

Japan hosts anti-China “security support” talks with Pacific Island foreign ministers

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Japan’s Defence Minister Minoru Kihara held talks on March 19 and 20 with counterparts from almost all Pacific Island nations. It followed a similar meeting in 2021. Tokyo is intensifying its efforts to undermine China’s influence in the strategically crucial region, as Japan is ever more closely integrated into US-led preparations for war against China.

As US imperialism has intensified its military build-up against China and strengthened alliances in the Indo-Pacific—including with Japan—Tokyo has engaged in its own remilitarisation, including a doubling of military spending, and joined Washington’s diplomatic efforts to consolidate an anti-China bloc throughout the region.

This week’s talks involved 14 South Pacific Island countries. Fiji and Papua New Guinea (PNG) sent their defence ministers, with Tonga represented by its crown prince. From 11 other participating nations, which have no military forces, senior officials joined either in person or online.

Japan’s imperialist allies—Australia, New Zealand, France, Canada, Britain and the United States—as well as Chile, also participated. The discussion focussed on security and police agreements ahead of an expected deal to be signed at the 10th Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM10) this July in Tokyo.

The *South China Morning Post* (SCMP) opined on March 13 that the meeting would be “the largest Japanese security-focused move in the Pacific Islands since World War II.” The talks were intended to escalate Japan’s so-called Self-Defence Forces (SDF) and police in regional responses as well as training, a “dramatic departure” from previous post-war policies.

Japanese media reported that Kihara told the gathering the Pacific must be “free, open and stable” under the “global order based on the rule of law” —the mantra employed by the US and its allies to assert their domination of the region. Clearly alluding to China, he

declared: “In this day and age, unfortunately, attempts to unilaterally change the status quo by force or coercion have advanced in the world and the Indo-Pacific region.”

In fact the US is the most aggressive power employing “force and coercion” against impoverished Pacific countries—including threats or implied threats to intervene militarily in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, should they get too close to Beijing.

Kihara said Japan will help Pacific states build their “capabilities” in dealing with natural disasters and share knowledge in areas such as outer space, cyber defence and artificial intelligence.

Through the Official Security Assistance (OSA) program, he said, Tokyo is offering military equipment for “like-minded partners” that share “fundamental values.” The program, introduced last April, is aimed at boosting the armed forces and related organisations of developing countries for “security cooperation.”

The purpose of OSA is to strengthen Japan’s offensive capacity against China by increasing its presence in the Indo-Pacific area and enhance the military capabilities of recipient countries. Getting them to accept assistance from Japan is intended to reduce their dependence on China and involve them more directly in the Japan-US alliance. Current OSA recipients include the Philippines, Malaysia, Bangladesh and Fiji.

Under the scheme, young people from the militaries in Tonga, Fiji and PNG are to be accepted as students in the National Defense Academy of Japan, a university-level training institution for Japan’s future SDF officers.

China’s *Global Times* bluntly declared that the meeting was attempting to bring the Pacific Islands into an “Indo-Pacific quagmire.” Tokyo had transitioned “from economic diplomacy to military diplomacy,” it said, quoting one strategist who said that the SDF’s deployment in the Taiwan Strait may be just a matter of time. “This not only risks dragging the Pacific region into

a dangerous quagmire but may also lead the world into turmoil once again,” the paper warned.

US military bases in Japan would play a critical role in any war with China. Japan is part of the quasi-military pact known as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue along with the US, India and Australia. This includes frequent aggressive military exercises and provocations aimed explicitly at China.

With its eyes on the wider Pacific, Japanese imperialism is asserting its own interests as it did prior to and during World War II. Behind the fig leaf of “self-defence,” Tokyo is flouting widespread anti-war sentiment in the Japanese working class and the legal restraints in the country’s so-called “pacifist” constitution, which placed limits on its military for decades.

Tokyo’s focus on policing arrangements follows reports in February that PNG, the Pacific’s largest and most strategically located island state, was considering a policing and security agreement with China. Beijing’s offer was reinforced after riots on January 10, driven by simmering social discontent and escalating living costs, decimated the capital Port Moresby.

PNG’s announcement prompted alarm in Canberra and the US. Australia, the regional imperialist power with a long record of meddling directly in its impoverished former colony’s affairs, indicated it was standing ready to send police and other support.

Earlier, following riots and looting of Chinese businesses in the Solomon Islands in 2021, Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare signed a security agreement with Beijing allowing Chinese police to train local police officers to protect their investments while also giving Chinese naval ships access to the country’s extensive maritime zone.

In what the *Japan Times* described as part of Tokyo’s “diplomatic thrust in Oceania in a bid to counter Beijing’s influence,” Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa this month held bilateral meetings in Samoa and Fiji with her counterparts from 10 island countries and co-chaired an interim PALM ministerial session.

Kamikawa last week vowed to provide “offer-based” financial development to Pacific nations, rather than wait for them to ask for it, in a policy “pivot” making foreign aid one of Tokyo’s “most important diplomatic tools” which would help keep the Indo-Pacific “free and open,” according to Japanese media.

Japan is also strengthening ties with Australia and New Zealand. The previous defence minister Yasukazu Hamada and his New Zealand counterpart Andrew Little

last year signed a Statement of Intent for greater military cooperation. The deal followed the signing a year earlier of a bilateral intelligence sharing agreement, aimed at strengthening Japan’s case to ultimately join the “Five Eyes” intelligence sharing network involving the United States, New Zealand, Australia, the UK and Canada.

Little said the statement was the culmination of more than two years of discussions, “including consultation with Pacific partners to ensure alignment with Pacific priorities.” It would seek to “strengthen collaboration with Pacific partners and regional institutions on... maritime security, humanitarian and disaster relief, and climate change,” he said.

Last March, Hayashi became the first Japanese foreign minister to visit the Solomon Islands, at the centre of strategic tensions since signing its defence pact with Beijing in 2022. Hayashi and his Solomons counterpart Jeremiah Manele agreed on strengthening cooperation towards a “free and open Indo-Pacific.”

Japan’s navy or Maritime Self-Defence Force then began its largest tour yet of the Indo-Pacific, adding Kiribati to its list of port calls along with the Solomon Islands, Tonga and Fiji. The naval deployment ran for 151 days and involved 1,190 personnel aboard three surface vessels and a submarine.

All these military and diplomatic maneuvers are heightening tensions in the Indo-Pacific, even as the US and NATO escalate the war against Russia in Ukraine, the US-Israel genocide in Gaza continues, and conflict spreads in the Middle East.

A third front in this global war now threatens to erupt in Asia. US imperialism will stop at nothing to end what it regards as the chief threat to its global domination—China’s economic rise—and to establish unchallenged hegemony in the Indo-Pacific. US allies, including Japan’s ruling class, are determined to play their part and to secure a share of the resources and profits to be extracted from Asia.



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