

# Former Japanese prime minister provocatively visits Taiwan

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In another provocative move directed at Beijing, former Japanese prime minister and virulent anti-China hawk Taro Aso recently visited Taiwan for three days. He met with senior government officials, including President Tsai Ing-wen and declared that Japan, the US and Taiwan should ramp up plans for war with mainland China.

Aso, who is a senior member of parliament, arrived in Taiwan on August 7 and delivered a keynote speech at the annual Ketagalan Forum: Indo-Pacific Security Dialogue the following day. He is the highest-ranking Japanese politician to visit Taiwan since 1972 when Tokyo broke off formal diplomatic relations with Taipei and recognized Beijing as the legitimate government of all China.

A major figure in Japanese politics, Aso served as PM from 2008 to 2009 and is currently the vice president of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party. He also served as the deputy prime minister of Japan from 2012 until 2021. He is close to Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, whose administration has accelerated Japan's remilitarization.

Speaking at the forum in Taipei on August 8, Aso directed his remarks at Beijing and sought to turn reality on its head, asserting that "peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait are important to the stability of the international community."

The phrase "peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait" has become a euphemism for its opposite: the ratcheting up of tensions and the preparation for war with China. In the same speech, Aso declared, "I believe that now is the time for Japan, Taiwan, the United States, and other like-minded countries to be prepared to put into action very strong deterrence." He added that they must have "the resolve to fight."

Washington and its allies including Tokyo accuse

China of attempting to "unilaterally" overturn the status quo in the Taiwan Strait. In reality, led by the US, they have challenged the "One China" policy through high-level diplomatic exchanges such as Aso's visit, large-scale weapon sales to Taipei, and military maneuvers around Taiwan. This is despite the fact that Washington has de facto accepted this policy since 1979 when it established diplomatic relations with Beijing. More broadly, the US and Japan have inflamed territorial disputes in the East and South China Seas while engaging in a massive military buildup in the region.

As with the US/NATO-instigated war against Russia in Ukraine, Washington is attempting to goad Beijing into a war over Taiwan in order to eliminate mainland China as an economic competitor. "It is not enough to spend money and possess defense capability," Aso stated at the forum. "It will become a deterrence when we let it be known to the other side that we have a focused intention to use it for maintaining the stability of the Taiwan Strait."

In other words, while Washington and Tokyo continually challenge the "One China" policy, incorporating Taiwan into their war plans, any opposition from Beijing is met with the threats of a military response.

China's Foreign Ministry responded to Aso's visit, saying, "We seriously urge Japan to deeply reflect on its history of aggression, abide by the one-China principle and its commitments regarding the Taiwan question, and stop meddling in China's internal affair and lending support to the 'Taiwan independence' separatist forces in any form."

Tokyo, however, is using its anti-China propaganda to justify remilitarization and the throwing off of the constitutional fetters on Japan waging war overseas.

This includes acquiring offensive weaponry, such as cruise missiles, capable of striking targets in other countries. It also involves a massive rise in military spending, with budget plans of 11 trillion yen (\$US76 billion) spent annually on military and military-related expenditures by 2027.

Other aspects of Aso's trip were also used to further this agenda. He met with President Tsai Ing-wen on August 8, when the two pledged to build closer ties between their respective governments. This included further developing economic connections involving supply chains, a point Tsai emphasized during her own remarks at the Ketagalan forum. This is significant as the US has led efforts to reduce economic reliance on mainland China as it steps up economic warfare against Beijing.

Aso held other discussions with officials in Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), including party chairman, Vice President Lai Ching-te, who is running for president in next January's election. Tsai is ineligible to run for reelection due to term limits. Lai is also planning trips to the US this coming week, including stops in New York on August 12 and 13 and then in San Francisco on August 16 and 17.

Aso provocatively offered flowers at the gravesite of Lee Teng-hui, president of Taiwan from 1988 to 2000, who came from a family of Japanese collaborators. Lee downplayed or outright denied atrocities committed by Japanese imperialism prior to and during World War II, such as the Nanjing massacre and the military's exploitation of "comfort women," a euphemism for sex slaves. Tokyo also downplays or denies these crimes as it prepares to dragoon a generation of youth into going to war and whip up support in the population for such conflicts.

Sections of the Taiwanese bourgeoisie, particularly around the DPP, promote Japan's colonization of Taiwan from 1895 to 1945 as a benefit to the island in contrast to rule under the mainland. Japan seized Taiwan from China following the First Sino-Japanese War in 1894–1895. Tokyo then brutally ruled the island until the end of World War II when the Chinese Nationalists under Chiang Kai-shek took control of Taiwan.

Following the Chinese Revolution in 1949, the US protected Chiang and the Nationalists after they fled to Taiwan, refusing to recognize Beijing as the legitimate

government of China or allowing the reunification of Taiwan with the mainland. Chiang headed a vicious dictatorship and a decades-long period of martial law, the framework of which still exists.

Today, rather than fight for the unity of workers throughout all of China, the DPP promotes independence in veiled forms in order to divide the Taiwanese working class. It also believes its material interests will be better served by aligning with US and Japanese imperialism.



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