

US, Japan agree to biggest boost to military cooperation in decades

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28 July 2024

The US and Japanese top-level defence and foreign affairs officials met in Tokyo yesterday for their Security Consultative Committee (or “2+2”). The two sides discussed unprecedented plans for the integration of the US and Japanese militaries, marking a highly provocative escalation in Washington and Tokyo’s war drive against China.

A joint statement released after the “2+2” talks explained the concrete steps the US and Japan are taking to bolster their military alliance. US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin stated, “This will be the most significant change to US Forces Japan (USFJ) since its creation, and one of the strongest improvements in our military ties with Japan in 70 years.” It has been described as the most substantial change since the 1960 revision of the US-Japan security treaty that led to mass protests.

The steps announced Sunday build on the agreement US President Joe Biden and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida reached at their April summit in Washington. The *Financial Times* noted that officials from both sides were surprised at how quickly this agreement was put into action. However, Tokyo is a key component of Washington’s accelerating war planning aimed above all at China, but also Russia and North Korea.

Japan hosts approximately 54,000 US military personnel, more than any other country outside the US itself. About half of these troops are stationed in Okinawa, which would play a major role in any armed conflict with Beijing. The four officials—Austin, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Japan’s Foreign Affairs Minister Yoko Kamikawa and Defense Minister Minoru Kihara—agreed to bolster their bilateral military presence in Okinawa’s island chain, also called the Southwest or Nansei Islands.

The joint statement explained that Washington would “reconstitute” USFJ as a “joint force headquarters.” This will serve as a counterpart to the Japan Self-Defense Forces’ (JSDF) new Joint Operations Command (JJOC) to be launched next March, which will oversee the operations of all three branches of Japan’s military.

“Through a phased approach, USFJ would enhance its capabilities and operational cooperation with the JJOC, as well as assume primary responsibility for coordinating security activities in and around Japan in accordance with the US-Japan Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security,” the statement declared.

This means the new headquarters will take over direct control of US military forces in Japan, which will include placing a three-star general in Japan. Under the present set-up, the USFJ oversees the management of US bases, but lacks command authority. Instead, controls rests with the US Indo-Pacific Command based in Hawaii, which is 19 hours behind Japan and 6,500km away. The “reconstitution” will allow increased cooperation and planning between the two sides as they coordinate plans for imperialist war against China.

Washington and Tokyo will establish working groups to enhance the “interoperability” of the two militaries in fields such as intelligence-gathering, training and military exercises, and so-called contingency planning, meaning preparation for actual armed conflict with China.

The joint statement hailed Tokyo’s plans to acquire long-range missiles, including Tomahawk cruise missiles, from the US despite the possession of such weaponry being a clear violation of Article 9 of Japan’s constitution. This is part of Tokyo’s longstanding plans for remilitarization. With

Washington's support, Tokyo announced in December 2022 that it would carry out a de facto doubling of its military budget, raising spending to 2 percent of GDP.

The US and Japanese officials provocatively denounced Beijing first and foremost in their joint statement. The two sides claimed they “reaffirmed their commitment to promote a free and open Indo-Pacific region,”—one in which Washington dominates, backed by military threats.

Beijing, the four ministers asserted, “employs political, economic, and military coercion of countries, companies, and civil society, as well as facilitates its military modernization through the diversion of technology to achieve these objectives.” They called this “the greatest strategic challenge in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond.”

In reality, after its decades of criminal wars of aggression in the Middle East and Central Asia, US imperialism is now waging war against Russia in Ukraine and backing the Israeli genocide in Gaza. At the same time, Washington is accelerating preparations for conflict with China which it regards as the biggest obstacle to asserting its global hegemony. These wars are rapidly morphing into a devastating global conflict that would almost certainly involve nuclear weapons.

Making this danger clear, the US and Japanese sides held separate talks on “extended deterrence,” meaning the use of nuclear weapons. It was the first time such discussions have been held outside of the “2+2” talks. A separate statement explained the two countries would make a “commitment to close consultations on US nuclear policy and posture,” more closely integrating Japan into US plans for nuclear war, essentially behind the backs of the Japanese working class. Anti-war and anti-nuclear sentiments are widespread in Japan, upon which the US dropped two atomic bombs to solidify its dominance in the Pacific and globally at the end of World War II.

The joint US-Japanese statement repeated the litany of accusations against China focusing in particular on Taiwan and claiming to stand for “peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait.” In fact, the US, backed by Japan, is deliberately strengthening ties with Taiwan in an increasingly open challenge to the One China policy, knowing that will provoke war.

Both the US and Japan nominally recognize the One China policy, which states that Taiwan is a part of

China, by having formal diplomatic relations solely with Beijing. However, both have been calling the policy into question through arms sales, high-level diplomatic visits and support for the pro-independent Democratic Progressive Party, the current ruling party in Taiwan.

US Defense Secretary Austin and Japanese Defense Minister Kihara also held trilateral talks on Sunday with South Korean Defense Minister Sin Won-sik. It was the first time that trilateral discussions between the three were held in Tokyo, an indication of the growing military alliance between South Korea and Japan. It was also the first trip to Japan by a South Korean defense minister since 2009.

The three signed a memorandum of cooperation that “institutionalizes” the trilateral military cooperation resulting from discussions between Washington, Seoul, and Tokyo at the Shangri-La Dialogue in June. This includes high-level policy coordination, military intelligence sharing and increased numbers of trilateral military exercises. After years of tensions between Seoul and Tokyo stemming from historical and trade disputes, South Korea under the right-wing Yoon Suk-yeol administration has rapidly moved to develop relations with Japan at Washington's behest. The three countries effectively created a de facto trilateral military alliance last August during a three-way summit at Camp David.

The meetings over the past weekend are a significant escalation in preparations for war with China. The increasing presence of the US military and the remilitarization of Japan right on China's doorstep can only raise tensions with Beijing and heighten the danger of military conflict.



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