

Japanese Communist Party: Indo-Pacific must be a region of ‘dialogue and cooperation, not rivalry’

Saturday 30 September 2023, by [FUENTES Federico](#), [KIMITOSHI Morihara](#) (Date first published: 4 September 2023).

Two Japanese F-35s fighter jets along with a contingent of 55 Japanese military personnel landed in Australia on August 26 as part of Japan’s first air force deployment to a country other than the United States since World War II. The visit was organised as part of the [Australia-Japan Reciprocal Access Agreement](#), which came into effect on August 13 and that, according to Australia’s defence ministry, seeks “greater defence cooperation” between the Australian Defence Force and Japan Self-Defense Forces. Australia will also for the first time deploy six of its own F-35A fighter jets to Japan, to participate in the Bushido Guardian 2023 joint air combat exercise in September.

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Japan’s F-35s deployment came just two days after the two countries participated alongside the US and the Philippines in a joint naval exercise in the South China Sea — the site of conflicting island and maritime claims involving China, Taiwan, the Philippines, Vietnam, Brunei and Malaysia. Disputes over the South China Sea have led to heightened tensions between neighbouring countries. Meanwhile, the US — with Australia’s support — continues to build up its military presence in the region.

LINKS International Journal of Socialist Renewal’s Federico Fuentes interviewed Japanese Communist Party (JCP) International Commission vice Chair Kimitoshi Morihara to discuss how the organisation is responding to rising US-China tensions and Japan’s shifting post-war security policy, along with its position on Ukraine, Taiwan and possible peace initiatives for the region.

In the past few weeks we have seen an important tightening of military cooperation between Japan and Australia. These moves come amid a significant strengthening of Japan’s military ties with the US and South Korea. What do you believe are the Japanese government’s motivations and intentions behind these actions?

The Japanese government made its views clear in the [National Security Strategy](#) paper released last December — a document that marks an important shift in Japan’s post-war security policy.

In this document, the Japanese government states that “China’s current external stance, military activities, and other activities have become a matter of serious concern for Japan and the international community, and present *an unprecedented and the greatest strategic challenge* in ensuring the peace and security of Japan and the peace and stability of the international community” (my emphasis). The document also refers to North Korea as an “*even more grave and imminent*

threat to Japan's national security than ever before" (my emphasis). Regarding Russia, the document says that its "external and military activities ... in the Indo-Pacific region ... together with its strategic coordination with China, are of *strong security concern*" (my emphasis).

Prime minister Fumio Kishida presented this document to US President Joe Biden in January. Following their meeting, they issued a [joint statement](#) committing the two leaders to "reinforcing cooperation on the development and effective employment of Japan's counterstrike and other capabilities". Biden also commended Japan's "bold leadership" at the meeting.

Until then, the Japanese government had always maintained that, in accordance with the 1960 [Japan-U.S. Security Treaty](#), Japan's Self-Defense Forces would only play the role of a "shield" while the US military would play the role of a "spear" in case of any potential conflict. With its *National Security Strategy* document, the Japanese government has declared that the US and Japan are now united as one single "spear".

The government's decision to carry out this dramatic shift in Japan's post-war security policy was done without first seeking public support through an election or explaining it in the Diet [parliament]. Instead, Kishida prioritised reporting it to the US and pledging his allegiance to the US. This attitude cannot be described as that of a government of a genuinely independent country. It is clear that Japan simply follows US hegemonism when it comes to its Indo-Pacific strategy because the government cannot come up with, or even begin to imagine, any non-military means to address the security situation in the region and, in particular, deter China.

Regarding South Korea, it is worth noting that the US-Japan-South Korea summit held on August 18 — the first trilateral meeting of its kind — issued a joint statement declaring that the three countries would bring "trilateral security cooperation to new heights" through enhanced cooperation in the fields of military and economic security. The statement also affirmed the extended deterrence commitment by the US to Japan and South Korea based on the threat of use of nuclear weapons.

The day after the summit, JCP Chair Shii Kazuo issued a statement noting: "This is a highly dangerous move, creating a new trilateral military-focused framework in line with US strategy, deepening the division in the Indo-Pacific region through bloc-building, and accelerating the vicious spiral of military-to-military confrontation in East Asia."

Shii also noted that "The Japanese and U.S. leaders at their bilateral meeting [during the summit] agreed on the joint development of an advanced interceptor missile to deal with hypersonic weapons. The JCP strongly opposes this move as it will drag Japan deep into the US military-led scheme of Integrated Air and Missile Defense, fuel a dangerous arms race, and heighten regional tensions." [See JCP statement on the Japan, US, and South Korea Summit below]

Should Japan obtain powerful long-range missiles to use as "deterrent forces" against China, Japan would become integrated into the US' Indo-Pacific "[integrated deterrence](#)" defence strategy.

In a January 12 [article](#) in *Foreign Affairs*, "To Make Japan Stronger, America Must Pull It Closer", Christopher Johnstone made this clear: "At least at first, and perhaps over the long term, Japan will need to rely on U.S. intelligence, targeting, and damage assessment capabilities to respond to an attack with strikes of its own. Japan does not possess those capabilities today. Any scenario in which it is launching long-range strikes against targets in North Korea or China — or even 'active defense' cyber-operations, which penetrate and disrupt an adversary's computer networks — would almost certainly coincide with military actions taken by the United States, underscoring the need for tight coordination based on a common understanding of the threat.

"Washington and Tokyo will need a dynamic ability to identify priority targets, determine who will mount the attacks and how, and assess the damage inflicted and whether further action is required. For the first time, the United States and Japan will need to be able to coordinate the use of force against targets outside Japan."

It is worth noting that Johnstone is Japan Chair at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and, until recently, was on the US National Security Council as Director for East Asia in the Biden administration. Johnstone continued: "Japan's alliance with the United States falls short of a true military partnership capable of mounting integrated operations at short notice. As Japan pursues its new vision, the two close allies need a new command and control architecture, far deeper levels of information-sharing, and expanded cooperation between their defense industries."

All this confirms that Japan remains a US client state — militarily, economically and politically — as it has been since the US occupation officially ended in 1952.

Growing tensions between the US and China in the region are of great concern. What, in the JCP's opinion, is behind US military strategy in the region? Conversely, how does the JCP view China's actions, both towards the US and its neighbours in the region?

The US's overall strategy is, bluntly speaking, to maintain its hegemony in the Indo-Pacific. This means denying China any sphere of influence in the region — economically, diplomatically and militarily. The US seeks to do this using different words, such as "defending the rules-based order", and trying to mobilise US-aligned democratic states against authoritarian regimes. But the so-called Global South has objected, noting that they have not been included in the rule-making process.

The JCP also criticises Chinese hegemonism. China is increasingly engaging in a dangerous course of Great Power chauvinism. First, China's reactionary position of rejecting calls for the abolition of nuclear weapons is of increasing concern. Second, China's hegemonic behaviour in the South and East China Seas has become more aggressive. Third, China has not taken any meaningful steps to rectify the arrogant behaviour it has displayed at international conferences by undermining democratic procedures, something that is in violation of the principles mutually agreed upon by the JCP and Chinese Communist Party. Fourth, human rights abuses have become increasingly grave, especially in Hong Kong and in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.

Although we criticise China, the JCP strongly opposes the Japanese government's military buildup under the pretext of the "China threat". Second, the JCP opposes attempts to inflame "anti-China" sentiments and the use of right-wing historical revisionism to beautify Japan's past wars of aggression. Third, as China is one of Japan's most important neighbours, our criticism is based on our sincere desire to establish true friendship between the governments and peoples of Japan and China. We believe that pointing out faults in a subdued and rational manner can help to build friendly relations between both countries. [See JCP statement on Japan-China relations below]

Much like Ukraine is the key flashpoint in the US-Russia conflict, Taiwan appears to be a key flashpoint in US-China tensions. What stance does the JCP take towards the conflict in Ukraine and tensions over Taiwan?

The JCP strongly condemns Russia's aggression against Ukraine. It is an obvious act of aggression that infringes on Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and is in violation of the United Nations Charter and international law. We demand an immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Russian military forces from Ukraine.

It must also be pointed out that behind the disastrous outcome of war was the failure of diplomacy,

which fell into the “force versus force” trap in which neither Russia nor NATO would or could back down. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) was created as an inclusive framework involving all European countries, Russia, the US and Canada. The OSCE was designated as “the main institution for the peaceful settlement of conflicts”, according to the [European Security Charter](#) adopted in 1999. However, this function was not used. Both NATO and Russia pursued a strategy of “detering” aggression through military force, leading to a “force versus force” situation.

The Taiwan issue is different from the conflict in Ukraine. In Crimea or the eastern part of Ukraine, some residents, mainly Russian speakers, desired to breakaway from Ukraine. Russia used this as a justification for its invasion. On the other hand, the Chinese government claims Taiwan as an integral part of China. Article 8 of the [Chinese Anti-secession Law](#), adopted in 2005, declares: “In the event of a serious incident that may result in the separation of Taiwan from China, or in the event that the possibility of peaceful reunification is completely lost, the State may take non-peaceful measures and other necessary measures to protect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the nation.” Both the US and Japan uphold a “One China” policy.

We believe that the freely expressed will of the people of Taiwan should be respected in resolving the Taiwan issue. Surveys by the [Election Study Center](#) at National Chengchi University indicate that more than 80% want the status quo to remain for now. The Taiwan issue is a matter of regional and global peace and stability. A peaceful resolution of the issue is the only attitude that should be adopted by the region and the countries concerned, including China. We oppose the use of force by China. At the same time, we oppose military involvement by the US or Japan on the basis that “Taiwan emergencies are Japanese emergencies”.

In light of all these tensions, what kind of initiatives does the JCP think could help foster a more peaceful and cooperative Asia-Pacific region?

The JCP proposed the following in its policy document, [Working with ASEAN countries to make East Asia a region of peace – The JCP’s ‘Diplomatic Vision’](#), which it put forward as part of its 2022 Upper House election campaign: “The Liberal Democratic Party government of Kishida and the Japan Innovation Party say things like, ‘Can [Article 9](#) [of Japan’s constitution, which renounces the use and threat of force as means to settle international disputes] protect peace?’ However, the role of politics is to use wisdom and strength in diplomacy to prevent war. The Kishida administration has failed to fulfil this role and has no diplomatic strategy, instead focusing on the military.

“Currently, ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations) is strengthening the East Asia Summit (EAS), which is made up of 10 ASEAN countries and eight other countries, including Japan, the United States and China, to make the region ‘a region of dialogue and cooperation, not rivalry’, in line with the principles of ‘peaceful resolution of disputes and renunciation of the use and threat of force’. The ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) was unveiled as a grand vision to create a region of dialogue and cooperation rather than competition, and to eventually create an East Asian-wide friendship and cooperation treaty. What Japan needs to do now is seriously promote the AOIP, placing the peaceful resolution of disputes at the forefront of its security policy and working hand-in-hand with the countries of ASEAN.

“The JCP’s ‘Diplomatic Vision’ is to create a mechanism for collective security on an East Asian scale. The most important significance of this is that it is not an exclusive framework that establishes an external virtual enemy like a military bloc does, but rather it is an inclusive framework that embraces all countries in the region — ‘a region of dialogue and cooperation, not rivalry’.

The JCP’s ‘Diplomatic Vision’ adds: “The LDP government and others are saying ‘look at Ukraine’

and raising calls for 'strengthening the US-Japan alliance', but they have not learned from the diplomatic failures that led to war in Europe. This is the wrong path and will only intensify military tensions in East Asia. The lesson to be drawn from Europe's failure is not to strengthen military alliances that fall into a 'force versus force' framework, but to create a framework for peace that is inclusive of all countries in the region. To that end, peaceful diplomacy that makes the most of Article 9 of the Constitution is required."

JCP Chair on the joint statement by Japan, US, and South Korea: JCP opposes move to create a new military framework

Japanese Communist Party Chair Shii Kazuo issued a statement on August 19 after the leaders of Japan, the United States and South Korea (ROK) published a joint statement following their summit meeting. The full text of Shii's statement titled "The JCP opposes the move to create a new military framework" is as follows:

The leaders of Japan, the United States, and South Korea after their summit meeting held in the US on August 18 issued a joint statement which declares that they will "enhance strategic coordination between the US-Japan and US-ROK alliances and bring our trilateral security cooperation to new heights" and expresses their intent to strengthen their deterrence capabilities through enhanced cooperation in the fields of military and economic security, for example by holding larger-scale trilateral military exercises on a regular basis. It also affirms the extended deterrence commitment by the US to Japan and South Korea based on the threat of use of nuclear weapons.

This is a highly dangerous move, creating a new trilateral military-focused framework in line with US strategy, deepening the division in the Indo-Pacific region through bloc-building and accelerating the vicious spiral of military-to-military confrontation in East Asia.

The JCP strongly opposes the move to create a military framework and deepen the division and confrontation in East Asia with the pretext that it is necessary to address challenges posed by North Korea's nuclear and missile developments and China's attempts to alter the status quo with force, even if these acts are, needless to say, unacceptable.

The Japanese and US leaders, at their bilateral meeting, agreed on the joint development of an advanced interceptor missile to deal with hypersonic weapons. The JCP strongly opposes this move as it will drag Japan deep into the US military-led scheme of Integrated Air and Missile Defense, fuel a dangerous arms race and heighten regional tensions.

The leaders of the three countries reaffirmed their support for ASEAN efforts and the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific. AOIP calls for an inclusive framework of peace involving all relevant countries in the region, which is contrary to the move to strengthen exclusion and bloc-building.

The need now is not to boost exclusion and bloc-building, but to promote a security framework that includes all countries in the region.

Proposals by the Japanese Communist Party for Japan-China relations

Japanese Communist Party Executive Committee Chair Shii Kazuo, March 30, 2023

Japan-China relations are one of the most important bilateral relationships for both countries, and cooperation for peace and friendship is not only in the interest of Japan, China and their people, but

also for the benefit of Asia and world peace and development. However, the various disputes, tensions and conflicts between Japan and China at present are a matter of deep concern.

How can we achieve positive breakthroughs in Japan-China relations?

The Japanese Communist Party focuses on the fact that there is a common foundation for peace and friendship between the governments of Japan and China in the following three areas and calls on both governments to make diplomatic efforts to make peace and friendship a reality by using this common foundation.

1. The first point is the “Joint Statement on Comprehensive Promotion of the ‘Strategic and Mutually Beneficial Relationship’” signed by Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda and President Hu Jintao during their Japan-China summit on May 7, 2008.

This Joint Statement confirms the following important agreements based on the Joint Communiqué of the Government of Japan and the Government of the People’s Republic of China, the Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Japan and China of 1978, and the Japan-China Joint Declaration of 1998: “The two sides recognized that they are partners who cooperate together and are not threats to each other.”

The agreement of “not [becoming] threats to each other,” confirmed in the Joint Statement of 2008, has been consistently reaffirmed in subsequent Japan-China summit meetings. Most recently, at the Japan-China summit meeting held during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit in November of last year, where this agreement was confirmed again. The fact that the agreement of “not [becoming] threats to each other” has been exchanged and consistently reaffirmed holds significant importance for positive breakthroughs in Japan-China relations.

2. The second is regarding the issue of the Senkaku Islands. At the “Discussions toward Improving Japan-China Relations” held on November 7, 2014, four points of agreement were confirmed, and the following agreement was included in the third point: “Both sides recognized that they had different views as to the emergence of tense situations in recent years in the waters of the East China Sea, including those around the Senkaku Islands, and shared the view that, through dialogue and consultation, they would prevent the deterioration of the situation, establish a crisis management mechanism and avert the rise of unforeseen circumstances.”

The Japanese Communist Party has stated its view that the legitimacy of Japan’s sovereignty over the Senkaku Islands is clear, both historically and under international law, and has presented detailed evidence to support this position. In addition, the Party advocates acknowledging the existence of the territorial dispute over the Senkaku Islands and resolving the issue through calm and rational diplomatic negotiations. The Party strongly opposes any attempt to change the status quo through the use of force, in accordance with international law.

The agreement reached by the two governments in 2014 regarding the tension in the waters of the Senkaku Islands and the East China Sea, in which both Japan and China “recognize that they have different views” and both sides recognize the existence of a dispute but confirm their commitment to resolving the issue through “dialogue and consultation” is a reasonable step in the right direction.

3. The third point is the common ground regarding multilateral peace frameworks that involve both Japan and China. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has proposed the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), which aims to develop the East Asia Summit (EAS), consisting of ASEAN’s 10 countries, Japan, China, the United States, South Korea, Russia, Australia, New Zealand and India, into a regional peace framework and eventually envisions a friendly cooperation treaty on

the East Asia scale.

The important thing is that all countries participating in the EAS, including both the Japanese and Chinese governments, have shown their support for the AOIP. Rather than excluding various countries, the direction proposed by ASEAN to develop an inclusive peace framework that encompasses all countries in the region is a source of great hope, as there is common ground between the two governments.

As mentioned earlier, there are three points of common ground between the Japanese and Chinese governments in terms of promoting peace and friendship. Therefore, it is the common responsibility of both governments to confirm this common ground and to make diplomatic efforts based on it to establish a solid relationship of peace and friendship.

In particular, it is strongly demanded that both Japan and China refrain from actions that contradict the agreement made in the 2008 Joint Statement, which emphasized that they should be “partners who cooperate together and are not threats to each other,” and make sincere efforts to fulfill and realize this agreement.

Regarding the issue of the Senkaku Islands, both Japan and China must exercise strict self-restraint, avoiding actions to escalate tensions and work to implement the agreement to resolve the disputes in the East China Sea, including the Senkaku Islands, through calm “dialogue and consultation”.

As for the multilateral framework for peace that Japan and China are involved in, the two governments should work together with ASEAN to focus on the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) as a common goal and engage in diplomacy to promote this direction.

The Japanese Communist Party emphasizes the above points and calls on both the Japanese and Chinese governments to work towards resolving the conflicts, tensions, and confrontations between the two countries and achieve a positive breakthrough in their bilateral relationship.

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