

US/Japan to strengthen military pact against China

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A prominent article in yesterday's *Financial Times* (FT) reported that the US and Japan are “planning the biggest upgrade to their security alliance since they signed a mutual defence treaty in 1960.” The strengthening of the pact in preparation for a US-led war against China is to be announced, according to the FT, when US President Joe Biden hosts Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida at the White House on April 10.

The article, which is based on multiple sources, explained that the changes will pave the way “to restructure the US military command in Japan to strengthen operational planning and exercises between the nations.” Currently, the Japanese military is compelled to communicate with the US Indo-Pacific Command based in Hawaii, 6,200 km away and in a time zone 19 hours behind Tokyo.

Japan is host to the largest US contingent of any country in the world outside the United States itself. Around 55,000 American personnel across all branches of the military—Army, Marines, Navy and Air Force—are housed on permanent bases throughout the country. The largest concentration of bases is in Okinawa where the US military occupation continued until it was only returned to Japan formally in 1972.

Japan is central to the Pentagon's war planning, as the US has intensified its aggressive confrontation with China over the past decade. At the same time, Japan's right-wing governments have seized on the opportunity to undermine the restrictions imposed by its post-World War II constitution on the military—known as the Self Defence Forces—and to rapidly expand its armed forces.

In December, the Kishida government announced the doubling of military spending and, for the first time, is openly acquiring offensive weapons, including the purchase of cruise missiles like Lockheed Martin's

Tomahawk and Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile (JASSM). It also plans to produce its own advanced fighter jets in conjunction with the UK and Italy, in addition to the F-35 fighters being bought from the US.

The Japanese government has lined up against China not only over its own territorial disputes with Beijing in the East China Sea, but in particular with the US in provoking Beijing over the status of Taiwan. Like Washington, Tokyo has sought to undermine the One China policy, which recognises Taiwan as part of China, by boosting political ties with Taipei.

In December, retired Lieutenant General Koichiro Bansho declared that should a military conflict break out with China over Taiwan, Japan would play the central role in funnelling arms to the island in a manner similar to that of Poland in the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine. He also advocated allowing the US military to station nuclear weapons in Japan—openly dispensing with the non-nuclear policy adopted following the US dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945.

Washington and Tokyo have already taken significant steps towards the preparations for war against China, overcoming longstanding hostility between Japan and South Korea to forge a real-time intelligence sharing agreement. In January 2023, Japan and the US announced a significant strengthening of their military alliance with the refashioning of a Marine Regiment into a littoral unit—that is, one described as more lethal, more agile, more capable and focussed on island warfare in the East China and South China seas.

The plans revealed by the FT for greater operational command and control by the commander of US Forces in Japan (USFJ) underscore the fact that the Pentagon is preparing for war with China in the next immediate period, not many years down the track. Conflict

between major powers involving advanced weapons, including nuclear weapons, obviously requires the very closest real-time co-ordination. Complementing closer cooperation with the US, the Japanese military is also setting up a “Joint Operations Command” next year to improve co-ordination between the branches of its own Self-Defence Forces.

The FT cites the comments of former head of the Indo-Pacific command, Admiral Philip Davidson, making clear that the changes have been prepared well in advance. After praising Japan’s remilitarisation as “the most positive security development in east Asia in this century,” he declared: “The recognition that our two nations’ defence strategies have converged makes improvement in our day-to-day command and control the logical next step.”

Ryoichi Oriki, former chief of Japan’s SDF joint staff, told the FT that it was inconvenient having to co-ordinate with Indo-Pacific command in Hawaii rather than the USFJ commander, his daily counterpart. Tokyo says there is an urgent need to put a more senior US officer in Japan as it takes on a bigger regional defence role.

“It sends a strong strategic signal to China and North Korea and it’s meaningful from the point of view of deterrence to say that the US will strengthen the command structure in Japan,” Oriki explained to the FT.

The changes to the joint military pact to be formally announced next month will almost certainly provoke popular opposition. The 1960 US-Japan Security Treaty which allowed the US to establish permanent military bases in Japan provoked massive demonstrations, known as the Anpo protests or struggle.

In June 1960 as the government of Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi prepared to ram ratification of the treaty through the Japanese parliament, hundreds of thousands of protesters surrounded the building virtually on a daily basis. Mass protests also took place around the US Embassy and the prime minister’s official residence. Three one-day, nation-wide general strikes involving millions of workers also took place supported by the closure of tens of thousands of businesses in sympathy. A planned trip by US President Eisenhower to Japan was cancelled and, following the treaty’s ratification, Kishi resigned.

The protests reflected the widespread anti-war

sentiment, particularly among workers and youth, following the end of the wartime militarist regime, of which Kishi had been a part, that brutally repressed any opposition. In 2015, large protests also took place in opposition to legislation by the government of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Kishi’s grandson and admirer, to “reinterpret” the constitution to allow “collective self-defence”—that is Japan’s participation in US wars of aggression.

Already embroiled in a war against Russia in Ukraine and backing Israel’s genocidal onslaught in Gaza, US imperialism is accelerating its war drive against China, which Washington regards as the chief threat to its global hegemony. The revamping of the US-Japan security treaty is a key component of its militarist plans in the Indo-Pacific.



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