



## Japan's New Defense Policy

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** Japan has stated that it will broaden its defense policy, a sign of growing concerns in Tokyo about the threat of North Korean and Chinese aggression. The change of policy also reflects the continued influence of the late Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who expanded Japan's definition of what constitutes acts of self defense.

Japan has declared that it will change its defense policy in the coming years. The new policy will include important modifications that will influence the ability of Japan's Self Defense Forces to protect the country from missiles, submarines, and other threats from states in the region and beyond. It will also upgrade Japan's deterrence against North Korea and China.

Japan restrained its defense policy for many years in keeping with Article 9 of the Japanese constitution. Any attempts to upgrade national defensive capabilities were met with harsh criticism from states in the region and from political forces within Japan that did not support any alteration to the country's pacifist defense policy.

Japanese defense policy changed incrementally over the past two decades, however, especially under the late Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Abe did not change the Japanese constitution; nor did he change Article 9 as he promised to do. But he began to expand the way the parameters of Japanese self-defense were defined, thereby allowing the country to develop its long-range capabilities (such as drop tanks, aerial refueling, and so on).

Abe also began to change the public attitude toward the idea of a Japanese attack on North Korean missile launchers, which pose a direct threat to Japan. By

legitimizing a preemptive attack of this kind as an act of self-defense, he extended the self-defense parameters beyond their earlier constraints.

Several factors led to this change in Japanese defense policy:

1. **The North Korean missile and nuclear threat**, which led Japan to feel defenseless despite the deployment of US forces on Japanese soil and the US-Japan security alliance. Washington, Beijing, Seoul, and even Tokyo all failed to deter Pyongyang from launching dozens of short-range missiles toward the Sea of Japan (East Sea) as well as middle-range missiles that flew above Japan.
2. **China's rising military and economic threat to Japan**, the potential conflict in the Taiwan Straits, and the potential threat to sea lanes in the region.
3. **The Russia-Ukraine war**, which is raising concerns in Tokyo that Russia might ultimately threaten Japan's security.
4. **The rise in Japanese support for a change in Japan's self-defense policy**, which, together with the failure to deter North Korea and China and the new potential Russian threat, have allowed conservative political forces in Japan to make such alterations.

Japan intends to double its defense budget in the next five years. For many years, it limited the budget to 1% of GDP, making its defense budget the ninth-largest in the world. Doubling the budget to 2% of GDP would turn Japan's defense budget into the world's third-largest. The increase would allow Japan to upgrade the SDF's capabilities in many ways, including upgrades to counterstrike weaponry, long-range power projection, missile defense, and space surveillance.

These changes would allow Japan to attack North Korea's missile launchers preemptively before they launched missiles toward Japan. They would also help Japan project power in order to deter Chinese attempts to threaten Japanese national interests, as well as assure free trade in sea lanes that are potentially threatened by China.

The increase in the defense budget will also give a boost to the Japanese defense industry. Washington is closely following changes to Japan's defense policy, as those changes might enable the sale of American weapons systems to Japan like Tomahawk missiles and F-35s, among others.

Japan's new defense policy will be supported by Washington, which has favored such changes for many years. In addition to the potential for billions of dollars' worth of US weapons sales to Tokyo, the change serves American deterrence policy toward North Korea, China, and potentially Russia. This does not mean Tokyo will replace Washington in Northeast Asia, but it will become more active.

While Washington supports the new defense policy, Beijing, Pyongyang, and Seoul are raising concerns about it. North Korea might respond by launching a few missiles. Seoul, in addition to airing its apprehensions publicly, will likely increase its own defense budget as well. The change in Japan's defense budget combined with the North Korean threat will serve as justification for an upgrade of South Korea's defense.

From the Israeli point of view, the change in Japanese defense policy will provide opportunities to the Israeli defense industry to sell missile defense systems, drones, and cyber security to Tokyo. It will also allow for upgraded intelligence cooperation with Japan on the North Korean threat to Japan as well as North Korean missile exports to the Middle East and nuclear cooperation with Iran.

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