

In Washington, far-right Japanese prime minister backs war on Iran

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Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi met with US President Donald Trump in Washington on Thursday where the two discussed Tokyo's involvement in the criminal US-Israeli war against Iran. While the far-right Takaichi government has avoided making a formal statement, Tokyo has in fact backed the war from the start.

The summit took place at the White House for approximately 90 minutes, during which Takaichi reiterated her support for Washington's illegal attack on Iran. She echoed Trump's phony rationale for the war declaring, "Iran must never be allowed to develop nuclear weapons." Takaichi obsequiously groveled before Trump, telling the fascistic president, "I firmly believe that it is only you, Donald, who can achieve peace across the world."

In turn, Trump praised Takaichi for "stepping up" in response to his demand that Japan and NATO countries dispatch military forces to the region, in particular to open up the Strait of Hormuz, through which 20 percent of the world's oil exports pass. During his talks with Takaichi, Trump called on Japan again to send military forces. What steps Japan will take have not been revealed, but Tokyo is already working with Washington to further develop the US economy for war.

Trump referenced a recent joint statement issued by Japan and several European nations, including the UK, France, and Germany, that was in fact released that day on the war. He stated, "I believe that, based on statements that were given to us yesterday, the day before yesterday, having to do with Japan, they are really stepping up to the plate, yes—unlike NATO."

Even as Iranian civilians, including children, are being targeted by the US and Israel, the highly hypocritical joint statement from Japan and the

European nations condemned Iran, the victim in this conflict, in the "strongest terms" for what it called attacks on commercial vessels, on civilian infrastructure, and the closure of the Strait of Hormuz.

Claiming "freedom of navigation" as a "fundamental principle of international law," the statement declared, "We express our readiness to contribute to appropriate efforts to ensure safe passage through the Strait. We welcome the commitment of nations who are engaging in preparatory planning."

In other words, plans are being made to send military forces to Iran to aid the US as Washington discovers that assassinations of the country's top leaders and widescale bombing have not been enough to win the war. This is being done under the guise of protecting shipping and "freedom of navigation," the same rationale that has been used to demonize China and prepare for an even more catastrophic conflict in the Indo-Pacific.

In this regard, Japan's involvement is not as a loyal junior ally to US imperialism, but to use the situation to ramp up its own remilitarization by claiming defense of "international law" and to further war plans aimed at China by securing greater access to energy resources. Japan receives nearly 95 percent of its oil from the Middle East. In this manner, Tokyo is reasserting itself as an imperialist power capable of projecting military power abroad once again in an attempt to offset its economic crisis and decline.

The war and Iran's closure of the Strait of Hormuz have had a major economic impact. Dubai crude oil rose to \$166 a barrel on Thursday, a new record-high, up from \$71 on February 27. In Washington, Takaichi declared, "We've brought plans with us to calm the energy market." These plans involve Japan's massive \$550 billion planned investment in the US in a tariff

agreement reached last year.

On Thursday, a White House fact sheet stated that Japan intends to invest \$40 billion dollars for the construction of small modular nuclear reactors in Tennessee and Alabama and an additional \$33 billion for the construction of natural gas power plants in Pennsylvania and Texas.

A White House official, according to Bloomberg, stated that the energy deal would supposedly stabilize electricity prices and raise US leadership in global technology competition. This includes building data centers, which require large amounts of power, for the development of artificial intelligence (AI) with its numerous military applications.

Separately, Japan is also planning to invest some \$100 million in the research and development of shipbuilding technologies that use AI and robotics, according to Japanese government sources. This technology would be used in shipbuilding, automating processes typically done by workers.

This economic investment is bound up with the war preparations against China. The development of domestic power plants would make the US less reliant on oil from abroad that could be cut off in the event of war, as is now taking place. Trump has also emphasized shipbuilding as a major component of his agenda to prepare the US navy for war with China.

Furthermore, prior to the meeting with Trump, Takaichi's government was already discussing ways to dispatch the Self-Defense Forces (SDF), the formal name of Japan's military, to the Strait of Hormuz.

At a press conference Friday, when asked about the dispatch of naval vessels, Takaichi responded, "These were sensitive exchanges [with Trump], but the extraordinary importance of ensuring the safety of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz was certainly emphasized. However, there are things that Japan can and cannot do within the bounds of our laws, and I provided an unambiguous and detailed explanation on this point."

Takaichi told an upper house budget committee meeting on March 16, "I am examining what Japan can do on its own within the legal framework, while issuing various instructions within the government." Sources close to the government, the *Asahi Shimbun* reported, have stated that the possibility of deploying the SDF was "under earnest consideration." Japan currently

already operates in the region, having its only overseas military base in Djibouti on the Horn of Africa, ostensibly to combat piracy.

The legal constraints on Tokyo's military forces are contained in Article 9 of the constitution, which formally ban Japan from waging war overseas. However, Article 9 has largely become a dead letter as successive governments have chipped away at it. Since coming to office last October, Takaichi has ramped up military spending to 2 percent of GDP, removed restrictions on military exports, and threatened war with China over Taiwan.

The government is not concerned with "following the law," but with the reaction of the working class. Some 82 percent of the population is opposed to the war according to a poll last weekend conducted by the *Asahi Shimbun*. Tokyo's open involvement in the conflict could spark mass anti-war protests like those that erupted in 2015 against the passage of military legislation allowing Japan to go to war overseas to fight alongside an ally.

It is that legislation that would now be used to justify dispatching the military forces to Iran under the claim that a "survival-threatening situation" exists due to the threat to Japan's energy supplies from the Middle East. Shinzo Abe, the prime minister in 2015, specifically referred to the blockading of the Strait of Hormuz as an example of just such a situation.

For workers, the war is exacerbating an already significant economic crisis. On March 16, the price for a liter of regular gasoline had risen to a record-high of 190.8 yen (\$US1.20). This takes place as workers have already suffered from years of stagnant or declining real wages and the dramatic increase in prices on major food items like rice. Tokyo's increasing involvement in what is rapidly becoming a global war means even further attacks on the social conditions of the working class.



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