

Japan to sell advanced naval frigates to Australia

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Japan and Australia recently announced that Canberra would purchase 11 new advanced naval frigates from Japan's Mitsubishi Heavy Industries (MHI), in what is a sign of growing military cooperation between two of the Washington's primary allies in accelerating war preparations against China.

Australian Defense Minister Richard Marles announced the \$US6.5 billion deal on August 5. MHI will produce three upgraded Mogami-class frigates in Japan while the remaining eight will be built in Australia in conjunction with shipbuilder and military contractor Austal. The initial price tag only includes the first three ships and parts for other vessels.

The upgraded Mogami frigate requires only a 90-member crew, fewer than a vessel proposed by Germany's Thyssenkrupp Marine Systems, and carries long-range missiles as well as having stealth, anti-submarine, and mine warfare capabilities. The deal is expected to be completed early next year, with the first vessel to be delivered by 2029. Marles described the purchase as "a very significant moment in the bilateral relationship between Australia and Japan."

For Japan, the deal represents an expanding aspect of its remilitarization drive, through which Tokyo is rapidly preparing for war. Japan's efforts to become a significant arms exporter further demonstrates that Article 9, the so-called "pacifist clause" in its constitution, has become a dead letter.

The clause formally bars Japan from fielding a military or going to war overseas. Though undermined for decades, the establishment's reluctance to officially overturn it reflects its fear of broad anti-war sentiment in the Japanese working class in particular. Having previously attempted to revise Article 9, Tokyo now simply ignores it.

The naval sale deepens Tokyo's military cooperation

with Canberra. Japan's Defense Minister Gen Nakatani stated that the deal showed "the importance of interoperability between the Self-Defense Forces and the Australian military." The Self-Defense Forces is the formal name of Japan's military.

Both Japan and Australia are members of the Quad, a de facto military pact that also includes India and the US directed against China. Japan is also cooperating with the anti-China AUKUS alliance, comprised of Australia, the United Kingdom, and the US. While not a full member, Japan participates under Tier 2, which involves sharing advanced military technology.

The frigate sale is the first of this size and scale for Japan since the end of World War II. Hirohito Ogi, a senior research fellow at the Institute of Geoeconomics and a former defense ministry official, told the *Financial Times*, "This will further motivate the Japanese defense companies to seek other opportunities for international arms transactions."

Weapon exports have been a key part of Japan's remilitarization for years. In 2014, the government of Shinzo Abe eased regulations that banned such exports, though this had been violated in the past. Subsequent governments further undermined this supposed ban. In December 2023, the Fumio Kishida government approved the sale of Patriot missiles to the US in order to allow Washington to send its own stockpile of missiles to Ukraine in the war against Russia.

In April 2023, Japan announced that it would begin supplying countries like the Philippines with satellite communication technology, radio systems, and radars as part of its new Official Security Assistance program. The goal, Japan's Foreign Ministry claimed, was to "strengthen a free and open international order," a phrase repeated ad nauseam to justify the US-led militarization of the Indo-Pacific and demonize China.

Japan is also currently planning to transfer as many as six Abukuma-class destroyer escort vessels to the Philippines, with talks on a deal in July. Tokyo and Manila would work jointly to refurbish the warships, which have been in operation for more than 30 years. This joint development would allow Tokyo to ignore restrictions on sending vessels to other countries for use in future wars.

These measures are not directed towards “self-defense.” Tokyo’s recently released annual Defense Ministry white paper branded China “an unprecedented and the greatest strategic challenge” while stating that the world was entering a “new era of crisis.”

Responsibility for this “era of crisis” rests above all with US imperialism, which is attempting to offset its relative economic decline and block the emergence of China as a competitor. The US is seeking to goad China into a war, particularly over Taiwan by challenging and chipping away at the One China policy. The US has also inflamed tensions in the South China Sea by encouraging the Philippines to stage provocative maneuvers around disputed territories, operations which the US military has overseen.

Japan has added to these tensions. On March 30, Defense Minister Nakatani proposed to US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth a “single theater” concept, which the latter welcomed. Nakatani reportedly stated, “Japan plans to deepen partnerships by viewing Japan, the United States, Australia, the Philippines, South Korea, and others as a single theater,” which would include the East and South China Seas as well as the Korean Peninsula. This effectively means Tokyo is preparing to go to war anywhere in the region.

This is part of Washington’s push to create a system of alliances to surround China. Washington, Tokyo and Canberra formalized a new trilateral naval logistics arrangement on July 11 aimed at improving cooperation and enhancing interoperability.

It is the first such trilateral logistics pact between the three. The arrangement includes missile reloading and refueling at sea, with the US Navy’s Vice Admiral Jeff Jablon adding that it “allows us to more easily share information, technologies, and processes for greater logistics resiliency.” The deal was signed prior to the massive, nearly month-long Talisman Sabre exercises in Australia, in which Japan took part.

These war games were active preparations for

imperialist war with China. Another round of naval exercises took place in the northern Philippine Sea, near Taiwan, which ran from August 4 to 12. Vessels from the US, Japan, UK, Norway and Spain were involved.

Four battle groups took part in the operations including those of the USS George Washington and HMS Prince of Wales. The other two were associated with the USS America, classified as an amphibious assault ship, and the JS Kaga from Japan, which is undergoing conversion into an aircraft carrier. The latter two are capable of launching F-35B fighter jets.

The Kaga is one of two carriers the Japanese navy has in violation of previous restrictions on offensive weaponry. The vessels were originally built as “helicopter carriers” as a workaround to the restriction, before their conversion into aircraft carriers capable of launching F-35Bs, which have short take-offs and vertical landings.

On August 7, Japan also received the first three F-35Bs out of 42 it has purchased from the US. In addition, Tokyo has ordered 105 F-35A fighters, which would make it the largest operator of the aircraft outside of the US.



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