



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on December 8, 2022

U.S., Australia Invite Japan to Increase Troop Rotations to Counter China

The United States and Australia announced on December 6 that they would invite Japanese troops to three-way rotations, pledging a show of unity against the growing Chinese military.

Australia's defense and foreign ministers agreed to increase the pace of military activities with the United States during discussions with their counterparts in Washington, after which they will fly to Tokyo.

"It's really important that we are doing this from the point of view of providing balance within our region and involving other countries within our region, and we look forward to being able to have more engagement with Japan," Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles remarked in a four-way news conference.

"We can go to Japan at the end of this week with an invitation for Japan to participate in more exercises with Australia and the US," he said, in the first such talks since Australia's Labor government took office six months ago.

U.S. Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin said the allies would seek Japanese involvement in joint operations in Australia, where the United States has been rotating Marines since 2011 through Darwin, the strategic northern city struck by imperial Japan in World War II.

Austin elaborated that the United States and Australia agreed to step up rotations of bomber task forces, fighter jets, and the U.S. Army and Navy.

"We agreed to enhance trilateral defense cooperation and to invite Japan to integrate into our force posture initiatives in Australia."

Japan, a treaty-bound ally of the United States, has made attempts to increase diplomatic cooperation with Australia in recent years. Yet defense ties have been more sensitive due to Tokyo's official pacifism since its defeat in World War II.

However, Japan has been involved in exercises such as three-way drills in May off Australia's north-east coast that included infantry live fire and tank integration.

With the rising assertiveness of China under President Xi Jinping, all three countries face a common source of concern.

"China's dangerous and coercive actions throughout the Indo-Pacific, including around Taiwan, toward the Pacific Island countries, and in the East and South China Seas, threaten regional peace and



U.S. Army
Japanese infantry



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stability,” Austin said.

Australia made a three-way security pact with the United States and Britain to obtain nuclear-powered submarines to counter China. Australia’s move rankled France, whose planned sale of conventional submarines to Australia was scrapped.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken told the Australians that the United States was committed to “delivering on that promise at the earliest possible time.”

The defense arrangements come in spite of a comparative thaw in Sino-U.S. tensions, with Blinken planning early next year to pay the first visit by a top U.S. diplomat to Beijing in more than four years.

Blinken’s trip comes after U.S. President Joe Biden met China’s Xi in Bali in November of this year. Both Xi and Biden vowed to discuss their major differences.

Key among the points of contention between the United States and China is Taiwan, the self-ruling island nation claimed by China. China responded in a bellicose manner when U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan in August this year.

A bipartisan group of Australian lawmakers also visited Taiwan, ignoring warnings from Beijing.

Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong said in Washington that there should be “no unilateral change to the status quo” over Taiwan and that Canberra valued “our longstanding unofficial relationship with Taiwan.”

The United States, Japan, and Australia have collaborated in recent years through the so-called Quad with India, which has been more uncertain than the other three about forming a group to counter China.

Earlier this week, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida ordered a steep defense-spending increase that could see his historically pacifist country’s defense budget rise to near the levels spent by Russia.

Kishida told ministers to assemble a budget of around ¥43 trillion (US\$315 billion) for the five-year period beginning in April, according to Defense Minister Yasukazu Hamada.

Such a figure is up 57 percent on the ¥27 trillion (US\$198 billion) initially budgeted for the current five-year period.

The modification of military policy for Japan, which has retained a U.S.-drafted pacifist constitution since its defeat in World War II, comes after the country was rattled by the Ukraine-Russia conflict.

Moreover, China’s pugilism toward Taiwan and North Korea’s provocative missile tests have prompted Tokyo to push for one of its greatest military expansions in decades.

A poll conducted by the Yomiuri newspaper over the weekend found that 51 percent of respondents were in favor of a military spending hike to more than ¥40 trillion, while 42 percent were opposed.

The money would be used to procure items such as missiles that can target military assets in neighboring Russia, China, and North Korea.

Another government aim over the next decade would be to triple the number of military units with ballistic-missile interceptors in a southwestern island chain in the direction of Taiwan, according to a draft of a government document as well as reports from Kyodo News.

In response, China criticized Japan’s move toward more military spending.



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“Japan has been sensationalizing regional tensions in an attempt to seek a military breakthrough,” Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said at a regular news briefing in Beijing on Tuesday.

“This is highly dangerous. It cannot but put Asian neighbors and the international community on high alert about Japan’s commitment to an exclusively defensive policy and to peaceful development,” she said.

Kishida’s increase could mean Japan surpasses countries such as Saudi Arabia and France to become the world’s fifth-largest defense spender, according to 2021 figures from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

Nonetheless, the value of the yen against the dollar dropped in recent months.

Ministries and ruling Liberal Democratic Party politicians have disputed over the extent of the military spending increase, which will place more pressure on the finances of a country with an aging population.

The premier requested a detailed plan by the end of the year to fund the increase, including spending reforms and use of non-tax revenues as well as taxes, Hamada revealed. Finance Minister Shunichi Suzuki told reporters that adjustments would be necessary to guarantee sufficient funds for the five-year period.



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