U.S. Intends to Reconstitute U.S. Forces Japan as Joint Forces Headquarters



Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III and Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken conduct a press briefing with Japanese Defense Minister Minoru Kihara and Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa after the U.S.-Japan Security Consultative Committee meeting in Tokyo, July 28, 2024. (Photo by: Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Alexander Kubitza)
From C. Todd Lopez, DOD News, 29 July 2024

Through a phased approach, the U.S. plans to convert U.S. Forces Japan into a joint force headquarters which will report to the commander of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, the U.S. secretary of defense said today following the conclusion of a two-plus-two ministerial meeting in Tokyo.

Included in the meeting were Secretary of Defense Lloyd J.

Austin III, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Japan's Minister for Foreign Affairs Yoko Kamikawa and Japan's Minister of Defense Minoru Kihara.

"We welcome an historic decision to modernize our alliance command and control to better meet the challenges of today and tomorrow," said Austin during a press briefing today that followed the high-level meetings. "The United States will upgrade the U.S. Forces Japan to a joint force headquarters with expanded missions and operational responsibilities."

The new joint force headquarters will be commanded by a three-star officer and will serve as a counterpart to Japan's own Japan Self-Defense Forces Joint Operations Command, Austin said.

"This will be the most significant change to U.S. Forces Japan since its creation, and one of the strongest, improvements in our military ties with Japan in 70 years," he said. "Japan's new Joint Operations Command will further allow our forces to work together more closely than ever. And these new operational capabilities and responsibilities will advance our collective deterrence."

Austin said the change is based on a desire to work more closely with Japan and enhance the effectiveness of the existing relationship.

Also part of the discussions, Austin said, were ways to increase bilateral presence in Japan's Southwest Islands; a reaffirmation of the importance of cooperation on cybersecurity, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, cross-domain operations and bilateral exercises and training; and ideas for new areas for defense industrial cooperation.

According to a joint statement by the Security Consultative Committee, meeting participants discussed co-production opportunities to expand production capacity of both Advanced Medium-Range Air-to-Air Missiles and Patriot Advanced

Capability-3 Missile Segment Enhancement missiles.

“Finally, we held a separate two-plus-two ministerial level meeting on extended deterrence, and that has never been done before,” Austin said. “During that meeting, I reaffirmed our ironclad commitment to defend Japan with the full range of our capabilities, including our nuclear capabilities.”

As part of the extended deterrence meeting, participants discussed, among other things, North Korea’s destabilizing activities in the region, including its unlawful nuclear and ballistic missile programs; China’s expansion of its nuclear arsenal; and Russia’s unlawful arms transfers with North Korea.

Austin said he considered both meetings in Tokyo to be a success.

“We are reinforcing our combined ability to deter and respond to coercive behavior in the Indo-Pacific and beyond,” he said. “We’re reinforcing the rules-based international order that keeps us all safe. And the agreements that we’ve advanced today will ensure that the U.S.-Japan alliance remains a cornerstone of security and stability in the Indo-Pacific.”