

German-Japanese Military Cooperation Does Little to Deter China at Sea

By [Ahmed Adel](#)

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On March 18, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz visited Tokyo and promised Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida that their countries would strengthen military cooperation, even by sending German ships and planes to the Pacific region. Then, only three days later – and a day after Chinese leader Xi Jinping met with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin in Moscow – Kishida made a surprise trip to Kiev and met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. Kishida even visited the town of Bucha, the site of an [infamous fake news campaign](#) of alleged Russian war crimes.

The visit of the Japanese prime minister to the Ukrainian capital was undoubtedly timed to be immediately after the visit of Scholz to Tokyo and to nearly coincide with the Xi-Putin meeting, a clear expression that Japan is now fully behind the Western bloc in opposing Russia and China.

In a joint statement, Germany and Japan said that they will work on establishing “a legal framework for bilateral defence and security cooperation activities,” including on ways to protect critical infrastructures, trade routes and to secure future supply of sustainable energy.

For his part, Kishida said that the agreement with Germany was to “counter economic coercion, state-led attempts to illegally acquire technology and non-market practices,” an obvious reference to China.

With Japan embroiled in several disputes with China, and Germany pursuing a policy of aggression against Russia, it is rather surprising that they are teaming up to expand their hostile efforts considering their limited capabilities for global power projection, especially when compared to Russia and China.

None-the-less, First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Emine Dzheppa, said the

country was “happy to welcome” the Japanese premier in a way as if his visit was a gamechanger.

“This historic visit is a sign of solidarity and strong cooperation between Ukraine and Japan,” she tweeted. “We are grateful to Japan for its strong support and contribution to our future victory.”

This is obviously just another opportunity for a photoshoot. Japan has increasingly become hostile against Russia and China, and by Kishida visiting Kiev to take his photo alongside Zelensky, he is signalling to the West that Japan is prepared to do its part for Ukraine if they will do their part against China.

Tokyo’s decision will please the US, however, it is Germany’s reaction that is most telling. Although Kishida’s visit to Kiev was certainly a surprise to the unsuspecting public, undoubtedly Scholz would have been notified about the impending trip, perhaps from even before he arrived in Tokyo.

None-the-less, despite Germany and Japan having seemingly revived their World War II era alliance, it will do very little to deter China from defending its interests in the East and South China Seas or Russia from its military operation in Ukraine. This is for the simple fact that they, even in alliance, do not have the capability to challenge either country, let alone if Russia and China were in military alliance.

Although Japan is rapidly militarising, it is incalculably behind the Russian and Chinese militaries. The German military is in an even more pathetic state. Germany once had a very powerful military that was capable of instigating two world wars, but today [the Bundeswehr](#) only has 264,400 personnel, including 183,200 soldiers and 81,200 civil servants.

For comparison, even in 1989 the Bundeswehr numbered 486,000 personnel. After the reunification of the country in 1990, the great disarmament began.

Today, the German military has been exposed for having a severe lack of combat readiness, in terms of personnel numbers and the condition of military equipment. Germany not only faces serious problems in ensuring the combat effectiveness of its army, but also in the production of new military equipment and weapons. Although additional funds have been allocated for this, German experts still doubt that this will help.

Following the Russian intervention in the Ukraine conflict, the Bundeswehr made [serious efforts](#) to support the Ukrainian military. From January 2022 to March 13, 2023, arms, ammunition, and military equipment worth 2.7 billion euros were delivered to Ukraine. In addition, the Bundeswehr was forced to reinforce weaker NATO allies directly bordering Russia. About 1,000 German soldiers were sent to Lithuania and formed a fighting group with Lithuanian and Polish troops.

Yet, despite the pathetic condition of the German military, Scholz has promised to send forces to help Japan confront China. Although the statement is bold, it does raise the question on how many ships, soldiers, tanks and planes the Bundeswehr can send to the Pacific several thousands of kilometres away when a war is waging just a little more than a thousand kilometres away in Eastern Europe.

Sending such a force could signify a German presence in the region. But to say that a

thousand or so German soldiers could possibly make a difference against the People's Liberation Army of China is ludicrous, even if alongside Japan and the US. In this way, although the German-Japanese alliance is not a credible threat to Russia and China, it is an expression of intention that they will collectively pressure and provoke the two countries.

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Ahmed Adel is a Cairo-based geopolitics and political economy researcher.

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