

Japan integrates itself into Washington's war preparations in the Philippines

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Japanese and Philippine government officials met in Manila on December 3 to discuss arrangements for the basing of Japanese forces in the Philippines and to prepare for an upcoming trilateral maritime defence meeting to be held with the United States in Tokyo later this month. All of the discussions and preparations treat China as a hostile party and are in preparation for war.

Washington is constructing a network of alliances and military arrangements for war with China over Taiwan. On the frontlines of these arrangements are the Philippines and Japan. The bilateral negotiations in Manila are the product of Washington's machinations.

Earlier this year, the United States deployed medium-range missile systems to the northern Philippines with a range capable of targeting the entire coast of China and much of its interior, reaching as far as Beijing. In late November, US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin announced that the US had set up Task Force Ayungin in the Philippines, integrating US forces directly into Philippine maritime missions confronting China in the disputed South China Sea, including the deployment of US aerial and marine drones, piloted by American troops.

The same week as Austin's announcement, it was revealed that Washington and Tokyo were completing plans this month for the deployment by the US of a High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS) to the Ryukyu islands, with the explicit intention to use these against China in the event of a war over Taiwan. The Ryukyus stretch southwest from the main islands of Japan toward Taiwan. With missile systems deployed to the northern Philippines and southern Japan, Washington flanks both ends of Taiwan with the machines of war.

The war plans of Washington involve the return of

Japanese militarism to the Philippines, a country it occupied and ravaged during World War II. It was for this purpose that the meeting in Manila on Monday was convened. Representatives of Foreign Affairs, Defence and Coast Guard were present from both countries.

Japan announced that it would be supplying the Philippines with a coastal surveillance radar system under the auspices of the Official Security Assistance (OSA) framework. This radar system, in conjunction with US drones and other apparatuses of surveillance, will be used not only to monitor Chinese vessels but to coordinate confrontations with them. Japan also announced that it would be easing export controls on weaponry, and was planning the sale of armed Coast Guard vessels to the Philippines.

Like many such meetings before it, the meeting in Manila was presented to the press using certain watchwords: "interoperability," a "rules-based order" and "freedom of navigation." They are drawn from the phrasebook of US imperialism. Interoperability means integrated war preparations and the basing of troops; rules-based order and freedom of navigation mean an Asia-Pacific maritime region subordinate to the dictates of Washington.

Washington already bases its troops in the Philippines under the auspices of the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA). EDCA is an unconstitutional executive agreement concluded in 2014 between the defence departments of Manila and Washington. It was rubber stamped by a Supreme Court that had been disciplined by the executive branch with impeachment and corruption charges. EDCA circumvented the Philippine constitutional prohibition on the basing of foreign troops in the country except by treaty ratified by the Senate.

EDCA provides the legal architecture for the

implementation of a Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA) between Tokyo and Manila for the basing of Japanese forces in the country. The RAA was signed in July and is undergoing review in the Philippine Senate. Not only does the deal violate the Philippine constitution, it is at the same time a flagrant breach of the so-called “pacifist clause,” article nine of the post-war Japanese constitution, that bans the country from maintaining a military or waging war overseas.

Philippine Senate President Francis Escudero pledged that the RAA deal would be ratified by the end of 2024, or at the latest in time for the 2025 Balikatan war games, the massive joint military operations staged each year by Washington in the Philippines. Imee Marcos, head of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and sister of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., said that the committee was still trying to “iron out issues about jurisdiction and privileges to be extended to the Japanese visiting forces as well as civilian components.”

The deal, if it is approved as drafted, fully integrates Japan into the US EDCA apparatus of basing and war triggers. The possibility of armed conflict between the Philippines and China is very real, and the ties crafted with Washington and Tokyo mean that such a conflict could rapidly turn into a far wider war.

On Wednesday, yet another confrontation between Chinese and Philippine vessels erupted in the South China Sea, this time around the Scarborough Shoal. A Chinese Coast Guard vessel and a Philippine Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources vessel confronted each other on patrol. The Philippine media reported that the Chinese vessel “rammed” the Philippine ship and “attacked” it with water cannons. The reports featured images taken by surveillance drones conveniently deployed to capture the confrontation and supplied by the Philippine Coast Guard to the media. Within hours, the US Ambassador to the Philippines, MaryKay Carlson, had issued a statement denouncing China for its “unlawful” and “dangerous” activity.

In the Philippines, the media presents the return of the troops of the two former colonial powers—the United States and Japan—in the language of nationalism, as if these things were somehow about the “West Philippine Sea,” Philippine national sovereignty and the rights of poor Filipino fishermen. These are but the pretexts. Washington’s eyes are fixed above all on Taiwan and a

war with China that is increasingly imminent.

The Japanese occupation of the Philippines remains yet a living memory in the country. The oldest still remember a childhood under the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. Japanese troops raped comfort women, conducted forced death marches, organised concentration camps, starved Manila, policed and brutalised the population and staged mass executions. Fifty years earlier, a memory nearly eradicated by US propaganda, Washington conquered the Philippines in a colonial war that led to the death of over 200,000 Filipinos, conducted torture, turned villages into concentration camps, executed prisoners, and all in the name of “democracy.”

China has engaged in no war of conquest against the Philippines, has never taken an inch of its soil. Yet it is in preparation for war with China that US imperialism and Japanese militarism return to the scenes of their crimes.



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