

Japan dispatches military to evacuate citizens from Sudan

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Amid ongoing fighting in Sudan among rival factions, Japan announced on Tuesday that it had evacuated 45 of its citizens from the country while more Japanese nationals were transported out by other governments. Tokyo dispatched three Air Self-Defense Force (ASDF) planes to Africa to participate in the evacuation.

While portrayed as a rescue operation, the ASDF mission provided Tokyo with the pretext to dispatch its military overseas and further challenge the legal constraints placed on Japan's ability to wage war. ASDF is the formal name for Japan's air force.

Three ASDF planes arrived at Djibouti in the Horn of Africa by Sunday, according to Japan's Defense Ministry. These were a C-130 transport plane, a C-2 transport plane, and a KC-767 refueling and transport aircraft. Djibouti is the location of Japan's only overseas military base. A total of 370 ASDF and Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF, Japan's army) troops took part in the operation.

According to Tokyo, 63 Japanese nationals were working in Sudan when the conflict began on April 15, with Tokyo stating that all those who wished to evacuate had done so. These are mostly employees of the Japanese embassy and of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) as well as their families. The evacuees working in the Sudanese capital of Khartoum traveled to Port Sudan in the northeast where they were picked up by the Japanese military.

Fighting between different factions of the Sudanese armed forces erupted in no small part due to efforts by imperialist countries like the United States and Japan to exert control over Sudan and cut off Khartoum's relationship with China and Russia. The faction led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, military chief and de facto head of the country, has supported the US/NATO

war against Russia in Ukraine. The opposing faction led by Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, who heads the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, has connections to Moscow.

Sudan has long been the scene of violence and intrigue promoted above all by the US. Sudan was carved up in 2011, creating the country of South Sudan, where numerous oil fields are located. It is access to these resources which motivates Tokyo's involvement in the region through its base at Djibouti, Self-Defense Forces (SDF) deployments, and organizations like JICA, ostensibly providing economic aid to developing countries.

The *Japan Times* on April 23 quoted Magdi el-Gizouli, a Sudanese analyst from the Rift Valley Institute, who stated, "Everyone wanted a chunk of Sudan, and it couldn't take all the meddling. Too many competing interests and too many claims, then the fragile balance imploded, as you can see now."

Japan is heavily dependent on other countries to meet its energy needs, with oil accounting for approximately 40 percent of this. In 2022, Japan imported 94.1 percent of its oil from the Middle East, leaving Tokyo searching for other sources, such as in Africa, to meet demand while simultaneously trying to undercut competitors in the region.

Above all, Japan is looking to remilitarize, which means continually chipping away at Article 9 of the constitution, with so-called rescue missions providing a pretext to do just that. The Japanese ruling elite ultimately hopes to overturn Article 9, known as the pacifist clause, which explicitly bars Japan from maintaining armed forces or waging war overseas. Tokyo also announced in December that it would double military spending over the next five years.

Tokyo's operations in the region are meant to further

the goal of remilitarization. In 2015, Japan revised its Official Development Assistance charter and created the Development Cooperation Charter, with one of the goals the integration of organizations like JICA with the SDF. In other words, JICA plays a military role in Africa, no less than the SDF itself.

In the past, the government has also lied about the situation in South Sudan in order to keep SDF troops in the region. In July 2016, fighting broke out in the country that threatened to pull Japanese GSDF troops into the conflict. Stationed there as part of the United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan, a condition for the Japanese soldiers' involvement was the existence of a ceasefire, a condition GSDF logs showed had been broken.

The government covered up these facts not only to keep the military in the country to secure access to resources, but to test military legislation passed in 2015 that allowed the SDF to take part in battles alongside allied countries, ostensibly by coming to their defense. This raises the serious question if Tokyo is not once more looking to place SDF troops or Japanese citizens in a conflict zone in order to justify the use of military power, further eroding legal constraints.

Tokyo uses so-called "aid" not only in Africa, but around the globe in pursuit of its imperialist aims. Japan announced on April 5 that it would begin supplying military aid to countries as part of its new Official Security Assistance (OSA) program, which Japan's Foreign Ministry website states will be used to "strengthen a free and open international order." The US, Japan, and their other allies regularly use this phrase to denounce Beijing for not acquiescing to the "order" established by Washington in the post-World War II period. The Philippines, Malaysia, and Fiji are likely to be the first to receive support from this program.

Tokyo claims that the aid will not be used to purchase weaponry that could be used in a conflict. Instead, recipient governments would use it to boost satellite communication, radio systems, and radars in order to monitor Chinese activity in the region, which would bring these countries further in line with US war planning in the Indo-Pacific targeting China.

Japan and the Philippines also reached an agreement in February to allow Japanese troops to take part in exercises in the country, officially to respond to natural

disasters. The two sides are also discussing a reciprocal military access agreement that would make it easier to dispatch Japanese troops to the Philippines, alongside a tripartite agreement with the US.

In the end, none of Tokyo's machinations in Africa or the Indo-Pacific are based on "humanitarian" concerns. These efforts are above all aimed at deepening Japan's own plans for promoting war with China.



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