

Newly-elected far-right Japanese government prepares war measures

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Following the Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) landslide victory in the Japanese general election earlier this month, the far-right government of Sanae Takaichi is rapidly accelerating Tokyo's remilitarization agenda in preparation for waging war abroad and war against the working class at home.

On Wednesday, the LDP's Research Commission on Security panel approved a plan to lift nearly all restrictions on Tokyo's ability to export lethal weaponry. The plan will be submitted to the government for additional revisions before going into effect. This significant change does not require parliamentary approval from the National Diet.

Under the panel's recommendation, Japan will now be able to export weaponry jointly developed with one nation to a third country. Exports to nations currently at war will also be allowed with approval by the National Security Council, which includes the prime minister and cabinet ministers. At present, exports will be limited to 17 countries with which Tokyo has military technology transfer agreements, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and the Philippines.

Current restrictions date back to 2014 when the Shinzo Abe government scrapped a longstanding ban on military exports. The new policy allowed exports of so-called "non-lethal" equipment supposedly for use in rescue, transport, warning, surveillance, and minesweeping.

The government of Fumio Kishida further chipped away at the ban in 2023, allowing finished products to be sent to countries that held the item's license. This paved the way for shipping Patriot missiles to the US to replenish Washington's supply depleted by the arming of Ukraine in the US/NATO-instigated war against Russia, making Japan an indirect supplier of arms to

Kiev.

The LDP and its similarly far-right, pro-war coalition partner, Nippon Ishin no Kai, view Japan's export restrictions as an impediment to the expansion of Japan's military industry and capabilities in preparing for war against a US-led China.

The ban was first implemented in 1967 and then strengthened in 1976 to supposedly align with Article 9 of the constitution, which makes it illegal for Japan to maintain a military or wage war abroad. The export ban was imposed as the government faced widespread anti-war opposition among workers and youth, though exceptions existed for things such as technology transfers to the US.

Furthermore, while Japan's remilitarization has taken place under the framework of the US-Japan security treaty, Japan is also pursuing an agenda to assert its own imperialist interests.

In her first policy speech to the Diet on February 20 following her reelection as prime minister, Takaichi claimed that the lifting of the export restrictions would "contribute to strengthening the deterrence and response capabilities of allies and like-minded countries." She added that it would "also lead to strengthening our nation's defense production and civilian technology bases."

According to the Defense Ministry, in a 20-year period since 2003, over one hundred companies had left the military industry due to a lack of profit-making potential. This includes the likes of Komatsu, Mitsui E&S Shipbuilding, and Sumitomo Heavy Industries. Takaichi pointed to this on Wednesday when she stated that the lifting of the export restrictions would "contribute to the growth of the Japanese economy" by boosting supply chains and the development of military technology.

The lifting of the ban will not only allow the export of weaponry, but bolster Japan's own military, known as the Self-Defense Forces, creating a larger and stronger domestic base for the production of war material diminishing its reliance on foreign powers for military hardware. Simultaneously, Japanese can strengthen its bilateral military ties with countries to which it exports the weaponry.

While the immediate lifting of the export ban is being discussed publicly, how it is carried out in the future will take place largely behind closed doors. The government will be under no obligation to explain to or seek approval from parliament for exports. In fact, senior government and Defense Ministry officials told the *Asahi Shimbun* that such a requirement would be "out of the question."

The Japanese ruling class is terrified that any exposure of its pro-war agenda and the fraudulent claims that remilitarization is limited to so-called "defense" will spark opposition from the working class. Takaichi tacitly acknowledged as much when she stated after the election that her new government would enact "bold policies that could divide national opinion." As war planning grows, oppressive measures will also be strengthened to clamp down on any opposition.

This is the purpose of another pro-war measure the government is pursuing, the so-called anti-espionage bill and other changes to Tokyo's intelligence gathering capabilities. Long sought-after by the ruling class, this would strengthen Tokyo's spy agencies both domestically and abroad while making it more difficult for whistleblowers to expose the machinations of the state and for reporters to write about these exposures.

The Takaichi government intends to draft a "National Intelligence Strategy" for the first time within this year. Until now, intelligence has been included within the National Security Strategy, one of Japan's primary military documents. The new strategy would centralize intelligence gathering and clarify the roles of new bodies dedicated to this purpose.

In particular, the Takaichi government intends to establish a National Intelligence Council to oversee a new National Intelligence Agency, both of which could be set up as early as July. Another agency for foreign intelligence gathering based on the US's CIA is slated to be set up by the end of 2027.

As with the lifting of the weapon export ban, the

intelligence agenda is based both on strengthening war planning with allies and on strengthening the independence of Japanese imperialism, making it less reliant on the US for intelligence sharing. Japan already has one of the world's most extensive intelligence-gathering networks, built in the post-war period, in particular with a focus on China, North Korea, and Russia.

In the past, high-ranking Japanese officials including former Defense Minister Taro Kono has expressed interest in joining the "Five Eyes" intelligence network, which includes, the US, the UK, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. Barriers to Japan joining include what is considered lax in handling of sensitive information, or in other words, the ability for the press to gain access to information. This is a major reason for the ruling class's push for an espionage law.

Additional oppressive measures are being pursued through constitutional revision. Takaichi stated on February 18 after the inauguration of her new cabinet, "As the LDP, we intend to tenaciously work to create an environment in which a (constitutional) amendment proposal can be initiated as soon as possible and lead to a national referendum." Changes to the constitution require two-thirds approval from both the lower and upper houses of the Diet and approval in a national vote.

Article 9 has long been the target of the ruling class, even as it has been largely turned into a dead letter. The purpose of any revisions would be to formally recognize both the existence of Japan's military and Japan's ability to wage war without any restrictions.

The revisions do not stop there. Other proposed changes include a state-of-emergency clause in the event of foreign invasion or so-called "domestic rebellion." Cabinet orders during such a so-called emergency declaration would be considered law while the terms of lawmakers would be extended without elections. A proposal contained within the LDP's 2012 revised constitution draft would allow the military to be deployed on the streets to "maintain public order."



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