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The imperialist powers prepare for World War III: US, Japan, Germany plan record military spending

Over the past week, the United States, Germany and Japan, three of the principal combatants in the last world war, moved to approve their largest military budgets since World War II, each marking a major escalation in their preparations for military conflict with Russia and China.

On Thursday, the US Senate voted overwhelmingly to approve an \$858 billion National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) that is \$45 billion larger than that requested by the White House, which was in turn larger than the request by the Pentagon.



Two US Air Force B-1B bombers, top center, South Korean Air Force F-35 fighter jets and US Air Force F-16 fighter jets, bottom left, fly over South Korea Peninsula during a joint air drill in South Korea, Saturday, Nov. 19, 2022. [AP Photo/South Korean Defense Ministry via AP]

The budget marks an eight percent increase over last year and a 30 percent increase in military spending over the 2016 Pentagon budget. The massive surge in military spending comes as the typical US household saw its real income fall by three percent in the past 12 months.

The overwhelming majority of the American population was not informed that the measure was being debated or voted on. Neither the passage of the record-setting budget through the House of Representatives or the Senate was reported on the evening network news.

The bill increases funding for every single military department and weapons program. The US Navy will get \$32 billion for new warships, including three Arleigh Burke-class destroyers and two Virginia-class submarines. And the Pentagon is authorized to purchase a further 36 F-35 aircraft, each costing approximately \$89 million.

Members of Congress did not even bother hiding the fact that the central purpose of the bill was to prepare for what they called “a future conflict with China” and the ongoing US-led proxy war against Russia.

“This year’s NDAA takes concrete steps towards preparing for a future conflict with China by investing in American hard power, strengthening American posture in the Indo-Pacific, and supporting our allies,” Wisconsin Republican Representative Mike Gallagher said.

The NDAA will upend Washington’s decades-old One China policy by providing \$10 billion in direct military funding to Taiwan for the first time. The bill will also institute no-bid contracting, typically used only in wartime, allowing defense contractors to charge the US government whatever they want.

The bill transforms Taiwan into a frontline proxy for conflict with China, in a manner similar to the way Ukraine is serving as a US proxy for war with Russia. In a press statement, Gallagher praised the fact that the bill “provides similar drawdown authority to arm Taiwan as we have Ukraine.”

On Friday, just one day later, the Japanese government unveiled a new national defense strategy that will double the country’s military budget and transform its military into an offensive fighting force. For the first time, Japan will procure long-range missiles capable of hitting China in an offensive strike.

The strategy openly defies Japan’s constitution, which declares that “land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be sustained.”

The Japanese population is overwhelmingly opposed to military rearmament, stemming from popular horror at both the crimes committed by Japanese imperialism throughout Asia and the devastating toll the war with the United States took on the Japanese population.

The Japanese imperial government oversaw the murder of millions of people through massacres, starvation and forced labor. In China alone, which was invaded by Japan, it is estimated that between 10 and 25 million civilians died in the war. During its war in the Pacific, the United States and its allies killed over one million Japanese civilians, including in the fire-bombing of Tokyo and the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

On Wednesday, the budget committee of the German parliament voted to approve the purchase of nuclear-capable F35 aircraft from the United States. While Germany does not have nuclear weapons of its own, as a member of NATO it participates in nuclear weapons sharing with the United States, and US nuclear weapons are stationed in Germany.

The purchase of the F-35 fighters is part of a \$100 billion spending package passed through the German parliament earlier this year, which more than doubles previous German military spending.

As in Japan, there is broad popular opposition in Germany to military rearmament as a result of the horrendous crimes of German imperialism in the Second World War. The Nazis murdered six million European Jews in the Holocaust and millions of other European civilians, laying waste to large portions of the continent. German imperialism is also responsible for the murder of as many as 19 million civilians in the Soviet Union against which it conducted a brutal “war of annihilation.”

Both the First and Second World Wars were preceded by years of military spending increases in a massive global arms race. During the Nuremberg tribunal, a key pillar of the case against the leaders of Nazi Germany was that they facilitated a years-long military build-up in preparation for waging aggressive war.

Now, too, both Germany and Japan are making preparations for wars that risk consequences for their populations as devastating as those of the Second World War.

In June, NATO published a strategy document declaring that the alliance, which includes Germany, must prepare for “high-intensity, multi-domain warfighting against nuclear-armed peer-competitors” including Russia and China.

The United States, Germany, Japan and other imperialist powers are preparing for a new imperialist world war. Their targets are Russia and China: two countries that, for many

decades, were excluded from direct exploitation by imperialism as a result of the Russian and Chinese revolutions. They remained outside the direct control of imperialism even after the Stalinist restoration of capitalism. But while the primary targets of the imperialist war drive are now Russia and China, the logic of inter-imperialist rivalries will inevitably lead to the reemergence of open and bitter conflicts among the temporary allies of today.

The war in Ukraine, instigated, provoked and prolonged by the United States, has become the catalyst for this new global redivision of the world. That war is only intensifying, with US officials now openly discussing Ukraine's stated goal of retaking Crimea – a move that threatens nuclear retaliation by Russia.

In an interview this week with the *Economist*, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky doubled down on his declaration that Ukraine's aim is to retake Crimea, which was annexed by Russia in 2014. Asked what "price would be too high" for Ukraine to advance "to the 1991 borders," Zelensky made clear that his aim was to fully retake the peninsula, no matter the cost.

Over 100,000 Ukrainians have already been killed or injured in the war with Russia. When asked, "But how many lives are you going to lose" to retake the peninsula, Zelensky refused to reply.

Indeed, none of the imperialist governments are able to honestly answer this question. Are the governments in Tokyo and Berlin willing to risk a repeat of the horrors of the Second World War? They never say so in public, but the answer is yes.

Stopping the war plans of the imperialist powers requires the political intervention of the working class and youth, organized on the basis of a socialist program. This was the perspective put forward at the December 10 online rally, "For a Mass Movement of Students and Youth to Stop the War in Ukraine!"

We urge our readers to study the speeches delivered at the rally, and to make the decision to contact and join the Socialist Equality parties and International Youth and Students for Social Equality.

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