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Japanese and Taiwanese ruling parties hold talks aimed at Beijing

Representatives from the ruling parties of Japan and Taiwan held highly provocative bilateral talks on Friday for the first time. The purpose of the online meeting was to further integrate Taiwan into Tokyo's, and by extension Washington's, war plans against Beijing and will only further escalate tensions in the region.

Masahisa Sato and Taku Otsuka in charge of foreign affairs and defense issues respectively for Japan's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) took part with Lo Chih-cheng and Tsai Shih-ying, who both hold leading positions for the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) on the foreign affairs and defense committees of Taiwan's Legislative Yuan.

The discussion was aimed squarely at Beijing. In highly inflammatory remarks afterward, both sides referred to Taiwan as a country, thus calling into question the "One China" policy, which recognizes Taiwan as part of China. In establishing diplomatic relations with Beijing and not Taipei, Washington and Tokyo both tacitly accepted the former as the legitimate government of all China including Taiwan.



A maritime engagement in the East China Sea on Aug. 25, 2021 involving the passage of a U.S. Navy warship and Coast Guard cutter through the waters between China and Taiwan.(U.S. Coast Guard via AP)

Lo bluntly stated, “Taiwan, as a sovereign and independent country, has the right to promote bilateral and multilateral ties with all countries.” Such remarks risk the outbreak of war. Beijing has repeatedly stated that it will use military force to reunite with Taiwan if the island ever declares formal independence. Beijing rightly fears that Taiwan will be turned into a military base aimed at the mainland if Taiwan is able to formally align with the United States.

Beginning under President Trump and continued by Biden, Washington has pushed for high-level contacts with officials in Taipei in order to pressure Beijing while encouraging Tokyo to do the same. Lo acknowledged this, saying, “From a certain perspective, today’s talks represent the efforts of both governments to raise relations.”

The talks were no ordinary meeting, as the Taiwanese representatives explained to the *Financial Times* beforehand. “Given that all four participants are members of parliament, it is a bit like a track one dialogue. Although we will be attending in our capacity as party officials, we all have direct influence on policy.”

While the exact details were not made known, Tsai confirmed that the two sides had discussed military measures, including possible cooperation between the Japanese and Taiwanese coast guards. Other key issues included plans by the Taiwan Semiconductor

Manufacturing Company to invest in Japan. Taiwan is a major exporter of semiconductors which are considered vital economically and militarily.

Lo also hinted at possible future trilateral collaboration with the United States, but only vaguely mentioned “Japan, Taiwan, and a third place” without elaborating.

China denounced the talks on Friday. During a press briefing, Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian stated, “Taiwan is an inalienable part of China’s territory. China firmly opposes all forms of official interactions between Taiwan and countries having diplomatic ties with China.” He urged Tokyo to be “prudent with its words and actions,” adding that Beijing had lodged “solemn representations” with Japan regarding the talks.

Justifying the talks, Tokyo claimed that whatever happens on Taiwan has a direct influence on Japan, which opens the door for Japanese military intervention. In February, Sato announced the creation of a “Taiwan project team” to explore deeper relations with Taipei and called for a law similar to that of Washington’s 1979 Taiwan Relations Act, under which the US does not recognize Taipei but provides military support. As such, the initiative for Friday’s talks came from Japan.

Tokyo has increasingly called into question the “One China” policy this year, both unilaterally and in diplomatic statements. Notably, Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga and President Biden directly referenced Taiwan in a joint statement while meeting in April, the first time leaders from the two countries had done so since 1969.

Japanese imperialism is deeply connected to Taiwan, having brutally ruled the island from 1895 to 1945. Furthermore, Taipei has covered up this history as it aligns with imperialism and the war plans against the mainland.

For more than three decades, Taiwan has pursued a policy of rejecting its shared history with the rest of China and promoting a separate Taiwanese history that includes emphasizing the supposed benefits of Japanese rule. While driving a wedge between Taiwanese workers and youth and their counterparts on the Chinese mainland, Taipei has hoped to undermine Beijing diplomatically by winning support from Tokyo.

This began under President Lee Teng-hui, who held office from 1988 to 2000, as the decades-long period of martial law, known as the White Terror, was coming to an end.

This was not a coincidence, but a shift away from the use of force and terror to a different means of controlling the population and instilling anti-mainland sentiment.

Lee, who died in 2020, came from a family of Japanese collaborators, with his father serving with the Japanese police. Lee openly denied or downplayed atrocities committed by Japanese imperialism before and during World War II, such as the Nanjing massacre and the exploitation of so-called comfort women. While a member of the Kuomintang (KMT) until 2001 when he nominally became an independent, Lee's policies were embraced and continued by the DPP.

The claim that Japanese imperialism was beneficial, or at least not as bad as conditions in mainland China today, flies in the face of reality. Japan initially ripped Taiwan away from China after more than two hundred years of Chinese rule, following the First Sino-Japanese War in 1895. Japan then engaged in a bloody five-month suppression campaign against those opposed to colonization, killing approximately 14,000 people, with minimal losses for the Japanese army.

To justify its rule, Tokyo promoted the pseudo-scientific claim that the Taiwanese were biologically different from the Japanese and therefore inferior. It cultivated a layer of collaborators to assist in the repression of the Taiwanese working class and peasantry while forcing people to adopt Japanese names, language and culture in order to prepare them for war. Japan forcibly conscripted Taiwanese workers en masse for slave labor and coerced approximately 2,000 women, many of them minors, into becoming comfort women, a euphuism for sex slaves.

The growing relationship between Taipei and Tokyo today is not aimed at the promotion of democracy as the two sides claim. While the Taiwanese bourgeoisie seeks to enrich itself by joining with the world's two largest imperialist powers, Tokyo and Washington intend to subjugate China to their own predatory interests and offset their own relative economic declines, even at the risk of a catastrophic war.

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