

Japan prepares to deploy fighter jets to Australia on a rotational basis

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Amid the escalation of Israel's genocidal war on Gaza and with the United States threatening wider military intervention in the Middle East, the imperialist powers in the Indo-Pacific are pushing ahead with the Washington-led war drive against China. This includes Japan and Australia, which are expanding their military presence throughout the region while Tokyo also remilitarizes.

The *Asahi Shimbun* reported on October 30, citing Japanese government sources, that Tokyo plans to deploy Air Self-Defense Force (the formal name of Japan's air force) fighter jets to Australia on a rotational basis as early as the next fiscal year. These include F-35s, F-15s and F-2s, which would be stationed in Australia for several months a year while conducting training drills with the Australian air force.

Tokyo and Canberra are deepening their military ties to line up with Washington's war preparations against China. During a meeting between Japanese Defense Minister Minoru Kihara and his Australian counterpart Richard Marles in Tokyo on October 19, the two agreed to put into practice a Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA) signed between the two countries in January 2022, which went into formal effect in August.

The RAA allows troops from one country to enter the other more easily, facilitating their stationing abroad. According to the ministers, this will allow Japan and Australia to enhance operational cooperation and interoperability between their armed forces. The fighter jet deployment is an outcome of the RAA. Tokyo has similar agreements with the US and the United Kingdom.

Kihara and Marles also agreed to deepen trilateral military collaboration with the US. Washington regards both countries as key components of the war drive against China. While the US is the only country with

which Japan has a formal military treaty, Tokyo considers Australia one of its closest partners. Both are members of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the Quad), a quasi-military alliance that includes the US and India.

Australia is a key base of operations for the US military, which includes the stationing of 2,500 US Marines in Darwin on a "rotational" basis. US think-tanks have described this base as an important strike force for a future conflict with China. The deployment of Japanese jets to Australia is meant to further solidify this position.

In recent years, Tokyo and Canberra have stepped up their military cooperation, which includes joint military exercises as well as unveiling a new security pact in October 2022. The closer integration between the two is part of the web of alliances that Washington is pushing to surround China. In addition to the Quad, Canberra joined the AUKUS (Australia, United Kingdom, United States) pact in September 2021, while Tokyo has worked to integrate its own operations with US allies, including South Korea.

In Tokyo, Marles declared: "Our growing strategic alignment contributes to shared security challenges in our region, and is key to promoting an open, secure and prosperous Indo-Pacific."

The promotion of a "free and open Indo-Pacific" is a euphemism for its opposite. The growing Japanese-Australian alliance means working to encircle China in order to goad Beijing into a military conflict, as the US and NATO did to Russia over Ukraine.

Japan is also using the fighter jet deployment to further its aims of remilitarization and to circumvent Article 9 of its post-World War II constitution that bans maintaining a military or deploying it overseas. Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's administration states that

basing jets in Australia is allowed under Japan's "collective self-defense" doctrine, which Tokyo claims permits its Self-Defense Forces (SDF) to go to war in "defense" of "like-minded countries."

No branch of the SDF has previously been deployed abroad for such training purposes. The deployment is part of Japan's new National Defense Strategy, one of three documents released last December to further develop Tokyo's war plans. The other two documents are the National Security Strategy and the Defense Buildup Program. Japan's only overseas base is located in Djibouti on the Horn of Africa, ostensibly to combat piracy in the region.

There is nothing defensive about this whatsoever. In 2014, the Shinzo Abe government carried out a "reinterpretation" of the constitution to justify the "collective self-defense" concept. The following year, Abe's government and the ruling Liberal Democratic Party ran roughshod over popular anti-war sentiment and mass protests to force through so-called national security legislation to justify this "reinterpretation."

Tokyo has backed Washington as it has inflamed previously minor territorial disputes in the Indi-Pacific, practically overturned the "One China" policy regarding Taiwan, and sharply increased its military presence in the region to place pressure on Beijing.

Legal experts question the constitutionality of the fighter jet deployment. Koichi Yokota, a professor emeritus from Kyushu University and a constitutional law expert, told the *Asahi Shimbun*: "Even the right to collective self-defense, which was made possible by the (2015) national security legislation, is highly suspected of being unconstitutional." He added that the rotational deployment "could expand the scope of the right to collective self-defense without limit, making it clearly unconstitutional."

This last point identifies the government's true aim. The dispatch of fighter jets overseas sets a quasi-legal precedent for expanding Tokyo's military operations overseas without regard for the constitution or for any requirement to amend the constitution, a prospect that faces considerable opposition in the working class.

Tokyo is also working to expand military partnerships with other countries in the region. Prime Minister Kishida visited the Philippines for two days on Friday and Saturday for discussions with President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr., before leaving for Malaysia.

Tokyo announced on November 1 that it plans to provide surveillance radars to the Philippines as part of its new Official Security Assistance program, introduced earlier this year. Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno stated: "While drastically strengthening Japan's own defenses, it's essential to improve the security and deterrent capabilities of like-minded countries." Kishida and Marcos also discussed their own Reciprocal Access Agreement to allow Japanese troops to be stationed in the Philippines.

Vietnamese President Vo Van Thuong is set to visit Japan this month, where Hanoi and Tokyo plan to elevate their relationship to a comprehensive strategic partnership. Hanoi and Washington signed a similar agreement in September when US President Joe Biden visited Vietnam.



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