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Japan plans to double military spending

The Japanese government last Friday announced a doubling of military spending and, for the first time, is openly acquiring offensive weapons, all of which is in breach of not only of the country's so-called pacifist constitution, but of the limits placed on its military for decades. The military build-up is explicitly directed against China and is part of the rapidly escalating, US-led confrontation with Beijing.



An MV-22 Osprey takes off during a Japan-US joint military drill in Gotemba, southwest of Tokyo, on March 15, 2022. [AP Photo/Eugene Hoshiko]

Article 9 of the Japanese constitution imposed by US occupation forces following World War II declares that “the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes.” To

accomplish that aim, it continues “land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be sustained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized.

Article 9 quickly became a dead letter as Washington came to regard Japan as a critical ally in the Cold War against the Soviet bloc including China. The US and Japan signed a military alliance in 1952 and, in the name of defence, Japan established air, sea and land military forces—under the thin disguise of Self-Defence Forces.

For decades, Japanese governments retained the fiction that its sizeable and well-armed military was purely for defensive purposes in a bid to ward off deep-seated popular hostility, particularly in the working class, to its war preparations. Military budgets have been limited to around 1 percent of GDP and the purchase of nakedly offensive weaponry has been largely avoided.

These limits have now been cast aside in documents released last week: a revised National Security Strategy (NSS), as well as the National Defense Strategy (NDS) and the Defense Buildup Program (DBP), both of which are based on the new NSS. It is the first time the NSS has been revised since the initial 2013 strategy.

Tokyo will increase its military spending between the 2023 and 2027 fiscal years to 43 trillion yen (\$US316 billion), a 56.5 percent increase over the previous five years. The annual defence budget is projected to increase from \$US40 billion this year to about \$80 billion in 2027. This will bring its military spending to 2 percent of GDP, in line with that of NATO countries.

Anticipating opposition, the government is attempting to dress up the acquisition of offensive weaponry as “counterstrike” capabilities necessary for “self-defense.” Their use will supposedly be limited to when an armed attack against Japan, or a foreign country in a close relationship with Tokyo, threatens Japan’s national survival. It is a meaningless caveat that could be subverted by a range of invented pretexts.

The Japanese military will acquire a range of weapons including cruise missiles like Lockheed Martin’s Tomahawk and Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile (JASSM). Tokyo is also planning to upgrade its own Type 12 guided missiles that can be fired from the surface, ships, or aircrafts to strike naval vessels, and to manufacture its own hypersonic guided missiles. It will also produce its own advanced fighter jets, being jointly developing with the United Kingdom and Italy, to complement its F-35 fighters being purchased from the US.

Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi told a press release that the military build-up would enable the “strengthening [of] the Japan-US Alliance.” To this end, two trillion yen will be

allocated to create space and cyber warfare units at the insistence of the US. The cyber warfare unit will be manned by up to 20,000 military personnel and, along with the expansion of military intelligence, is considered critical to the integration with the US military, which maintains some 50,000 personnel and large bases in Japan.

Japan also intends to dispatch standoff missile units to undisclosed locations throughout the country. Tokyo, however, has previously announced plans to militarize several islands within the Ryukyu Island chain in the East China Sea, including Amami, Miyako, Ishigaki, and Yonaguni Islands. Tokyo has deployed or intends to deploy missile and electronic warfare units to these islands in addition to constructing ammunition and fuel depots.

New military spending includes 15 trillion yen on expanding and upgrading ammunition and fuel depots in order to sustain prolonged military action. The Japanese military is acutely aware that the country is completely dependent on imports for oil and petroleum products and is therefore vulnerable to blockade.

The new National Security Strategy openly targets China, declaring that Beijing's activities in the region "present an unprecedented and the greatest strategic challenge" to the peace and security of Japan and international community, as well as to the international rules-based order. "Japan should respond with its comprehensive national power and in cooperation with its allies, like-minded countries and others," it stated.

The shift is significant. Japan has previously justified its remilitarization by claiming North Korea was a threat. However, retired Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) Admiral Tomohisa Takei told the media that China has been the main target for which Japan has been preparing "by using North Korea's threat as cover."

The claim that China is a "challenge" to the "international rules-based order" is the pretext that the US cites endlessly to justify its huge military build-up in Asia and military provocations against China in the South China Sea. US imperialism regards China as the chief threat to its global dominance and the post-World War II order in which it sets the international rules to meet its strategic and economic interests.

While the US has welcomed Japan's military expansion, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin criticized Japan on Friday, declaring, "Japan disregards the facts, deviates from the common understandings between China and Japan and its commitment to bilateral relations, and discredits China."

In justifying its military build-up, Japan has inflamed tensions over Taiwan, having previously claimed that whatever takes place on the island has a direct impact on Japan,

since Yonaguni Island lies just 110 kilometres to the east of Taiwan. Taking his cue from Washington, Prime Minister Kishida has regularly declared that “Ukraine today may be East Asia tomorrow.”

In reality, the greatest threat to peace in the Indo-Pacific region is the United States. Since the Obama administration’s “pivot to Asia,” Washington has deliberately intensified tensions with Beijing. Both the Trump and Biden governments have challenged the “One China” policy under which the US de facto recognizes Beijing as the legitimate government of all China including Taiwan.

Having goaded Vladimir Putin into an invasion of Ukraine in a bid to weaken and fragment Russia, the US is seeking to turn Taiwan into a military quagmire for China. The latest US military budget includes for the first time the provision of billions of dollars in military aid. In addition, the Biden administration is facilitating Taiwan’s purchase of advanced weaponry from the US and greater diplomatic ties with the island, knowing full well that China has warned it will respond forcefully to any formal declaration of independence by Taipei.

Ultimately, Japan’s military buildup, while currently part of the US-led preparations for war with China, is to ensure Tokyo’s ability to prosecute the interests of Japanese imperialism by force. For more than a decade, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party has been pushing for an end to the constitutional and legal restrictions on the country’s military including Article 7 of the current constitution.

The government’s propaganda campaign promoting the alleged threat posed by China is not only to justify its huge military budget that will inevitably mean severe cuts to the country’s limited social spending. It is also aimed at undermining the widespread opposition to constitutional change among working people who recall the brutal repression meted out by the wartime militarist regime in the 1930s and 1940s.

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