

Dangerous Crossroads: US-Japan Talks Escalate War Preparations against China

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The so-called “2 plus 2” meeting in Tokyo this week of US Secretary of State John Kerry and Defence Secretary Chuck Hagel with their Japanese counterparts marked a significant escalation of the US military build-up against China. The lengthy joint statement announced major deployments of hi-tech US weaponry to Japan and a green light for Japanese remilitarisation, within the framework of “a more robust alliance”. Thursday’s talks took place in the wake of the Obama administration’s decision to postpone an imminent military attack on Syria last month in the face of mass popular opposition, both in the United States and around the world. The “2 plus 2” meetings make clear that despite the postponement of war with Syria, Washington’s plans for military escalation are proceeding apace.

Washington’s decision to back down provoked consternation among US allies not only in the Middle East, but in Asia, where Obama’s “pivot” has encouraged Japan and other countries to adopt a more aggressive stance towards China.

Fears that American allies could be left out on a limb were underscored this week when Obama cancelled his high-profile trip to South East Asia amid the crisis in Washington generated by the government shutdown. While the Obama administration has repeatedly declared the “rebalancing” of US military forces to the Indo-Pacific region would be quarantined from austerity measures, such pledges are called into question by the political turmoil over the budget.

The “2 plus 2” meeting on Thursday sent the unmistakable message that the US is proceeding with its military build-up in Asia that includes stationing 60 percent of American naval and air force assets in the region by 2020. The American deployments announced in the joint statement are all directed at strengthening US-Japanese military against China. These include:

* The stationing of a second X-band early warning radar in Japan near Kyoto, as part of joint anti-ballistic missile systems. While nominally directed against North Korea’s primitive nuclear capabilities, these weapons are part of the Pentagon’s preparations for nuclear war against China and Russia.

* The basing of advanced P-8 surveillance and anti-submarine planes starting in December 2013 and long-range Global Hawk drones next year. The stepping up of US maritime surveillance in the East China and South China Seas, where the US “pivot” has exacerbated tense maritime disputes with China, including with Japan over the Senkaku/Diaoyu island, is particularly provocative.

* Two squadrons of MV-22 Osprey vertical take-off transport planes will enhance the capacity of the Japanese military to rapidly deploy troops in the event of a conflict over the Senkakus. The Pentagon also plans to deploy F-35B vertical take-off stealth fighters by 2017—again for the first time outside the US—boosting its ability to carry out its Air-Sea Battle strategy for a blitzkrieg against military targets inside China.

The Obama administration's "pivot to Asia", which began in mid-2009 and was openly announced in November 2011, has inflamed nationalism and militarism throughout the region. Nowhere is this more evident than in Japan, where the right-wing government of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, which took office last December, has boosted military spending, toughened its stance on the Senkakus, and taken steps to free the military from the constraints imposed by the Japanese constitution, which formally forbids external military aggression.

In the joint "2 by 2" statement, the US "welcomed" Japan's "intention to make more proactive contributions to addressing the challenges faced by the international community"; its decision to establish a National Security Council; its expanded military budget; its re-examination of the legal basis for "collective self-defence; and "regional contributions, including capacity building effects vis-à-vis South East Asian countries."

Abe is proceeding with his election pledge to build "a strong Japan" with "a strong military". His government is seeking to either circumvent or amend the constitution to allow for "collective self-defence"—that is, the ability of Japanese imperialism to wage war with the US including "pre-emptive" military strikes. Japan has already pledged to boost the coast guard in the Philippines—the former US colony and leading South East Asian partner in confronting China.

The "2 by 2" statement also laid out closer US-Japanese military collaboration in intelligence sharing, cyber warfare and "space-based maritime domain awareness"—that is, the use of spy satellites for surveillance of the Western Pacific. Japan and the US also reaffirmed their agreement on US military bases on Okinawa, which have provoked deep popular opposition. Tokyo has agreed to pay \$3.1 billion towards the relocation of 9,000 US Marines to Guam as part of the Pentagon's broader restructuring of US forces throughout the region, including to Australia and the Philippines.

This week's ministerial meeting was the first time that such high-level talks were held in Tokyo, rather than Washington, in recognition of Japan's "greater responsibilities". The Obama administration clearly regards the Abe government as a central partner in its efforts to contain and prepare for war against China. The planned revision of the "Guidelines for Japan-US Defence Cooperation" will formalise "robust" new military arrangements.

The escalation of US military deployments to East Asia and US encouragement of Japanese militarism as an adjunct to the Pentagon testify to the utter recklessness of US foreign policy. Staggered by an intractable capitalist crisis in the United States and worldwide, US imperialism is intensifying its pursuit of global hegemony through military intimidation and war.

Amid growing popular opposition to war, the tempo of US military aggression has accelerated since the outbreak of the global economic crisis in 2008, threatening an even greater conflagration. Having temporarily stepped back from an attack on Syria—a war that risked a confrontation with Iran, Russia and China—the US has stepped up its preparations

for just such a conflict.

In every country, the drive to war is being accompanied by the whipping up of poisonous nationalism and a relentless assault on the living standards of working people. The only social force able to prevent war is an independent movement of the international working class to abolish its root cause—global capitalism and its outmoded nation state system—and reorganise the world economy on socialist lines for the benefit of all humanity.

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