue (Quad), which brings together the largest militaries in the region, the US, Japan, India and Australia, in a de facto alliance directed against Beijing.

Marles proclaimed that Australia and Japan had never been "more strategically aligned." He boasted of three meetings with his Japanese counterpart since Labor was elected in May and of the signing of a "status of forces" agreement between the two countries in October—the first such pact Japan had signed with a country other than the US.

"Australia's relationship with Japan is foundational," Marles declared. The defence minister outlined Labor's plans for a massive expansion of military activities, including the US basing arrangements agreed to at AUSMIN. These would increase the "potency" of the Australian Defence Force.

Marles made no secret of the target of the build-up, or the increased ties between Australia and Japan. He explicitly named China, accusing it of "the largest military buildup since World War Two... occurring without transparency or reassurance to the region of China's strategic intent." Marles asserted: "This is the most significant factor shaping the strategic landscape in which Australia and Japan exist."

Anyone familiar with the vast network of military bases established by American imperialism since World War II knows that this stands reality on its head. The US has an estimated 750 military installations around the world, as against China's one base in Africa.

It is the US and its allies, including Australia and Japan, that are engaged in a major military expansion—in preparation for an aggressive conflict with China. The aim is to ensure American imperialist hegemony over the Indo-Pacific and the world, whatever the cost.

There is an increasingly feverish discussion in

Australian strategic circles on the need to accelerate this process.

A featured article in the *Weekend Australian* by its foreign editor Greg Sheridan was headlined: "The time to start preparing for war with China is now."

In a hysterical screed, Sheridan wrote: "As a middle power, there's a limit to what we can do. But if we had thousands of medium-range missiles of our own, we could keep adversaries at a distance, or at least pose real risks to them. At the moment, we can do none of that. We lack, in Marles's slightly clunky term, 'impactful projection.'"

Today, the government-funded Australian Strategic Policy Institute issued a report calling on the Labor government to investigate purchasing a dozen US B-21 stealth bombers at a cost of up to \$28 billion. The latest generation of US bombers, they can travel vast distances and evade a number of radar detection systems. In the commentary surrounding the proposals in the media, it has been noted that such aircraft could drop payloads on mainland China.

Labor is pressing ahead with such a build-up. A review into the acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines will be handed down in March. A separate inquiry into defence force capabilities as a whole will submit its findings the same month. Its interim report, not published, but reported on in sections of the press, reportedly called for a vast expansion of missile systems in northern Australia and the acquisition of more fighter jets.

The insane drive to a catastrophic conflict, rooted in the crisis of the capitalist system itself, underscores the urgency of building an international anti-war movement of students, young people and the working class. The perspective upon which such a movement must be based was spelt out at the International Youth and Students for Social Equality's global anti-war webinar over the weekend. Watch it here.



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