

Japan holds military exercises amid US-led war preparations against China

Ben McGrath**20 November 2023**

Amid the ongoing US-led war drive against China and the genocide being carried out by Israel in Gaza, Japan is rapidly pushing ahead with its agenda of remilitarization. This includes increasing the number and scale of military exercises in the Indo-Pacific region while continuing to acquire offensive weaponry long considered as banned under Japan's constitution.

On Sunday, Japan's military, formally called the Self-Defense Forces (SDF), concluded an 11-day military exercise designated 05JX. The drills on the final day included amphibious landings and assaults by Marines on Tokunoshima, an island in the Ryukyu Island chain in the East China Sea. Over the course of 05JX, drills took place across Japan, involving different branches of the armed forces.

The Marines involved in the exercise on Tokunoshima belong to the Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade (ARDB), which was established in 2018. ARDB commander Shingo Nashinoki stated during separate training maneuvers last week on Irisunajima: "The national security environment around Japan has become harsher, particularly with the growing military activities by China and Russia in the East China Sea, South China Sea and western Pacific."

The ARDB is Japan's first marine unit since World War II. Tokyo plans to expand the brigade by adding a third regiment this fiscal year, funded by the de facto doubling of the military budget announced last December. Its primary task in the event of war would be to seize Chinese controlled islands in the East and South China Seas. Nashinoki's statement demonstrates that Japan's SDF is preparing to take part in a war throughout the region, contrary to claims that the drills are about defense.

Japan has its eyes on the wider region and once again using military force to assert its imperialist interests as

it did prior to and during World War II. Hiding behind the fig leaf of "self-defense," Tokyo is increasingly ignoring widespread anti-war sentiment in the working class and legal restraints on its military activities contained in Article 9 of the constitution. This article explicitly bars Tokyo from both maintaining a military and sending it overseas.

Remilitarization includes refurbishing its two huge *Izumo*-class "helicopter carriers" to be capable of launching US-made F-35 fighter jets. The acquisition of aircraft carriers has long been considered a violation of the constitution. In an obvious ploy, the government has designated the carriers as "multi-functional." The two ships, the JS Kaga and the JS Izumo, are the largest in Japan's fleet. On November 13, the Kaga began sea trials following the completion of its alterations.

Japan is also acquiring other offensive weaponry including cruise missiles, both from the US and through production domestically. This will give Japan the ability to strike targets within other countries that have been targeted by US and Japanese imperialism. The islands in the country's southern Ryukyu Island chain have also been continually militarized.

Furthermore, military exercises in East Asia involving Japan have become an almost daily occurrence. Provocatively taking place on China's doorstep, these drills are to goad Beijing while further stoking territorial disputes in the region. These disputes have routinely been used to demonize China and justify the military maneuvers of the US and its allies in the region. Tokyo has its own territorial dispute with Beijing over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands near Taiwan.

From November 4 to 8, the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) and the US Navy conducted a Multi-Large Deck Event in the Philippine Sea, south of the Ryukyu Islands, that involved the strike groups of

two US aircraft carriers, the USS Carl Vinson and the USS Ronald Reagan, as well as the “helicopter carrier,” the JS Hyuga.

Following that, Japan led the Annual Exercise 2023 (ANNUALEX) in the same region, which included the participation of the US, Canada, and Australia. The Philippines also took part for the first time as an observer, a sign of the growing military cooperation between Tokyo and Manila.

Such exercises and the inclusion of new countries are also designed to cement a network of US-led alliances, preparing the armed forces of Washington’s allies to operate in close coordination with the US military.

One of the primary alliances being developed is between the US, Japan, and South Korea, forming what is a de facto trilateral military alliance. Washington considers its two Northeast Asian allies crucial for its ballistic missile system aimed at China. Under pressure from the Biden administration, Tokyo and Seoul have rapidly moved to repair relations this year that had long been frayed due to tensions stemming from Japan’s brutal colonization of Korea from 1910?1945.

In their seventh meeting this year, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida held talks with South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit last Thursday in San Francisco, California. Kishida stated, “Until now I have worked with President Yoon for bilateral cooperation in various areas, including politics, security guarantees, the economy and culture.” He continued, “I hope to further push forward with these steps.”

Plans for increased military cooperation are already in the works. Earlier this month, Japanese Defense Minister Minoru Kihara met with US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and South Korean Defense Minister Sin Won-sik and agreed to expand intelligence sharing in real-time as well as holding trilateral military exercises “more systematically and effectively” beginning in January.

In addition, Vice Admiral Saito Akira, the commander in chief of the MSDF’s fleet, declared during the ANNUALEX exercises, “The Self-Defense Fleet will continue working closely with the US Seventh Fleet and the armed forces of like-minded countries such as Australia, Canada, and the Philippines in order to defend Japan, ensure regional peace and stability, and realize a free and open Indo-Pacific.”

For all the talk of “free and open” and “rule of law,” what Washington and Tokyo truly mean can be seen in their support the genocide now being conducted in Gaza by Israel. While fully-backed by Washington, Tokyo has also essentially given its support to Israel’s genocide when it abstained in a United Nations’ vote in October calling for a ceasefire in Gaza.

Washington’s and Tokyo’s support for the destruction of this large, open-air prison and the physical annihilation of the oppressed Palestinian people clearly exposes the phony claims that they are defending “freedom” in the Indo-Pacific, the territorial rights of smaller nations, oppressed peoples in China, or “democracy” in Taiwan. It is the US and Japan that are above all driving the Indo-Pacific towards a catastrophic conflict.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact