

US, Japanese, Australian defence ministers boost anti-China military collaboration

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A high-profile trilateral meeting between the defence ministers of Australia, Japan and the United States in the northern Australian city of Darwin on Sunday has underscored the advanced character of US-led preparations for conflict with China.

Darwin has already become a major hub of US military activity in the Indo-Pacific region. In 2011, President Obama visited the city after announcing in Canberra his “pivot to Asia”—a diplomatic, economic and military offensive against China. In Darwin, Obama foreshadowed the “rotational” deployment of up to 2,000 US Marines, which has since taken place along with a growing presence of US warplanes, warships and submarines across northern and western Australia.

Last weekend’s trilateral meeting focussed on integrating Japanese military forces with their Australian and US counterparts in Australia and the region more broadly. In their joint statement, Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles and his Japanese and US counterparts—Nakatani Gen and Lloyd Austin—made explicit that their military preparations were aimed against China, as well as Russia and North Korea.

The statement repeated the standard litany of Washington’s accusations against Beijing, focussing in particular on “serious concern about destabilizing actions in the East and South China Seas, including dangerous conduct by the People’s Republic of China (PRC) against Philippines and other coastal state vessels.”

In reality, it was the provocative statements and actions of the Obama administration that dramatically transformed longstanding regional territorial disputes in the South China Sea into a dangerous flashpoint for a wider war. In parallel, the Japanese government escalated tensions with China in the East China Sea by

nationalising the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islets in 2012.

The joint statement also highlighted sharpening tensions with China over Taiwan and condemned North Korea’s missile and nuclear programs and its military assistance to Moscow amid the escalating US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine. It also warned China against providing any political or military support for Moscow, underscoring the increasingly global character of the conflicts.

Significantly, the three top defence officials announced regular trilateral consultations to support a realignment of “the policy and operational objectives” of their militaries “from peacetime to contingency.” Such “contingencies,” of course, include open conflict, under conditions where the US—backed to the hilt by Japan and Australia—is already in a de-facto war with Russia and is supporting the expanding Israeli war in the Middle East.

In that context, the most significant announcement was the plan to hold annual trilateral training of the amphibious forces of the three countries beginning in 2025 with the major Talisman Sabre war games. “Today, we are announcing that there will be regular deployments of Japan’s amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade to Australia,” Marles told a press conference.

The focus on amphibious military forces—the US Marines and the recently established Japanese counterparts they have trained—points to the aggressive character of the US plans. The ability to mount amphibious landings is a necessary component of the Pentagon’s war planning targeting Chinese held islets in the South China Sea as well as potential operations against the Chinese mainland itself.

The so-called rotational deployment of US Marines in Darwin—a basing arrangement in all but name—puts

them within striking distance of strategic naval “choke points” such as the Malacca Strait to the South China Sea. Now they are to be joined by Japanese amphibious forces—reportedly around 600 troops next year—whose duration of stay has not been announced.

The involvement of Japanese military forces in what is likely to become a semi-permanent presence in northern Australia as part of the US-led war drive is a transparent breach of the so-called pacifist clause of the Japanese constitution. It has increasingly become a dead letter as Japanese imperialism has remilitarised in recent decades.

While the presence of Japanese troops in Darwin has been featured in the news coverage, the joint statement from the tri-lateral meeting made clear that the integration of the three militaries is proceeding apace. That includes:

- * Australian troops will increasingly be involved in joint Japanese-US war games in Japan taking part for the first time in Exercise Orient Shield in 2025—the largest drills for ground forces—and boosting their previous involvement in other exercises.

- * Trilateral intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance cooperation will be enhanced by including Australian personnel in the Japan-United States Bilateral Information Analysis Cell (BIAC).

- * Trilateral air interoperability will be increased by “reciprocal deployments of air assets such as fighter and transport aircraft, to all three countries from 2025” in Exercise Cope North in Guam, Exercise Bushido Guardian in Japan and Exercise Pitch Black in northern Australia.

- * The three countries are also building “a networked air and missile defense architecture to counter the growing range of threats throughout the Indo-Pacific.” Japan already hosts key elements of the US anti-ballistic missile systems that are vital to the Pentagon’s nuclear war plans and Australia is investing heavily in long-range missile systems. An “inaugural trilateral regional air and missile defense live-fire event” is scheduled for Exercise Talisman Sabre in 2027.

Significantly, US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin foreshadowed the inclusion of Japan in Pillar II of the top-level AUKUS military pact between Australia, the US and UK. Pillar I involves the provision of nuclear-powered submarines to Australia while Pillar II is to accelerate research and development of hi-tech military

technology.

Austin told the joint press conference: “We expect that Japan will join AUKUS pillar II at some point in the not-too-distant future.” While vague on detail, he pointed to Japan’s potential involvement in quantum capability, collaborative combat aircraft (CCA) or the teaming of unmanned and manned military aircraft, and Long Range Strike (weapons with advanced capabilities to strike precisely at distance).

While the trilateral meeting took place in the shadow of Donald Trump assuming the US presidency, the new administration will undoubtedly continue the overall thrust of the anti-China war drive. Trump, despite his occasional posturing during the election campaign as a man of peace, has made no secret of his intentions to ramp up the US confrontation with China.

At the joint press conference, Marles declared he believed the Trump administration would uphold the alliance with Australia and the AUKUS pact in particular. The Australian government, he said, was “confident that a future Administration will stand by America’s place in the world.” Asked about Trump’s appointment of the fascist Peter Hegseth as US defence secretary, Marles declared he looked forward to “working with him with enormous optimism.”



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