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US, Japan conduct large-scale military exercises in Hokkaido

The United States and Japan concluded two-week long, bilateral military drills on the Japanese island of Hokkaido on October 14. Called Resolute Dragon, it was conducted as part of Washington and Tokyo's acceleration of imperialist war plans, above all targeting China, but also directed against Russia.

The war exercises involved approximately 1,400 personnel from Japan's Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF), the formal name for the Japanese army, and 1,600 US Marines. The militaries fielded tilt-rotor MV-22 Ospreys and other military aircraft, Japan's Multiple Launch Rocket System and the US's High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS), and US anti-tank Javelin missiles.



Japanese Ground-Self Defense Force (JGDDF) Type 90 tanks maneuver through a course during an annual exercise at the Minami Eniwa Camp in Eniwa, Japan's northern island of Hokkaido Dec. 7, 2021. [AP Photo/Eugene Hoshiko]

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They were the largest bilateral drills involving US Marines on Japanese soil and took place after separate war games in the Sea of Japan involving the US and South Korea as well as trilateral drills with the US, South Korea, and Japan.

This is the second year in which the US and Japan have conducted what are slated to be annual joint Resolute Dragon exercises. These war games have been presented as preparations for defending remote islands from an attack. In reality, Washington and Tokyo are preparing for war with China, which involves plans for goading Beijing into a conflict over the island of Taiwan.

The US is systematically undermining the “One China” policy, to which Washington has adhered since ending formal diplomatic relations with Taipei in 1979 and recognizing Beijing de facto as the legitimate government of all China. Washington has conducted highly provocative diplomatic visits to the island, including that of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi in August. President Biden has repeatedly asserted that Washington would go to war with mainland China over Taiwan, effectively ending its policy of “strategic ambiguity,” aimed at preventing crisis and conflict across the Taiwan Strait.

The HIMARS and Javelin missiles tested on Hokkaido have also been supplied to Ukraine as part of the US-instigated war against Russia. Washington intends to use this weaponry to turn Taiwan into a “porcupine,” bristling with arms. With complete indifference to the fate of the Taiwanese working class, such a strategy is meant to turn the island into a warzone, bogging mainland China down in a protracted conflict.

In October 2020, the previous Trump administration in Washington approved the sale of eleven HIMARS to Taiwan, part of the total \$18 billion in US arms sales to the island during his term. At Washington’s direction, Taipei is now planning to increase this purchase to 29 HIMARS units as part of a record \$40 billion military budget for 2023.

The US Congress is also currently considering military legislation calling for spending \$10 billion over the next five years to further arm Taiwan. This would be in addition to the \$1.1 billion in arm sales the Biden administration approved in September. The legislation also calls for fast-tracking arm sales to the island, which could include some of the 25,000 Javelin missiles the bill would authorize the US Defense Department to purchase in 2023 and 2024.

In this context, an article published on October 14 by the Australian ABC News praising the Javelin missile reads like an advertisement for the weaponry. Lieutenant Colonel Felix Guerra, the head of the 3rd Marines battalion, which took part in the Resolute Dragon

exercises, told ABC News the firing of Javelin missiles in Japan was “rare,” but “a good symbol for our partners, our allies here, the Japanese, to see that it's a valuable asset.”

The ABC cited Professor James Brown, an expert on Russia-Japan relations at Temple University in Tokyo, who stated, “It’s (the Javelin missile) primarily an anti-tank weapon. The chances of Russia launching an invasion of Hokkaido are very minimal. The decision to use this [is] primarily symbolic rather than practical: reminding the Russian side just how potent the weapon has been in Ukraine.”

While Russia may not be about to invade Japan, the US and its NATO allies are recklessly prosecuting a war against Russia in Ukraine. The potential for US instigated provocations in the Russian Far East cannot be ruled out as Washington pursues a strategy of weakening, restabilizing and breaking up Russia.

The latest US National Security Strategy released this month identifies Russia and above all China as the chief threats to American global dominance.

The focus of the war games was the “interoperability and readiness” of US and Japanese forces, according to Major General Jay Barger, the commanding general of the 3rd Marine Division, who stated the exercises would “ensure we are prepared to rapidly respond to crisis throughout the Indo-Pacific.”

For Japan, this means dispensing with the restrictions imposed by Article 9 of its constitution, which expressly forbids Japan from waging war overseas. Tokyo, therefore, has seized on “Chinese aggression” to deepen its plans for remilitarization. This includes plans to double military spending over the next five years and plans to acquire first-strike capabilities in the form of cruise and ballistic missiles and the conversion of its huge naval “helicopter carriers” into fully fledged aircraft carriers, Japan’s first since World War II and capable of handling F-35B fight jets.

Tokyo is seeking to counter widespread anti-war sentiment by demonizing China, Russia and North Korea as menacing threats. Most recently it seized on Pyongyang’s launch of an intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM) over Japan to generate an atmosphere of fear in the country.

In an interview with the *Financial Times* published on October 12, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida stated, “We need to do a thorough examination of whether Japan’s defense capability is adequate or not.” As part of this, Tokyo plans to release a new national security strategy in December, the first in nearly a decade.

Kishida continued, “As the only Asian member of the Group of Seven, we are working with the G7 as well as many other countries to impose tough sanctions against Russia and

to continue support for Ukraine. I hope that such a response will send a proper message to east Asia, and especially to China.”

This “message” includes Tokyo’s further militarization of the East China Sea, building up forces on islands in the Ryukyu Island chain. This island chain stretches from the southern island of Kyushu to Yonaguni Island, just 110 kilometres east of Taiwan.

The US and its allies, including Japan, are recklessly turning the Indo-Pacific region into a powder keg that is leading to a war between nuclear armed powers.

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