

Australian spies assist Japan's plans for intelligence agency

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In a front-page article on Saturday, the *Australian* revealed that the country's overseas spy agency, ASIS, has been assisting in the training of Japanese agents and the reestablishment of a centralised foreign intelligence apparatus in Japan akin to the CIA or Britain's MI6.

The re-establishment of a foreign intelligence agency is bound up with the revival of Japanese militarism, which is being encouraged by Washington as part of its "pivot to Asia" and military build-up against China. ASIS's involvement demonstrates just how closely Canberra is intertwined with US war plans, which rely heavily on its allies in Asia, especially Japan and Australia.

The Japanese government signalled last month that it intended to accelerate the creation of an overseas intelligence body. Seizing on the killing of two Japanese citizens by Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) militias, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe declared that it was vital "to strengthen the government's intelligence functions" to inform "the state's strategic decision-making."

Japan's notorious military intelligence agencies and internal secret police were dismantled following World War II under the US occupation. Intelligence operations continued, in collaboration with the CIA, through several agencies. Over the past two decades, however, the push for a centralised body has continued to mount. In 2006, a parliamentary committee report called for a new agency operating from Japanese embassies to collect foreign intelligence and another to perform centralised intelligence analysis.

The *Australian* explained: "Since 2008, members of Japan's national security community have been travelling to Australia to be trained by ASIS so that Japan can slowly build up its espionage capability." According to the newspaper, at least 20 Japanese agents

have been trained, including several at ASIS's highly secretive training centre on Swan Island in Victoria where exercises also involve elite Special Air Service (SAS) trainers.

The ASIS training has been critical to the Japanese intelligence apparatus which lacked foreign agents schooled in all dirty tricks and subterfuge of so-called spy craft. A WikiLeaks cable recorded a 2008 conversation in which Hideshi Mitani, the director of Japan's Cabinet Intelligence and Research Office, told Randall Fort, head of the US State Department's bureau of intelligence, that a "human intelligence collection capability" was a priority.

"The decision has been made to go very slowly with this process as the Japanese realise that they lack knowledge, experience, and assets/officers. A training process for new personnel will be started very soon," the US cable read. Undoubtedly, Japanese spies have received training from the CIA and other allied agencies.

The re-establishment of a foreign spy agency is deeply unpopular in Japan. During the 1930s and 1940s, military intelligence services were intimately involved Japan's wars and in suppressing opposition to the colonial occupation of Korea, China and other countries. The secret police in Japan ruthlessly cracked down on domestic opposition, especially from the working class, to the militarist regime in Tokyo.

The US think tank Stratfor noted that "persistent anti-militarist sentiments" remained a major obstacle to the establishment of a new spy agency. "The Japanese constitution famously contains an article, Article 9, that forbids the use of war to solve international conflicts. Though there is no intelligence equivalent to Article 9 forbidding a clandestine intelligence service, in the eyes of the public, intelligence and militarism are deeply

intertwined. Memories of World War II still run deep,” it commented.

The Abe government is remilitarising across the board. Since coming to office, Abe has increased military spending, established a National Security Council to centralise foreign policy and strategic affairs, “reinterpreted” Article 9 to allow Japan to participate in US wars, and is campaigning for an end to all constitutional restrictions on the military. While the training of Japanese spies has been taking place for years, moves to re-establish a centralised overseas intelligence service will also speed up.

Currently, Japanese intelligence activities are dispersed between various agencies: the Cabinet Intelligence Research Office, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Defence Intelligence Headquarters, the National Police Agency and the Public Security Intelligence Agency.

Abe’s ambition to forge a powerful spy agency is bound up with his determination to have the means to aggressively prosecute Japanese imperialism’s economic and strategic interests—whether or not they coincide with those of the US. A Japanese intelligence apparatus would reduce Tokyo’s current dependence on the CIA and other Western spy agencies that developed during the Cold War.

According to the *Australian*, “the proposal to train the [Japanese] spies was put by ASIS boss Nick Warner and approved by the previous Labor government.” As Australian governments, Labor and Coalition, have integrated more and more closely into the US “pivot to Asia,” the US has also encouraged closer military and strategic ties between its two closest allies.

During a visit to Tokyo last year, Coalition Prime Minister Tony Abbott held discussions on elevating “the bilateral security and defence relationship to a new level.” Abbott and Abe resolved to reach “a framework agreement” on cooperation on military science, technology and equipment. The deal was to pave the way for the possible multi-billion dollar purchase of Japanese Soryu submarines to replace the aging Australian submarine fleet.

Abbott foreshadowed even closer military cooperation. “We want to see more interoperability between our militaries, we want to see more exercises between our militaries, we want to see over time more significant intelligence co-operation,” he said.

Australian’s foreign editor Greg Sheridan thought to play down the significance of the newspaper’s revelation about ASIS’s training of Japanese spies. “It is good news that Japan is building a foreign intelligence agency and that the previous Labor government offered Australia’s assistance in training its personnel ... There is nothing sinister about this.”

The opposite is the case. It is one element in the far broader preparations of the US, Japan and Australia as well as other allies and strategic partners for a war with China that would have devastating consequences for the working class in Asia and internationally.

The author also recommends:

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