

Japan plans for massive military build-up aimed at China

By Ben McGrath
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The cabinet of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe approved new so-called National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG) on December 18 that will rapidly accelerate Tokyo's remilitarization, including the acquisition of offensive weaponry. The new 10-year policy explicitly targets China and North Korea, as well as Russia.

The document makes clear that Japan is preparing for war alongside the United States. It states that the US "remains the world's most powerful nation, but national rivalries are surfacing and we recognize the importance of the strategic competition with both China and Russia as they challenge the regional order."

The NDPG states, "Further strengthening relations with the US, which shares the same universal values and strategic interests with our country, has become more important than ever for our national security."

While this relationship is couched in terms of defense, Tokyo is calling for a vast expansion of its military. This is in violation of Article 9 of the constitution that bans Japan from possessing the ability to make war on other countries, a ban which has been in place since the end of World War II. The NDPG calls for the acquisition of obviously offensive weaponry such as aircraft carriers and cruise missiles. Until now, governments have maintained the charade that the Japanese military has a purely defensive character.

Japan intends to convert its Izumo-class helicopter carriers, which it claimed were defensive weapons, to carry and launch United States-made F-35 fighter jets. While the Defense Ministry admits that aircraft carriers are prohibited by the constitution, it claims that because the ships will not always carry fighters, that they continued to be "defensive" in nature.

Japan will purchase 147 F-35 fighter jets, including

42 of the F-35Bs for the aircraft carriers. Other jets will be stationed on islands in the East China Sea, around the uninhabited Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, that are claimed by both Tokyo and Beijing.

Japan intends to equip these jets with long-range cruise missiles, capable of hitting targets at a distance of 900 kilometers. These Joint Air to Surface Standoff Missiles (JASSM), would, in the words of their developer US-based Lockheed Martin, give Japan the ability to "destroy hostile air defenses and high value, well defended, fixed and relocatable targets while keeping aircraft safely out of range from hostile air defense systems." Japan will also pursue the development of hypersonic guided missiles that evade radar systems.

The new guidelines also place increased emphasis on cyber and outer space with the government seeking to develop the ability to obstruct the use of cyberspace if the country is supposedly under attack. A new unit will be created within the Air Self-Defense Force to continuously monitor space.

The cost of this military expansion will inevitably fall on the working class in the form of increased austerity measures. Over the next five years, Tokyo intends to spend approximately 27.47 trillion yen (\$248 billion), a record high and three trillion yen more than the period from 2014 to 2018. Part of this money will be spent on two land-based Aegis Ashore missile batteries from the US, as announced last year.

A major factor behind Japan's decision to purchase so much military hardware is the demand from US President Trump that allies spend more money on US weaponry or face trade tariffs. The result, in part, is to ensure these allies are prepared for war, namely with China.

The fact that Japan views China as one of its primary

targets also belies the apparent warming of ties earlier this year with Beijing. Tokyo has looked to improve relations with China as a means of heading off uncertainty in the face of tariff threats from Trump. However, Tokyo remains undeterred from its broader goal of using renewed military power to achieve its economic goals and boost its strategic position in Asia and internationally.

Japan's Defense Ministry also made this clear in its annual White Paper, released at the end of November, saying, "China's recent activities, including its rapid military modernization and enhancement of operational capabilities, its unilateral escalation of actions in areas around Japan, and with the lack of transparency in the military build-up, present a strong security concern for the region including Japan and the international community."

In reality, US imperialism with the aid of Japan has sought to maintain and strengthen its hegemony in the Asia-Pacific since the dissolution of the Soviet Union and to head-off economic challengers like China. This intensified under the Obama administration's "pivot to Asia," which included provocatively sailing warships near Chinese-claimed islands in the South China Sea.

Trump has stepped up these provocations, deepened military and political connections with Taiwan, which Beijing regards as part of its territory, and previously threatened to completely destroy North Korea, a Chinese ally.

Tokyo has acted in a similar fashion, in 2012 "nationalizing" three of the five Senkaku Islands, also claimed by China. Abe is pushing to revise the so-called pacifist constitution by 2020 and whitewashing the historical war crimes of Japanese imperialism in preparation for new conflicts. Tokyo also pushed through military legislation in 2015 to allow it to take part in wars abroad alongside an ally, namely the US.

The White Paper specifically cites this legislation as one method of deepening cooperation with the US, stating it will "enable SDF personnel to protect the weapons and other equipment of the units of the United States Forces and the armed forces of other foreign countries that are in cooperation with the SDF and are currently engaged in activities that contribute to the defense of Japan."

China along with both Koreas expressed concern

over the new guidelines. Beijing's Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Hua Chunying criticized Tokyo for "[making] irresponsible remarks about China's normal national defense construction and military activities." She pointed out that, "For historical reasons, Japan's movements in the military security field have greatly concerned its Asian neighbors and the international community."

North Korea denounced Japan as a "war criminal country, saying "Japan remains unchanged in its wild ambition for overseas aggression." South Korea's Foreign Ministry spokesman Noh Kyu-duk was more restrained, stating, "Japan's defense policy should contribute to peace and stability in the region under the spirit of its pacifist Constitution. This is the South Korean government's stance."

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