



Japan Strengthens Defense Strategy: An Overview

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Introduction

In response to the growing regional threats, Japan unveiled its new National Security Strategy, National Defense Strategy, and Defense Buildup Program all in December 2022. While Japan has considered itself a pacifist nation since its Constitution's establishment in 1947, its adversaries' increasing military advancements and capabilities have prompted Japan to alter its defense and security strategies. In conjunction with its commitment to bolster its defense forces, Japan looks to increase its defense budget to 2% of the current GDP in 2027. Japan's projections suggest that defense spending will increase by a total of approximately 43 trillion yen, or about \$315 billion, over the next five (5) years. An increase of this magnitude, approximately 56% from Japan's current five (5)-year plan, would give Japan the world's third largest annual budget after the U.S. and China.^{1,2,3}

Military Advancements and Activity by Adversaries in the Indo-Pacific

Over the course of 2022, North Korea accelerated its ballistic and nuclear weapons program with a significant increase in missile tests. In 2022, North Korea launched at least 95 ballistic and other missiles, which was more than any year prior; although, the country's last nuclear test was in 2017. The tests are part of Pyongyang's escalation in response to international sanctions as well as tensions between South Korea. In late December 2022, North Korea fired three (3) more missiles within as many days with a weapons display after South Korea launched a solid-fueled rocket as part of its efforts to build a space-based surveillance capability to better monitor North Korea military activities.^{4,5}

China's economic rise has enabled a buildup of its People's Liberation Army (PLA). Beijing is determined to make China the primary military power in East Asia. In the South China Sea, Beijing will likely use its growing military presence to assert itself against other countries' interests in the region, including Japan. This allows China to assert control over contested areas. Throughout 2021 and 2022, China leveraged the PLA as a tool to support its national strategy and its regional and global ambitions. As a result, the PLA has adopted a more aggressive posture in the region.^{6,7,8}

Within the international community, Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine has been treated as a precursor, or a potential template of China's plans for Taiwan. Both China and Russia have sought to reunify with independent nations to which they assert a historical claim. It was widely believed that Russia would quickly annex Ukraine with little resistance. Instead, it has fought for over a year while Ukraine has been supported through both political backing and military aid by other Western countries and several members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Russia's decision to invade Ukraine and commitment to continue the war has led to its isolation on the world stage with many countries supporting Ukraine's resistance.

As Beijing escalates its moves for reunification with Taiwan, Japan has been forced to consider its next steps. If Taiwan were to be invaded, the islands at the far southwestern end of the Japanese archipelago may be threatened. China could restrict trade routes, increase pressure around the disputed Senkaku Islands, and become even more aggressive in the region. Tokyo has stated that it will not permit such an invasion in the first place. Its own December 2022 National Defense Strategy addresses China's actions and condemns Beijing's launch of nine (9) ballistic missiles in August 2022, five (5) of which landed within Japan's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). In response to Beijing's escalation, Japan intends to double defense spending by 2027 and turn some of its southwestern islands into defensive strongholds. The westernmost tip of the Nansei (Ryukyu) island chain is only 68 miles from Taiwan.^{9,10,11,12}

Background on Japan's Defense Policy

Since its Constitution was enacted in 1947, Japan has adhered to an exclusively defense-oriented policy that ensures its military remains in civilian control and will not threaten other countries. Furthermore, Japan has remained committed to observing the Three (3) Non-Nuclear Principles of not possessing, not producing, and not permitting the introduction of nuclear weapons. While remaining a "peace-loving county" for about 77 years, Japan also has upgraded its defense capabilities since FY1958. In October 1976, Japan clarified its defense capacities and offered guidelines for defense development in its first National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG). The NDPG in 1976 ultimately highlighted that Japan's defense capabilities would prevent destabilization in the region.^{10,13,14,15}

Changes in international activities over the past few decades have motivated Japanese authorities to develop additional NDPGs. Following the Cold War, Japan's defense missions increased to include various situations, such as domestic and international large-scale disaster responses and International Peace Cooperation Activities. In addition, the FY2011 NDPG indicated that Japan would transition from a "basic defense force concept" and enact more dynamic, proactive, and assertive defense policies. Building on the "dynamic defense force concept," in December 2013, Japan's National Security Council and the Cabinet approved the 2013 NDPG to address the increasingly severe security environment and develop more effective defense capabilities. Lastly, the 2018 NDPG proclaimed that Japan would build a "Multi-Domain Defense Force," which would look to execute cross-domain operations and conduct flexible and strategic activities in various environments.^{10,15,16}

As a result of military advancements and activities by adversaries in the Indo-Pacific, Japan looks to reinforce its defense capabilities by focusing on adversaries' capabilities, warfighting methods, and adapting new warfare strategies. According to Japan's recent National Defense Strategy, released in December 2022, Japan's defense objectives include shaping a security environment that does not tolerate unilateral changes to the status quo by force, deterring attempts that could impact Japan's peace and security by cooperating with the U.S. and other allies, and disrupting and defeating a potential invasion should deterrence fail. The National Defense Strategy indicates that Japan will strive to reach these objectives by strengthening its architecture for national defense, reinforcing the joint

deterrence and response capability of the Japan-U.S. Alliance, and upholding a free and open international order by bolstering collaboration with like-minded countries. While Japan looks to reach its defense objectives by 2027, its Defense Buildup Program (DBP) highlights that the nation also will make further efforts in about ten (10) years to be able to disrupt and defeat invasions earlier and at a further distance.^{10,17}

Present and Future Japanese Self Defense Force (JSDF) Capabilities

In 1954, the Japan Self Defense Force (JSDF) was established as a narrow self-defense operation, as Article Nine (9) of Japan's Constitution forbade the nation from developing a military or using force internationally. The JSDF is composed of the Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF), Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF), and Air Self-Defense Force (ASDF). Open-source research indicates that the GSDF includes armies, the Ground Central Command, and other units directly under the defense minister. In total, the GSDF has five (5) armies, nine (9) divisions, and six (6) brigades. In addition, the MSDF comprises the Self-Defense Fleet, five (5) district fleets, Air Training Command, the Training Squadron, and other units directly under the defense minister. Lastly, the ASDF, which has four (4) air defense forces, and nine (9) air wings, includes the Air Defense Command, Air Support Command, Air Training Command, Air Development and Test Command, and other units directly under the defense minister.^{18,19}

Japan's Defense Buildup Plan (DBP), which accompanies the December 2022 National Defense Strategy, indicates that the JSDF will establish a Permanent Joint Headquarters to engage in cross-domain operations more effectively. Furthermore, the JSDF looks to create a joint cyber defense unit to monitor defense networks and disrupt cyberattacks against Japan. Lastly, the JSDF seeks to develop a maritime transport unit to improve mobile deployment capabilities to the southwestern region. In order to optimize organizational capacity, the DBP states that approximately 2,000 GSDF personnel will be transferred to the joint unit incorporating the MSDF and ASDF.¹⁷

The 2022 National Defense Strategy highlights seven (7) functions and capabilities to defend Japan effectively. First, Japan seeks to protect its territory, which stretches approximately 3,000 km along both north-south and east-west axes, by reinforcing stand-off defense capabilities to address vessels and landing forces invading its borders and remote islands. By FY2027, Japan looks to enable the operation of stand-off missiles, including surface-launched and ship-launched models. Japan seeks to obtain these stand-off missiles overseas until domestic production increases. In about ten (10) years, Japan hopes to operate hyper velocity gliding missiles with irregular trajectories, hypersonic guided missiles, and other stand-off missiles. Furthermore, the nation will pursue integrated air and missile defense capabilities by reinforcing detecting, tracking, and intercepting capabilities. In five (5) years, Japan aspires to respond to small UAVs with weapons, strengthen warning and control radar, surface-to-air missiles, and procure Aegis System Equipped Vessels. In addition, JSDF plans to acquire unmanned assets in five (5) years, including Unmanned Underwater Vehicles (UUVs).¹⁰

The JSDF also aspires to conduct cross-domain operations and organically fuse capabilities in space, cyber, electromagnetic spectrum, land, sea, and airspace. By FY2027, Japan hopes to develop essential infrastructure for unit operations and enhance its Space Domain Awareness (SDA) capability. The nation also plans to bolster its cybersecurity posture to secure command and control capabilities and high-priority equipment systems. To strengthen command and control and intelligence-related functions, Japan looks to establish intelligence capabilities that could respond to hybrid and integrated information warfare while also developing the ability to gather near real-time information using assets such as satellite constellations. In the near future, the JSDF looks to utilize AI for information gathering and reinforce the capabilities of the Defense Intelligence Headquarters (DIH) based on functions including signal (SIGINT), imagery (IMINT), human (HUMINT), and open-source (OSINT) intelligence. Furthermore, in response to a potential invasion, Japan aspires to reinforce its transportation systems and carry out civil protection missions by using its strengthened mobile deployment capabilities for evacuating residents. Lastly, the National Defense Strategy indicates that the JSDF will resolve the ammunition and parts shortages through sustainability and resiliency measures. Japan indicates it will promote the construction of underground command headquarters, relocate and consolidate facilities, and strengthen the resilience of structures against natural disasters.¹⁰

Open-source research indicates that Japan's defense industry has been impacted by inefficiency and high costs. Reporting highlights that Japan has historically struggled in the international defense marketplace, even as domestic restrictions on defense exports loosened in 2014. Japan's DBP proposes measures to establish more effective procurement practices and make the defense business more stable and attractive to the private sector. In addition, the DBP emphasizes a need to reduce research and development (R&D) timelines to accelerate equipment innovation while lowering development and production costs by incorporating international standards for requirements. Furthermore, the DBP identifies benefits for Japan's industrial base through increased production of major defense items, such as lowered procurement costs.^{20,17}

Joint Deterrence Agreement Between U.S.

The Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan was signed in 1960, superseding an earlier 1951 agreement. The agreement outlined the rules and stipulations governing the presence of U.S. installations and personnel within Japan. It also requires the U.S. to defend Japan from attack, if necessary. The treaty was automatically renewed in 1970 and has stood ever since. While historically pacifist, in September 2015, Japan formally reinterpreted its constitution to allow for mutual defense of its allies in the region.

In January 2023, the U.S. and Japan announced plans to further increase military and security cooperation. The U.S. plans to evolve the 12th Marine Regiment into a smaller mobile unit called the 12th Marine Littoral Regiment, which will be designed to better defend its allies in the region. However, the overall number of Marines on Okinawa will remain approximately the same. Japan has also begun new construction on the uninhabited island of Mageshima for joint exercises, including those of F-35B stealth fighters, amphibious operations, and missile interception. The exercises are expected to begin in 2027. The shift in the countries' mutual defensive posture comes following a record number of missile tests by North Korea in 2022, recent tests in February 2023, and increased hostility by China against Taiwan.^{21,22}

The renewed commitment to cooperation comes amid recent developments in the decades-long effort to relocate Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Futenma from Ginowan on the southern part of Okinawa to Henoko on the east coast. There are three (3) active lawsuits to prevent projects on multiple grounds, with the most recent filed in October 2022. Such lawsuits range from administrative disputes to concerns about the environmental fallout from the relocated installation. The relocation currently has the support of the Japanese government, but residents of Okinawa have long been concerned about the secondary effects of the U.S. military presence, including noise, pollution, and crime. They fear that construction of a new installation will further embed the U.S. military presence on the island.²³

Outlook

Japan has acknowledged the increasingly hostile environment in the region with its December 2022 plans for its defense budget. This expansion includes cruise missiles and counterstrike capabilities. Recent actions by North Korea and China have compelled the U.S. and Japan to escalate defensive capabilities and renew their commitment to cooperation. As recently as 18 February 2023, North Korea fired a long-range missile from Pyongyang into Japan's EEZ, about 125 miles west of Oshima Island. Two (2) days later, on Monday, 20 February, North Korea launched two (2) more missiles that landed in the Sea of Japan off the coast of the Korean Peninsula. Japan reported no damage from the missiles. The U.S., Japan, and South Korea responded with a trilateral Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) drill in the Sea of Japan on 22 February 2023.^{24,25,26}

Per Article 9 of its constitution, Japan's official policy remains one of pacifism. However, its September 2015 reinterpretation allowed for military support to allies in the region. Japan has also sent non-lethal aid to Ukraine in the wake of Russia's invasion. These actions, coupled with the plans for its defense budget, indicate that Japan intends to take a more active role in both its own defense and that of its regional allies. This new posture could help mitigate the ongoing threat of its adversaries from both their respective militaries and their intelligence services.

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