

# US, Japan promote plans for boosting Tokyo's rearmament

Ben McGrath  
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US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin recently travelled to Japan for meetings with Japanese officials, where the two sides pledged to deepen their war drive against China while promoting Tokyo's remilitarization. This is in line with Washington's goal of building a system of military alliances in the Indo-Pacific region in preparation for war with China.

The meetings took place on June 1 as part of Austin's four-nation trip, that also included stops in Singapore for the Shangri-La Dialogue, India, and France. Austin spoke separately with his counterpart Defense Minister Yasukazu Hamada and Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi while also paying a "courtesy call" to Prime Minister Fumio Kishida.

During a joint press conference, Austin and Hamada pledged their commitment to the US-Japan alliance with the former declaring that the two countries' "militaries are operating and training together like never before." The two denounced China, Russia, and North Korea, including Pyongyang's failed attempt to launch a military reconnaissance satellite into orbit the previous day.

Two days later, Austin and Hamada also met together with South Korea's Defense Minister Lee Jong-seop on the sidelines of the Shangri-La Dialogue, with the three agreeing to begin sharing real-time intelligence between Seoul and Tokyo within the year, ostensibly aimed at North Korea. This is part of the deepening trilateral relationship between the US, Japan, and South Korea, which Washington considers a vital aspect of its ballistic missile system in the region.

Furthermore, while in Tokyo, Austin and his Japanese allies discussed working together to improve Japan's ability to launch long-range attacks far beyond its borders. Couched in the language of defense and the supposed need for "counter-strike" capabilities, Japan

intends to develop and acquire cruise missiles that would enable its military to strike targets in China, Russia, or North Korea.

The acquisition of such offensive weaponry is banned by Article 9 of Japan's constitution, which states that it renounces "the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes" and that armed forces "will never be maintained." While the Japanese ruling class has chipped away at this clause over decades, Tokyo began to pursue a more rapid agenda of remilitarization after Shinzo Abe came to power in 2012, an agenda that the current Kishida government is building upon.

All of this is backed and encouraged by Washington. During the press conference with Hamada, Austin stated, "I strongly support Japan's updated national security policies, including your decision to increase defense spending and to acquire counter-strike capabilities."

To carry this out, Japan's Defense Ministry signed four contracts totaling 378.1 billion yen (\$US2.7 billion) in April with Mitsubishi Heavy Industries for the development of long-range, or standoff, missiles. These weapons, coupled with support for Washington's stoking of tensions over Taiwan, make clear that Tokyo is preparing for war with China, not defending itself from Beijing's supposed "assertiveness" or so-called North Korea "aggression."

The first contract involves the mass production of an upgraded Type 12 surface-to-ship missile (SSM) beginning in the current fiscal year with delivery expected in 2026. The second is for the development of new ship- and air-launched versions of the Type 12 SSM by 2026 and 2028 respectively. The range of this missile is expected to jump from 200 kilometers to 1,500 kilometers.

The third contract is for the mass production of Hyper Velocity Gliding Projectiles (HVGP), for use against targets on remote islands. This includes the Block 1 and Block 2A and 2B variants, with the Block 1 and 2A missiles expected to enter service in 2026 and 2027 and the Block 2B expected to be deployed by the early 2030s. The Japanese military intends to base them in Kyushu in the south and in Hokkaido in the north. The latter will host the HVGP Block 2B, which will have the longest range of the variants of up to 3,000 kilometers, allowing Tokyo to target the Russian Far East.

Tokyo also plans to develop a submarine guided missile under the final contract by 2027, which would enter into use beginning the following year. The missile range will be greatly expanded over that of the current Harpoon missiles used on Japanese submarines, but full details have not been released.

Tokyo also intends to purchase 400 Tomahawk cruise missiles from the US while its own weaponry is in production, a decision announced last February.

The development of these missiles is part of Tokyo's new National Security Strategy released last December and plans to double military spending over the next five years. Already, Japan's military spending is at record levels, hitting 6.82 trillion yen (\$US48.8 billion) this year. Between 2023 and 2027, Tokyo is expected to spend 43 trillion yen (\$US308 billion), bringing its spending to 2 percent of GDP, similar to the guideline set for NATO countries.

In addition to these plans, Austin and Hamada also used their meeting to continue ramping up tensions with Beijing over Taiwan. The two provocatively declared "that unilateral changes to the status quo cannot be tolerated, and that Japan and the United States will cooperate more than ever in this regard." Hamada added that the two "reaffirmed the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait."

The language used here is regularly trotted out to denounce Beijing. In reality, it is Washington that has sought to overturn the status quo in the region, provocatively goading Beijing over Taiwan and all but overturning the "One China" policy, which the US had de facto recognized since 1979 when it cut off formal diplomatic relations with Taipei in favor of Beijing.

References to "peace and stability" around Taiwan are meant to place the blame for tensions in the region

on Beijing while the US regularly conducts so-called "freedom of navigation" military operations through the Taiwan Strait on China's doorstep. Washington uses these highly provocative voyages to try to provoke a response from Beijing, which fears allowing Taiwan to declare independence would set a precedent for carving up China and at the same time provide the US with a base for military operations directly adjacent to the Chinese mainland.

These US provocations are growing more dangerous. On June 3, the US sent the USS Chung-Hoon destroyer, alongside the Canadian frigate HMCS Montreal, through the Taiwan Strait. During the transit, Washington claims, a Chinese destroyer supposedly cut across the path of the American vessel. Whatever actually took place, it is ultimately the purposeful recklessness of the US and its allies that is inflaming the overall danger of war in the region.



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