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Two Japanese F-35 fighter jets and a contingent of 55 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](#) that came into effect on August 13 and which, according to Australia's defence ministry, seeks "greater defence cooperation" between the Australian Defence Force and Japan Self-Defense Forces.

The deployment also came just two days after Australia and Japan participated alongside the US and the Philippines in a joint naval exercise in the South China Sea. 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 Indo-Pacific region.

Green Left's **Federico Fuentes** interviewed Japanese Communist Party (JCP) International Commission vice chair **Kimitoshi Morihara** regarding the peace and security initiatives the party is promoting to help counter growing militarisation in the region.

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Federico Fuentes (FF): 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. What do you believe is motivating the Japanese government's actions?

Kimitoshi Morihara (KM): 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”.

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.

The day after the the US-Japan-South Korea summit held on August 18 — the first trilateral meeting of its kind — JCP Chair Shii Kazuo issued a statement noting the summit’s outcomes were “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 added: “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.”

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.

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.

FF: 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?

KM: 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.

FF: 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?

KM: 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'](#):

“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, but rather an inclusive framework that embraces all countries in the region — ‘a region of dialogue and cooperation, not rivalry’...

“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.”

[A longer version of this interview can be read at links.org.au.]

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Featured image: Japanese Self Defence Forces are becoming more integrated with the United States’ Indo-Pacific military strategy. Photo: Wikimedia Commons CC By SA 4.0

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