

Japanese defense minister calls for end of “taboo” on nuclear weapons

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Japanese Defense Minister Shinjiro Koizumi publicly declared on July 17 that Tokyo should discuss the introduction of nuclear weapons into Japan. The comments were rare coming from a sitting member of government and demonstrate Tokyo’s escalating program of remilitarization as part of the US-led war drive against China.

Speaking in an interview with the online program Genron TV, Koizumi stated, “While this is a difficult issue for Japan to discuss, one topic we cannot avoid is nuclear weapons.” These comments came shortly before the far-right defense minister headed to Europe. He cited both France and Finland as examples to emulate as Paris plans to boost its nuclear arsenal while Helsinki recently lifted a ban on the deployment of NATO nuclear weapons to the country.

Koizumi presented the issue of hosting or acquiring nuclear weapons in Japan—the only country to suffer from atomic bomb attacks—as a necessary one in case of an “emergency.” He added: “Considering this, I believe we must make even greater efforts to explain that the security environment in which Japan finds itself requires us to approach every policy with a strong sense of crisis, discussing and advancing them without any taboos.”

Since the eruption of the US/NATO-stoked war in Ukraine against Russia, Tokyo has regularly declared that “Ukraine today could be East Asia tomorrow,” accusing China of planning an attack on Taiwan as a pretext for Japan’s rapid remilitarization.

However, neither Washington’s nuclear arsenal nor Japan’s nuclear ambitions has anything to do with defense. US President Trump has reportedly asked if using low-yield nuclear weapons against Iran “was doable.” In the event of war with China, the US would no doubt resort to these weapons, making Japan a

potential staging ground for such attacks.

The deployment of nuclear weapons to Japan would further destabilize the Indo-Pacific region, no doubt leading to a broader arms race and the even greater danger of a nuclear war.

Responding to Koizumi’s remarks, Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Lin Jian stated on Monday, “If the Japanese authorities stick to their miscalculation on the nuclear issue, push to revise the three non-nuclear principles, and deploy allies’ nuclear weapons in Japan, they not only gravely challenge the postwar international order and the international nuclear non-proliferation regime, but also breach the commitment to peace, defy what the Japanese people want, and will eventually pay a heavy price for it.

Both Washington and Tokyo have goaded Beijing for years over Taiwan, regularly challenging the One China policy, whether by dispatching high-level diplomatic missions, sending naval warships through the Taiwan Strait, or backing pro-independence sentiment on the island. Beijing is extremely sensitive to the issue, fully conscious that if Taiwan were to declare independence, it would set a precedent for the future carve-up of Chinese territory while providing the imperialist powers with a military base against the mainland.

Countries around the world—including the US and Japan—have adhered to the One China policy for decades, acknowledging that Taiwan is a part of China. Doing so was the basis on which Washington established formal relations with Beijing in 1979 as it sought to exploit both cheap Chinese labour and tensions between Beijing and Moscow.

Last November, far-right Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi provocatively declared that an “emergency” on Taiwan would constitute a “survival-threatening situation” for Japan—the legal justification needed for

war against China in the name of supposed “self-defense.”

In the short term, the most likely scenario would be for Tokyo to host US nuclear weapons on Japanese soil. However, Tokyo has no intention of simply being Washington’s junior partner. Rather, allowing the US to openly base nuclear weapons in Japan would set a precedent for Tokyo to go further, establishing its own nuclear arsenal. Tokyo has a stockpile of at least 8,000 kilograms of weapons-grade plutonium, enough to make 1,600 nuclear weapons. Other estimates of Japan’s stockpiles are considerably higher.

With its own nuclear weapons, Japanese imperialism would be more capable of asserting its own economic and strategic interests, including at the expense of the US, as it seeks to re-establish itself as the primary power in the region.

Koizumi’s recent comments are meant to cover up Japan’s nuclear ambitions while stoking fears in the public over China to justify war. Since coming to power in October, Takaichi and other figures in her government have hinted at revising Japan’s “three non-nuclear principles,” which state Japan will not possess, produce, or allow nuclear weapons on its territory.

The three non-nuclear principles were first outlined in 1967, but are not legally binding and have been violated in the past. In 2024, Professor Emeritus Takashi Shinobu at Nihon University revealed documents showing that during negotiations between 1958 and 1960 to revise the US-Japan security treaty, Japan agreed to secretly allow US warships carrying nuclear weapons to dock at Japanese ports without consulting the Japanese government.

A 1969 memorandum declassified by the US in 2017 also showed that Tokyo agreed to allow Washington to bring nuclear weapons into Okinawa on a so-called “emergency basis” as a condition for the return of the province to Japan in 1972.

On July 6, Takaichi stated in response to a question on reviewing the “three non-nuclear principles” in the revision of three major military documents this year that she would “certainly bring all issues to the table for discussion.” In December, an unnamed government official also stated publicly that Japan needed nuclear weapons, according to public broadcaster NHK.

Japan plans to amend the three key military documents in question by the end of 2026, a year

earlier than initially planned. The three documents were revised in 2022 and outlined a plan to double military spending to two percent of GDP by 2027. The Takaichi government passed a supplementary budget that reached that target at the end of last year. Future spending could be even higher as the government cites pledges by NATO countries and South Korea to spend 3.5 percent as models to follow.

Calls for nuclear weapons in Japan are not new. Former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe declared in February 2022, for example, that Tokyo should follow in the footsteps of European countries and host US nuclear weapons. The cautious nature of these proposals, couched in the language of “having a discussion,” is the result of widespread opposition in the working class. In an April survey by the *Asahi Shimbun*, 75 percent of people opposed any alterations to Japan’s three non-nuclear policies. In May, large protests took place to denounce Japan’s military expansion.

Having been eclipsed by China as the world’s second largest economy, Japan is seeking to reverse its decline by all means including military. This requires not only dispensing with the ruling class’s phony adherence to “pacifism,” but also running roughshod over the democratic rights and interests of the working class as a whole.



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