

Japanese PM Kishida visits Manila, intensifies preparations for war with China

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Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida staged a two-day official visit to the Philippines over the weekend. In meetings with Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr, Kishida arranged the sale and transfer of military equipment and surveillance technology to the Philippines for use in the disputed waters of the South China Sea and began negotiations for the deployment of Japanese forces to the Philippines.

Tensions in the region are extremely high after a collision two weeks ago between Chinese and Philippine ships off the Second Thomas Shoal in the South China Sea. Kishida's visit only inflames the situation.

During an official banquet at Malacañang presidential palace, Kishida stated that Japan and the Philippines “are now experiencing an excellent relationship—we call it the golden age. I look forward to working with President Marcos to take these bilateral relations to even newer heights.”

The “golden age” of which Kishida spoke was the developing return of Japanese imperialism to Southeast Asia, to the countries that it once ravaged, now under the auspices of Washington's war drive against China. Tokyo is abandoning even the pretense of upholding Article 9 of the Japanese constitution, known as the pacifist clause, and is returning to the world stage as a military power, supplying arms and deploying troops.

Kishida donated P235 million (\$US13.5 million) of Overseas Security Assistance (OSA) for the acquisition of coastal radar equipment to improve the Philippines' “maritime domain awareness.” The technology will be used to surveil Chinese vessels and coordinate naval activity in the hotly disputed South China Sea.

Kishida stated that Japan would be providing the Philippines with additional patrol vessels, “defense equipment” and radar. Tokyo's transfer of military

hardware specifically designed to augment the Philippines capacity to escalate its already tense maritime confrontations with China is immensely provocative.

The *Global Times*, which articulates the interests of sections of the Chinese state and particularly the military, wrote of Japan's military aid to the Philippines: “This move—driven by Japan's desire to create chaos and provoke conflicts—will further escalate tensions in the South China Sea, which is detrimental to peace and security in East Asia.”

Marcos and Kishida discussed the establishment of a Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA), a defense pact that would allow the exchange and deployment of troops between the two countries for joint exercises. Japan has already established RAA's with the United Kingdom and Australia. The Philippines is the first Southeast Asian country to begin discussion of an RAA with Japan.

On Saturday, Kishida delivered an address to a special joint session of the Philippine Congress, the first time any Japanese leader has done so since World War II and the devastating Japanese occupation of the country.

He told the assembled representatives that the two countries had agreed “to further strengthen the trilateral cooperation among the Philippines, Japan and the US” and added that “in the South China Sea, the trilateral cooperation to protect the freedom of the sea is underway.”

This is the crux of the matter. The driving force behind the dangerous reemergence of Japanese militarism is Washington, the third partner in this trilateral cooperation. It is US imperialism and its aggressive campaign against China that are forcing open the doors of countries in the Asia-Pacific region,

devastated by Japan in the Second World War, to a restored Japanese military presence.

On November 3, as Kishida visited Manila, Washington made its presence known as the US Seventh Fleet sent a Navy destroyer to stage a Freedom of Navigation Operation (FONOP) through the South China Sea near the Spratly Islands. It was the first time in six months that Washington had conducted such an operation near the Spratlys.

The timing was not accidental. Looking to consolidate Japan's military ties with Manila, Washington deliberately escalated tensions with China for Kishida's visit.

The details of the trilateral cooperation of which Kishida spoke are not yet clear, but they will doubtless include the use of the basing facilities throughout the Philippines that have been set up for the US under the auspices of the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA).

No two countries created more misery and oppression in the Philippines in the past 150 years than the US and Japan.

At the opening of the twentieth century, the US conquered the Philippines in a bloody colonial war that killed hundreds of thousands of Filipinos. The US military tortured Filipino civilians, executed revolutionary soldiers as bandits, banned freedom of speech and thought, and destroyed the fledgling Philippine Republic. Out of this bloodshed it crafted a colony subservient to its interests and in service to these aims elevated a rapacious and corrupt elite to positions of political power that they still hold.

Japan ruled the country in a brutal three-year occupation during World War II, marked by mass repression, public executions, concentration camps, starvation in the cities, and the forced sexual slavery of so-called "comfort women." The occupation and the return of the US military left the country in smoldering ruins.

The US has never apologized for the crimes of the Philippine-American War, nor has Japan apologized for the rape of comfort women.

Now these two imperialist powers, with Japan working as junior partner to the US, posture as the noble defenders of Philippine sovereignty. The claim is an historical abomination.

What is more, they claim to be defending the

Philippines from Chinese aggression. The Philippines has never been the victim of Chinese aggression, but like the Philippines, China has been the victim of both the US and Japan. The US sought to dismember and subjugate China with its "Open Door" Policy in the 1920s and 1930s, and Japan invaded and ravaged China in the 1930s and 1940s.

Kishida's visit to Manila marks a significant step in the dangerous reawakening of Japanese imperialism. While Tokyo currently moves in lockstep with Washington, it has its own interests. The imperialist cooperation of the US and Japan against China contains explosive objective contradictions that could lead to deadly falling out. Washington, looking to secure its hegemony by aggression in every corner of the planet, is stoking the fires of world war.



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