

Re-Shaping Japanese Defence

Japan's refreshed Security and Military strategies

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Overview

On 16th December, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's cabinet approved three new documents that will re-shape the country's military strategy, and will mark a major turning point for Japan's post-war defence orientated policy. These are the *National Security Strategy* (NSS), the *National Defence Strategy* (NDS), and the *Defense Program Buildup* (DPB).^{1,2,3} The documents, which were approved at the same time for the first time, will shape Japan's overall strategy, its defence policy, and its defence acquisition goals.²

National Security Strategy

The *National Security Strategy* is the leading document of the three, and will set the framework for Japan's future thinking about national security.^{1,2} It provides the highest-level strategic guidance for diplomacy, defence, economic security, technology, cyber, and intelligence over the next ten years.²

This is the first time the document has been revised since its introduction in December 2013, and it reveals a shift in Japan's view of its security environment, which it describes as 'the most severe and complex' since the Second World War.^{1,2,4} Nine years ago, the focus was on North Korea; China's actions were merely described as 'an issue of concern for the international community'.^{1,2} The threat from North Korea was still acknowledged, with Japan declaring that the regime's effort to bolster its nuclear and missile capabilities posed 'an even more grave and imminent threat to Japan's national security than ever before',⁴ the revised document designated China as the 'greatest strategic challenge' that it has ever faced.^{1,4,5} Despite this, Japan was reluctant to designate China as a 'threat' because the Japanese government believes that China must be viewed from multiple perspectives, and the various military, economic and diplomatic aspects must be considered.^{2,6}

The NSS also highlighted Japan's shift in attitude towards its allies and partners. The idea of 'like-minded' countries, which was referenced only once in 2013, has been conceptualised in this new document, and Japan has outlined a desire for further cooperation with allies and partners based on shared values.⁷ The NSS specifically names the US, Australia, India, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy and others as 'like-minded countries'.^{2,6,7} In this context, Japan, the UK and Italy are collaborating to build a sixth-generation fighter jet.^{7,8}

National Defence Strategy

The *National Defence Strategy*, previously known as the National Defence Programme Guidelines, lays out Japan's defence objectives over the next ten years, and how it will achieve them.^{1,2} The NDS listed seven key areas to "drastically strengthen Japan's defence capabilities".¹ Among these is the incorporation of stand-off military capabilities in the *Japanese Self-Defence Force* (JSDF) through the production of longer-range missiles.¹ Japan will also introduce Integrated Air and Missile Defence (IAMD) capabilities to defend against adversarial missile attacks, and will strengthen its unmanned asset defence capabilities and cross-domain operational capabilities in space, cyberspace, and electromagnetic domains.^{1,9} It will bolster its command and control and intelligence-related functions, its mobile deployment capabilities, and the sustainability and resiliency of the JSDF.^{1,9}

The potential acquisition of longer-range, stand-off counterstrike capabilities is a key proposal of the new documents, and has been a point of contention between the ruling *Liberal Democratic Party*

(LDP) and its junior coalition partner, Komeito, a historically pacifist party.¹⁰ Government officials have argued that missile strike capabilities in the region have improved in both qualitative and quantitative terms, which has forced Japan to enhance its missile defence capabilities.² However, if Japan continues to rely solely upon ballistic missile defences, it will become increasingly difficult to fully address missile threats with the existing missile defence network alone.^{2,11} Government officials have stressed that the counterstrike capability is within the scope of the Japanese constitution and international law, and will not change the concept of the exclusively defence orientated policy.² The NSS and NDS documents lay out three conditions for Tokyo's use of counter-strike missiles:^{1,2}

- When an armed attack against Japan or a foreign country that is in a close relationship with Tokyo threatens Japan's national survival
- If there are no other appropriate measures to remove the threat
- If the use of force is limited to a minimum necessity

There will be no change in Japan's prohibition on preemptive strikes, with Kishida underlining that this detailed system is implemented as a mechanism to ensure that Japan 'adheres to international law'.^{2,12}

Defense Buildup Program

The *Defence Buildup Programme* (DBP), formally known as the *Medium-Term Defence Programme*, outlines total defence expenditures and procurement volumes for major equipment for the next five to 10 years.^{1,2} The DBP will look to increase Japanese defence spending to \$315bn from 2023 to 2027; this augmentation is in line with the 2% target set by NATO in 2027, and in doing so it will become the third biggest military spender after the US and China (based on current budgets).^{1,2,5} Kishida had in fact previously instructed his defence and finance officials to boost defence spending to 2% of GDP by 2027 in November 2022; the first time that the long-sought defence spending target was referred to as a specific budget figure.^{13,14}

The increased defence spending will allow Japan to acquire stand-off missiles that can fulfill a counterstrike capability function and allow Japan to strike its adversaries in the region.^{1,2} The Ministry of Defence said it plans to spend ¥5trn to procure various stand-off missiles in the next five years.¹ These include:^{1,15}

- Up to 500 US-made Tomahawk cruise missiles, which the MoD has said will be deployed in 2026-27
- An extended-range version of the domestically developed Type 12 Surface-to-Ship Missile (SSM) as a stand-off missile, which will be operated by the army, navy, and air force in different variants
- A hypersonic cruise missile (HCM), which the MoD plans to deploy in the early 2030s, and will allocate ¥200bn for its development and ¥100bn for production

Other capabilities include interceptor missiles for ballistic missile defence, attack and reconnaissance drones, satellite communications equipment, F-35 fighters, helicopters, submarines, warships and heavy lift transport jets.¹⁶ The increase in Japan's budget will allow Tokyo to strengthen its capabilities in space, cyber, and other emerging domains, as well as improving the ability of the Japanese Self-Defence Force (JSDF) to withstand a prolonged conflict.¹

Reactions

Domestic

Japanese public opinion was divided on the issue of Japan acquiring the counterstrike capabilities.¹⁷ A poll published by *Kyodo News* in late November [2022] indicated that more than 60% of respondents backed Japan acquiring the capability.¹³ However, a more recent *Kyodo News* poll published in December [2022] found that 50.3% of respondents approved of the policy, while 42.6% were opposed.^{17,18} It further revealed that 61% believed the capability would stoke tensions with neighbouring countries.^{17,18} On the increase in defence spending, 39% said they were in favour of the move, while 53.6% said that they oppose it.^{17,18} 64.9% of respondents disapprove of a recently announced plan to raise taxes to finance the increase in defence spending.^{17,18}

International

Beyond Japan, the new policies will have the support of the Biden Administration. The US views Tokyo as a key partner in the Indo-Pacific region, and it will look to strengthen the JSDF's partnerships with regional allies, such as Australia, India, and South Korea.¹ The US Secretary of Defence welcomed the release of Japan's updated strategy documents, declaring that they support Japan's decision to acquire new counterstrike capabilities and to substantially increase its defence spending.¹⁹

South Korea, however, was wary about Japan acquiring counterstrike capabilities.³ South Korea's constitution defines the North Korean part of the peninsula as part of its own territory,²⁰ and an official from South Korea's foreign ministry was quoted as saying that any use of the strike capability against the North "definitely must have the consent and approval" of South Korea before hand.³

The reaction from North Korea and China has been much stronger. North Korea threatened to take "bold and decisive military steps" in response to the military buildup.²¹ While China responded by sending an aircraft carrier-led flotilla through a key strategic waterway near Okinawa Prefecture.²¹

What's Next?

On January 9th 2023, it was reported that Japan and the US are looking to release a joint document focussing on bilateral security cooperation after the summit meeting between Prime Minister Kishida and President Biden.²² According to Japanese officials, the document is expected to include the further deepening of the Japan-US alliance and the strengthening of cooperation to promote a 'free and open Indo-Pacific' initiative, based on the revision of Japan's key national security and defence documents.²²

References

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