

Australia and Japan boost military ties against China

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Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi and her Australian counterpart Anthony Albanese announced a further step-up in military relations between the two countries at a meeting in Canberra on Monday, in a move that is part of the US-led confrontation with China.

It was the first visit of Takaichi to Australia since her election last October. Dubbed an “iron lady,” Takaichi is a war hawk who is accelerating Japan’s remilitarisation, including through aggressive regional interventions directed against Beijing.

That was the content of her trip to Vietnam, which she visited immediately before arriving in Canberra.

Speaking in Hanoi on the weekend, Takaichi declared that Japan would play a “more proactive” role in the Indo-Pacific, in line with Tokyo’s new “Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy.” The references to “free” and “open” are bound up with phony accusations that China is coercive and attempting to establish dominance, through which Washington has justified its own military build-up in the Indo-Pacific as have its major allies, Japan and Australia.

Takaichi declared that regional states had to adapt to “new realities” associated with “geopolitical competition.” She provocatively raised the issue of the South China Sea, where the US has stoked longstanding territorial disputes between China and regional states, including Vietnam.

Takaichi signed a series of agreements with Vietnamese leaders, largely focussed on economic cooperation, but including strategic sectors such as critical minerals, of which Vietnam has substantial deposits.

This is part of a broader push, with Japanese Defense Minister Shinjiro Koizumi scheduled to visit Indonesia and the Philippines next week, in a move that will agitate Beijing.

As in Vietnam, the issues of energy security were formally a focus of discussions between Takaichi and Albanese. Japan is dependent on imports to meet its fuel requirements, as is Australia, with the latter having virtually no domestic refining capacity. The implications have been highlighted by the global fuel supply shocks resulting from the criminal US

war against Iran.

Canberra has pledged not to increase taxes on liquified natural gas, under conditions where 40 percent of Japan’s LNG imports are from Australia. Japan supplies almost 7 percent of Australia’s diesel. Takaichi and Albanese signed a vague “commitment to mutual energy security,” which lamely concluded with an appeal to other regional states to ensure continued fuel flows, pointing to Canberra and Tokyo’s vulnerabilities.

The primary focus, however, was on the global military build-up, of which the attack on Iran is one component.

In comments to the press after closed door meetings with Albanese, Takaichi said they had engaged in “strategic discussions on issues beginning with China.” They had also canvassed “issues of nuclear and missiles,” North Korea and the Iran war, which both Australia and Japan have supported.

Takaichi and Albanese hailed a deal finalised in April, under which Japan will supply 11 Mogami frigates, with the first three of the warships to be delivered in 2029.

On the Australian side, the purchase is part of a massive military build-up, centring on preparations for a US-led air and sea war in the Indo-Pacific against China. Australia’s biannual 2026 National Defence Strategy, released by Labor last month, boasted that the Mogami frigates will boost the “lethality” of the navy, noting that they have “a range of up to 10,000 nautical miles,” possess “a 32-cell vertical launch system” and are “fitted with surface-to-air missiles and anti-ship missiles.”

For Tokyo, the deal is part of a growth of military exports, in defiance of the nominally pacifist post-World War II constitution. Last month, Takaichi effectively scuppered a decades-long ban on Japan exporting lethal weapons, with new guidelines approving the international sale of armaments including combat drones and missiles.

The frigate deal is one element of a far broader deepening of defence ties between Australia and Japan, which are aiding one another’s military build-ups.

The scope of collaborations was pointed to in a joint

statement by Albanese and Takaichi on “Enhanced Defence and Security Cooperation,” spanning intelligence cooperation; “Co-development and co-production of defence capabilities”; “Testing of new equipment, advanced weapons and emerging technologies”; “Enhanced training and exercises in all domains” and more.

The statement outlined the rapid deepening of such ties over the past several years, including a 2022 agreement to consult and collaborate on “strategic contingencies,” and a deal the following year allowing for “reciprocal access” for Japanese and Australian military forces to one another’s facilities. That is a military alliance in all but name, which is instead described as a “special strategic partnership.”

In addition to the frigate sale, last month Japan and Australia struck a deal to collaborate on the development of a fleet of Boeing MQ-28 Ghost Bats, an unmanned drone, which can fire medium range air-to-air missiles. Under the deal, Japanese troops are permitted to participate in live training exercises of the drones on Australian soil.

The April agreements were signed during a visit by Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles to Tokyo. According to the *Japan Times*, Marles stated that the focus of Australia and Japan’s military-industrial collaboration was not only on drones, but also the development of long-range missiles.

In comments to that publication, Marles raised the war against Iran and growing conflict in the Indo-Pacific, declaring: “To gain the levels of war stocks that our defence forces need ... we are simply going to have to cooperate much more together in terms of co-production and co-sustainment.”

In his public remarks, Marles pointed to the frenzied pace of joint exercises between Japan and Australia, noting: “Next month in Exercise Southern Jackaroo, around 300 Japanese infantry will be coming to Australia, to Queensland, to train with their Australian counterparts. In July, Japanese F-35s will be coming to the Northern Territory in Australia, again to train with Australian F-35s as part of Exercise Southern Cross. In August, through Exercise Yamasakura, about 100 Australian personnel, those who work in headquarters and planners, will be coming to Japan to participate in that exercise.”

Albanese and Takaichi were more discreet and said less than Marles, who in Tokyo had essentially blurted out that the whole thrust of the Australia-Japan partnership is to rapidly prepare for a war in Asia against China.

That is the context of the other agreements struck by Albanese and Takaichi, including for expanded economic cooperation. It again references the need for an “open” Indo-Pacific, the US catch-cry against Beijing.

There was also an agreement for cooperation on critical

minerals, which are crucial to all areas of advanced production, including for military goods. Albanese and Takaichi raised the need for a “diversification of critical mineral supply chains,” under conditions where China dominates the processing of rare earths.

The statement outlined six projects which are receiving joint Australian-Japanese funding. The largest and only one currently operational is Lynas Rare Earths in Western Australia, which last year commenced the mining and refining of heavy rare earths in addition to its earlier extraction of light rare earths. The company operates a processing plant in Malaysia.

Another, which is also being funded by the US, is aimed at developing “gallium recovery at one of Alcoa’s operating alumina refineries in Western Australia, for use in semiconductors, LEDs, and solar cells.” Others are seeking to develop the “production of high-purity magnesium,” acid-grade fluorite and cobalt.

While most of the projects are not operational, and the issues of processing capabilities within Australia and Japan are unresolved, the initiatives underscore a growing push to lessen reliance on Beijing’s dominance of critical minerals, which can only be understood in the context of the war preparations.

Takaichi and Albanese are pressing ahead with a militarist program in the face of widespread opposition in both countries. In Japan, there have been large rallies opposing the attempt to revise the so-called pacifist clause of the constitution over recent weeks. Opinion polling in Australia has shown over 70 percent of the population oppose the US-led war against Iran, of which Albanese has been among the most enthusiastic supporters.

The military build-ups in Australia and Japan underscore the reality that the eruption of American imperialism is only the sharpest expression of a descent into war by all of the major powers, amid a deepening crisis of the capitalist system.



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