

Japan stages provocative naval transit through Taiwan Strait

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The Japan navy on Wednesday sailed a warship through the Taiwan Strait for the first time, which is a highly provocative move that deliberately heightens tensions with Beijing. It goes hand-in-hand with Tokyo's ongoing remilitarization and involvement in the US-led war preparations against China.

The JS Sazanami, a Maritime Self-Defense Force destroyer, sailed south through the strait. The same day, naval vessels from Australia and New Zealand, the HMAS Sydney and HMNZS Aotearoa respectively, also made the voyage together. The three were traveling to take part in naval exercises in the South China Sea which has been transformed by the US and its allies into another dangerous flashpoint for conflict with China.

A spokesman for the New Zealand navy told the media that its decision to send a naval vessel through the Taiwan Strait for the first time since 2017 was to assert the "right of freedom of navigation." Australia last sent a warship through the strait in November 2023. Germany also sought to provoke China with the recent passage of two of its naval vessels on September 13 for the first time in 22 years.

According to Japan's *Asahi Shimbun*, a government source stated outgoing Prime Minister Fumio Kishida gave the green light for the Sazanami's mission. The source stated, "We made the decision considering China's recent actions and Japan's domestic political situation," referencing the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) leadership election that took place Friday. Right-wing war hawk Shigeru Ishiba was selected as its new president and will become next prime minister.

The comment is to blame to Beijing for the rising danger of war. On Thursday, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi referenced a brief incursion by a Chinese Y-9 surveillance aircraft into Japanese airspace

around Japan's Danjo Islands in the East China Sea southwest of Kyushu on August 26. China also sailed its Liaoning aircraft carrier on September 18 between Japan's Yonaguni and Iriomote Islands, which lie just east of Taiwan. The vessel allegedly passed through Japan's contiguous zone, between 12 and 24 nautical miles from the coast, which is not part of a country's territorial waters.

Japan's naval provocation in the Taiwan Strait was not a spur of the moment decision. Rather, it would have been carefully planned and coordinated with Washington. Tokyo no doubt seized on Chinese actions to justify the transit while also sending the message that no matter who replaced Prime Minister Kishida, the new government would continue its aggressive anti-China policies.

The Japanese military's involvement around Taiwan recalls its violent history in the region. Tokyo forced China to cede the island to Japan in 1895 following the First Sino-Japanese War. Japan then conducted a brutal colonization of the island, a fact often covered up or denied today by the descendants of collaborators in the Taiwanese bourgeoisie. Japan used the island as a military base for carrying out attacks on China and Southeast Asia in the 1930s and 1940s before its defeat in World War II.

Today, Tokyo is carrying out a program of remilitarization that will allow it to fully return its armed forces to the region. The Japanese government has pledged to carry out a de facto doubling of its military spending by 2027. This includes acquiring offensive weaponry capable of striking China, in clear breach of Article 9 of Japan's constitution. Tokyo circumvents this by claiming it has the right to engage in so-called "collective self-defense," meaning to take part in wars alongside an ally.

Japan now joins the US and its allies in sailing naval vessels through the Taiwan Strait. This is despite the fact that Beijing claims the strait as its territorial waters based on the fact that Taiwan is not an independent country, but a part of China. This is the One China policy, to which all of the nations in question, including the US and Japan, formally adhere by diplomatically recognizing only Beijing.

China's Foreign Ministry Spokesman Lin Jian responded on Thursday, stating, "The Taiwan question concerns China's sovereignty and territorial integrity. It is the political foundation of China-Japan relations and a red line that must not be crossed." Lin urged Japan to "act prudently on the Taiwan question, and refrain from causing disruption to its relations with China and peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait."

The sailing of warships through the strait is an obvious challenge to Beijing's red line and the One China policy that can only further stoke war. Beijing is opposed to Taiwanese independence as it would set a precedent for the further carving up of Chinese territory. It would also open the door for US imperialism to establish military bases on the island, which at its narrowest point of the Taiwan Strait is only 130 kilometers (81 miles) from the mainland.

Washington and Tokyo have also emboldened pro-independence forces on Taiwan, including current President Lai Ching-te. In November last year, retired Japanese Lieutenant General Koichiro Bansho revealed plans for Japan's participation in a conflict, stating Tokyo would funnel weapons and supplies into Taiwan.

To cover up these plans, Washington often cites the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)—which it hypocritically has failed to ratify—as justification for passage through the Taiwan Strait. However, while permitting transits of a strait, UNCLOS specifically bans any type of behavior that threatens a country bordering the strait.

After the transit, General Yoshihide Yoshida, who heads the defense ministry's Joint Staff, declared: "We will continue to monitor (China's) activities, gather information, and analyze it for the enhancement of surveillance." In other words, the naval transit could have been in part a military intelligence gathering operation.

Furthermore, from Beijing's perspective, the sailing

of multiple naval vessels through the Taiwan Strait could presage far more provocative political or military moves by the US and its allies. The broader uncertainty in the region no doubt contributed to Beijing's decision to test fire an intercontinental ballistic missile on Wednesday.

Blame for this dangerous situation ultimately lies with the US, which over the last 15 years has deliberately whipped up territorial disputes in the East and South China Seas as the potential pretexts for war with China. Tokyo played its part, heightening tensions with China over the disputed and uninhabited Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands and militarizing its southern islands in the Ryukyu Island chain.

Just as Washington and NATO did in provoking Russia into conflict in Ukraine, the US and its allies in the Indo-Pacific are dangerously goading China into war.



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