

Japan and the Philippines to deepen military collaboration against China

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Japan and the Philippines this week plan to elevate their relationship to a comprehensive strategic partnership, a move that will deepen military cooperation as both countries accelerate preparations for a US-led war against China. Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. will be in Tokyo this week for talks with Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi, during which the two are expected to make a formal announcement.

The four-day trip is the first by a Philippine president to Japan in more than a decade. Marcos is scheduled to meet with Takaichi on May 28. The comprehensive strategic partnership is one step below a formal military alliance. Both Tokyo and Manila have been at the forefront of provocations against China, in particular over Taiwan and territorial disputes in the East and South China Seas.

As part of this deepening cooperation, Tokyo and Manila are expected to negotiate a General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA). The agreement would allow the two sides to exchange military information, such as that obtained through radar systems. It also creates a legal framework to further restrict who can access military information. The US has similar agreements with both Japan and the Philippines. A GSOMIA between Tokyo and Manila would establish the basis for trilateral intelligence sharing.

The US and Japan already have a similar trilateral intelligence sharing system through GSOMIA with South Korea. Washington has played a key role in encouraging its allies to deepen their military cooperation as successive US administrations have worked to construct linked radar and missile systems throughout the Asia-Pacific targeting China.

The upgrade in relationship status is also in part driven by the political crisis in Manila, with Tokyo and

Washington striving to ensure the Philippines does not retreat from the belligerent line towards Beijing that has been set down.

A section of the Philippine ruling elite, led by the Duterte faction, favors closer relations with China while the Marcos-led faction has drawn closer to Washington and Tokyo, lining up with the war drive. A Japanese diplomatic source told the *Mainichi Shimbun*, “The Philippines’ stance on China shifts with each administration.” The new partnership would “drive a wedge to prevent tilting too close to China.”

However, while Japan is working closely with the US, Tokyo has its own separate imperialist interests and is seeking to remilitarize. This means tearing up Article 9 of the constitution, which restricts Japan’s ability to field a military. Remilitarization has accelerated under the far-right Takaichi and her coalition government comprised of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and its junior partner, Nippon Ishin no Kai.

Her agenda includes carrying out the decision in 2022 to double military spending to 2 percent of GDP. Japan’s initial military budget for the 2026 fiscal year stands at 10.6 trillion yen (\$US66.58 billion), or 1.9 percent of GDP. However, a supplementary budget passed last December pushed spending to 2 percent, ahead of the original deadline of 2027. It is entirely likely that another supplementary budget will be passed this year, pushing spending to even higher levels.

Under the cover of collaboration and so-called “collective self-defense,” Tokyo is building military networks throughout the Indo-Pacific through deals and agreements with nations like the Philippines.

Tokyo and Manila have discussed not just GSOMIA, but additional ways in which Tokyo can arm Manila, particularly since Japan lifted its ban on the export of

lethal weaponry to other countries last month. Cooperation is expected to continue through the establishment of a working group comprised of military authorities from both nations.

Earlier this month, Japan's public broadcaster NHK reported that the Defense Ministry is examining selling the Type 88 surface-to-ship missiles to the Philippines. This missile is the same that Japan fired during the recent Balikatan war exercises in the Philippines, the first time the missiles were used outside of Japan and the first time Japan conducted live-fire exercises in the Philippines since World War II.

The two sides are examining Manila's acquisition of Japan's Abukuma-class destroyer escorts and TC-90 training aircraft. Japan has also exported radar systems. The arming of the Philippines also means Japanese military firms and personnel can establish a presence in the country in order to provide maintenance for the equipment. Potentially, Tokyo would be able to establish a military maintenance base in the region for use by the Maritime Self-Defense Force, the formal name of Japan's navy.

At present, Japan's only overseas military base is in Djibouti on the Horn of Africa, ostensibly to combat piracy. The establishment of bases in Southeast Asia, regardless if they are euphemistically described as "maintenance bases," would be highly provocative, raising tensions sharply with China in the region.

The exporting of this military hardware to the Philippines and potentially other countries is also meant to stimulate the Japanese military industry, making it and the Japanese armed forces themselves, more independent and less reliant on arms purchases from countries like the US.

Japan paved the way for these developments through its Official Security Assistance (OSA) program, which was launched in 2023. Through the OSA, Tokyo exported satellite communication, radio systems, and radars to the Philippines in order to monitor Chinese activity in the region. Now, if a GSOMIA is completed, the information obtained from these systems can be shared back with Tokyo as war planning deepens.

Tokyo is also promoting so-called maritime domain awareness in the region. By the early 2030s, Tokyo will share maritime information with at least eight countries, like the Philippines. These services will be conducted with equipment provided through the OSA

and Official Development Assistance (ODA) program.

Japan is promoting this "service" as a supposed safeguard following the closure of the Strait of Hormuz. However, the strait was closed only after the US and Israel launched an illegal war on Iran. Similarly, Japan is setting measures in place to ensure shipping routes in Southeast Asia remain open to its economy in the event of war with China.

The US and Japanese war drive against China is not separate from the war against Iran, the genocide in Gaza, or the US/NATO-stoked war against Russia in Ukraine. Rather, all of these conflicts are intimately connected as the US and Japanese ruling classes attempt to resolve the crisis of capitalism through the only means at their disposal: war and the further subjugation of the globe to finance capital.



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