Japan launches new intelligence agency

Ben McGrath
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Last Friday, Japan's far-right government of Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi launched its new National Intelligence Bureau (NIB), a body designed to centralize intelligence gathering across the country's various military and police agencies. This restructuring of Japan's intelligence operations is being undertaken as Tokyo remilitarizes as part of the US-led war preparations against China and to suppress domestic opposition to such a conflict.

The NIB is Japan's first centralized intelligence body since World War II. This new body will collect information from agencies, including the Foreign Affairs and Defense Ministries as well as the National Police Agency (NPA), supposedly to focus on terrorism, national emergencies, and counterintelligence nationwide.

The NIB will streamline intelligence sharing between these different agencies while independently setting the government's related agenda. The bureau was founded through the National Intelligence Council Establishment Act passed in May.

The revamping of intelligence gathering operations is a major component of Japan's remilitarization, which has sharply accelerated under Takaichi's far-right government—a coalition of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and its junior partner Nippon Ishin no Kai. Article 9 of the constitution banning Japan from fielding a military or waging war overseas has for all intents and purposes been turned into a dead letter.

The formation of the NIB is just one aspect of so-called "intelligence reform" with Chief Cabinet Secretary Minoru Kihara stating on Friday that this was the "first step." He added: "Strengthening the government's central intelligence coordination function will enable it to make sound decisions based on higher-quality, timely information amid today's complex and challenging international environment."

The NIB consists of approximately 730 staff members and replaces the Cabinet Intelligence and Research Office (CIRO). Its director, Kazuya Hara, previously headed the CIRO. Hara built his career in the NPA and served as an executive secretary to former prime minister Shinzo Abe. The NIB will be overseen by the new National Intelligence Council (NIC), headed by the prime minister and nine other cabinet-level officials.

The NIC will deliberate on a new national intelligence strategy as well as additional intelligence-related legislation, including an anti-espionage law. The new strategy document would be the first in Japan, with intelligence having previously been included under the National Security Strategy, one of Japan's primary military documents. The new strategy will further centralize information gathering and clarify the roles of new bodies dedicated to this purpose. This includes a foreign intelligence agency modeled on the US CIA slated to be established by early 2028.

All of this is being carried out under the basis that Tokyo lacks the intelligence tools to counter China and Russia. The establishment media has commentary and articles labeling Japan a "spy paradise," filled with lurid tales of Russian and Chinese "agents" collecting and stealing information and technology. This includes a major piece in the *New York Times* on July 12 used to paint Tokyo as insufficiently tough on spies, specifically from Russia.

In reality, Japan has long had one of the world's most extensive intelligence-gathering networks, built in the post-war period, with a focus on China, North Korea, and Russia. Tokyo operates widespread signal intelligence (SIGINT) gathering networks, collecting information transmitted by electronic means. Documents revealed by whistleblower Edward Snowden showed that Japan's Directorate for Signals Intelligence had been operating since the 1950s in close collaboration with the US's National Security Agency

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(NSA). The NSA has also trained Japanese spies and provided technology for mass internet surveillance, including the XKeyscore system.

The reorganization of Tokyo's intelligence operations is meant to expand military collaboration with its allies. Tokyo has already established trilateral intelligence agreements with the US and South Korea as well as the US and the Philippines in order to target China, as the countries carry out massive war games and the construction of a wide-ranging missile system on Beijing's doorstep.

The creation of the NIB was carried out in collaboration with the United States, Australia, and Germany. According to the *New York Times*, US officials have advised Tokyo on cyber-defense systems to counter so-called industrial espionage and scrutinize foreign investment. Australian officials have similarly advised Takaichi's government on technology while the head of Germany's Federal Intelligence Service recently visited Tokyo to discuss the NIB and closer collaboration between the two countries.

Tokyo has also sought closer cooperation with the top-level, US-led Five Eyes intelligence sharing alliance, which includes the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. However, there have been reservations over what the Five Eyes members consider an "information security gap," which has led to calls within and outside Japan for an anti-espionage law.

For the ruling class, free speech and association as well as other democratic rights must be done away with in the name of "national security" to prevent public knowledge of war planning and to criminalize opposition. These war plans include the extent to which Japan has played a central role in whipping up tensions with China in the Indo-Pacific alongside the US.

Tokyo and Washington have sharply exacerbated territorial disputes in the East and South China Seas for the past 15 years while all but openly promoting Taiwanese independence as a means of goading Beijing into war. Takaichi even stated last November that she would go to war with China over Taiwan, which Beijing views as a renegade province and its most significant diplomatic redline.

Additional legislation being prepared in Japan would force people supposedly acting as "foreign agents" to register with the government. A wiretapping law allowing broad, warrantless surveillance of the public is also under consideration.

Japan has attempted to pass such legislation in the past. A failed 1985 bill met with stiff resistance from the public after it included the death penalty as a possible punishment for spies. A 2013 bill that was successfully pushed through also met with opposition for criminalizing whistleblowers, investigative journalists, and anti-war activists.

Lawrence Repeta, a member of the Japan Civil Liberties Union, told the *South China Morning Post* in December that the 2013 law showed the LDP has a "track record of adopting legislation that expands government authority, but fails to protect and even threatens those who might call the government to account."

These measures are being undertaken in the face of the deepening crisis of capitalism. Japan and the US both hope to eliminate China as a major economic competitor. Tokyo at the same time is remilitarizing in order to once again independently assert its own imperialist interests through military means after three-and-a-half decades of economic stagnation.

Tokyo has removed restrictions on exporting lethal weaponry abroad, raised military spending to 2 percent of GDP while planning to increase it further, and deployed long-range missiles on its territory for the first time. Defense Minister Shinjiro Koizumi declared last month that Japan should begin discussions on acquiring nuclear weapons.

Conscious of the widespread anti-war sentiment throughout the working class, this agenda is being carried out under the phony guise of "collective self-defense," with successive governments in Tokyo whipping up an anti-China atmosphere. This can only take place through a massive assault on the democratic rights of the working class.

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