

Japan's ruling party selects far right leader as prime minister

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Japan's governing Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) elected Shigeru Ishiba as its new president on Friday. As head of the party, he will be installed as the country's new prime minister at a parliamentary session tomorrow, replacing Fumio Kishida.

Ishiba's selection marks a significant further shift to the right in official Japanese politics that will accelerate remilitarization and preparations for war against China.

Nine candidates ran in what was a highly anti-democratic affair. In the first round of voting, Ishiba came in second to fellow anti-China hawk Sanae Takaichi, who was close to former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and represented Abe's faction. Falling short of a majority, the two went to a run-off vote. Ishiba then received 215 votes to Takaichi's 194.

The voting process heavily favored the LDP's parliamentarians from both the lower and upper houses of the National Diet, who were each allotted one vote for a total of 368. The party's membership of 1.1 million received a fraction of a vote, with their totals also equalling 368 points. In the run-off, the Diet members kept their vote totals while other party members were excluded. Each of the LDP's chapters from Japan's 47 prefectures instead received a vote.

Outgoing PM Kishida announced on August 14 that he would not stand for reelection as party president, essentially resigning as prime minister, after coming under pressure over corruption scandals that have gripped the party. Rather than corruption, the chief concerns of the LDP and ruling class were the ability of the government to prepare for war while suppressing growing working-class opposition to attacks on living conditions at home.

This paved the way for Ishiba, who has often postured as a party "outsider," pledged to "clean up" the LDP. In reality, he is a longstanding member of the

party and, like many in the Japanese government, comes from an established political family.

His father, Jiro Ishiba, began his career as a bureaucrat before World War II and was governor of Tottori Prefecture from 1958 until 1974 before being elected to the upper house of the National Diet. Jiro Ishiba also served in the cabinet of Zenko Suzuki as home affairs minister. Following his father's death in 1981, the LDP recruited the younger Ishiba to run for a Diet seat from Tottori Province in 1986.

Ishiba's career has been marked by involvement with the military and a focus on Japan's remilitarization. From 2002 to 2004, he served as the director of the Defense Agency, which became the Defense Ministry in 2007. He then became defense minister from 2007 to 2008. He has held other cabinet positions while also serving as the LDP's secretary-general from 2012 to 2014. He previously ran for LDP president in 2008, 2012, 2018 and 2020. Ishiba is a member of Nippon Kaigi, an ultra-nationalist organization that not only advocates remilitarization, but the tearing up of basic democratic rights.

To the extent that Ishiba differs from other politicians within his party, it has been over the pace of remilitarization. Ishiba has advocated a more rapid program of rearming, which includes spending more on the military than the current plan to double the military budget to 2 percent of gross domestic product by 2027. He was a critique of the right-wing Abe government for not going far enough, even as it carried out constitutional "reinterpretations" to work around post-World War II legal barriers to remilitarizing and rammed legislation through parliament to enable Japan to go to war alongside allies.

Now, without even waiting to be confirmed as prime minister, Ishiba has made clear that his government will

be one of militarism and war. In an article for the right-wing Washington-based Hudson Institute published shortly after his election as LDP chief, Ishiba reiterated the LDP's longstanding plans for constitutional revision.

Though Ishiba did not state it explicitly, he has on previous occasions declared that Article 9 of the constitution, which formally bars Japan from maintaining a military or going to war, should be deleted, not just changed to directly recognize the existence of the armed forces, currently called the "Self-Defense Forces," as the Abe faction has advocated.

Ishiba called for the creation of an "Asian NATO" that would be capable of fighting a war with China, as well as Russia and North Korea. In doing so, he is pushing for Japan to play a larger role militarily within the Indo-Pacific, speaking for sections of the capitalist class that advocate more independence from Washington.

In addition, Ishiba proposed revising the post World War II US-Japan security treaty, changing it "into a treaty between 'ordinary countries.'" He criticized the existing treaty for being "structured so that the US is obligated to 'defend' Japan, and Japan is obligated to 'provide bases' to the US."

Ishiba suggested that a revised treaty could allow Japan to station its military at Guam, a US island territory in the west Pacific. He is thus attempting to create the conditions for Japanese imperialism to project power throughout the Pacific. To date, Tokyo has only one overseas military base, located in Djibouti on the Horn of Africa, ostensibly to combat piracy.

Ishiba declared that an "Asian NATO" should "specifically consider America's sharing of nuclear weapons or the introduction of nuclear weapons into the region." Any open introduction of US nuclear weapons into Japan could set a precedent for Japan to acquire its own weapons, which Ishiba has long advocated.

Any move by Japan to introduce US nuclear weapons or acquire its own nuclear arsenal would provoke considerable opposition as memories of the horrific toll of the US atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki during 1945 run deep among working people.

Ishiba justified his stance in his Hudson Institute piece by repeating a phrase often used by Kishida that "Ukraine today is Asia tomorrow," accusing China of

planning an "unprovoked" war against Taiwan.

Raising tensions with China, Ishiba in August led a parliamentary delegation to Taiwan where he met with President Lai Ching-te. Ishiba declared that Japan should stand "shoulder to shoulder" with supposed "democratic" governments in the region against Beijing.

In reality, Washington and its allies, including Tokyo, have goaded and stoked tensions with Beijing over Taiwan, just as the US provoked the Moscow regime into invading Ukraine, including by expanding NATO to Russia's borders.

The US and its partners are increasingly challenging the One China policy which states that Taiwan is a part of China. For more than four decades, both Washington and Tokyo have had formal diplomatic relations with Beijing de facto recognizing it as the legitimate government of all China including Taiwan. China's ruling elite is conscious that Taiwan could become a military base for future imperialist attacks on the mainland.



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