

Japan's Strategic Shift: The U.S.-Japan Alliance in a New Era

Zineb Fraih ¹

University of Blida 2, z.fraih@univ-blida2.dz

Received 27/07/2025

Accepted: 23/09/2025

Published: 15/10/2025

Abstract:

In response to a rapidly deteriorating security environment—marked by the war in Ukraine, heightened tensions in the Taiwan Strait, and North Korea's growing nuclear ambitions—Japan has undertaken a historic strategic shift. In this context, the recent approval by the cabinet of Prime Minister Kishida Fumio marks a historic expansion of Japan's military capabilities, the likes of which have not been seen since the establishment of the country's Self-Defense Forces (SDF) in 1954. This analysis examines two key aspects of this shift: the geopolitical motivations driving Japan's new security strategy and the subsequent implications for the future of the U.S.-Japan security alliance. Ultimately, the paper concludes that the volatile Indo-Pacific security landscape has compelled Tokyo to make a profound and beneficial adjustment to its strategic posture, thereby strengthening the U.S.-Japan alliance in a new era of great power competition.

Keywords: Japan; U.S.A; Alliance; Security Strategy.

Corresponding author: Fraih Zineb, z.fraih@univ-blida2.dz

1. INTRODUCTION

In an era of intensifying geopolitical competition, Japan is undertaking a historic reassessment of its national security. This strategic shift is a direct response to a deteriorating security environment in the Indo-Pacific, characterized by a more assertive China, a persistent and growing threat from North Korea's missile and nuclear programs, and heightened regional anxieties following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

In this context, the government of Prime Minister Kishida Fumio has embarked on the most significant expansion of Japan's military capabilities since the establishment of its Self-Defense Forces in 1954. This includes a landmark decision to dramatically increase defense spending, with a goal of reaching 2% of GDP, which would position Japan among the world's top military investors. To formalize this transformation, the government has revised its foundational national security documents: the National Security Strategy, the National Defense Strategy, and the Defense Buildup Program. These revisions not only set ambitious fiscal and defense objectives but also signal a new, more proactive foreign policy. At its core, this shift aims to deepen and enhance Japan's existing alliances, particularly with the United States, while also forging new partnerships with like-minded nations.

This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of this monumental strategic turn. It proceeds in two main sections. The first part delves into the key geopolitical motivations behind Japan's shift, analyzing how threats from neighboring countries have impacted its security calculus. The second part then examines the profound implications of this military expansion for the future of the U.S.-Japan security alliance. By exploring these dimensions, this paper ultimately argues that Japan's new security posture is a beneficial adjustment that will reinforce the alliance for a new era of great power competition in the Indo-Pacific.

2. Japan's Strategic Reassessment: Responding to Indo-Pacific Threats

The security environment in the Indo-Pacific region is undergoing a significant historical transformation. The Japanese government asserts that Japan currently confronts the most intricate and demanding security

challenges since the conclusion of World War II. Strategically positioned, Japan faces a complex and delicate situation¹, bordered by three nuclear-armed nations—China, North Korea, and Russia—all of which are actively enhancing their military capabilities and operations in close proximity.²

According to Jennifer Lind's analysis, mounting threats across Asia prompted Tokyo to discard its longstanding defense taboos. On December 16, 2022, Japan took significant steps toward becoming a more conventional global power by endorsing substantial revisions to its policy of military self-restraint. Its updated national security strategy outlines plans to increase military expenditure, allocating an additional \$315 billion to its defense budget over the next five years, effectively doubling current spending. Crucially, this strategy also establishes a new 'counterstrike' capability, allowing for retaliatory assaults on enemy territory and marking a significant departure from its previous strategic approach.³

To fully understand Japan's New Security Strategy, this paper will first define and examine the specific emerging threats in the Indo-Pacific that have compelled Tokyo to reassess its longstanding defense norms.

2.1 Japan's Changing Security Environment

Japan's recently released National Security Strategy (NSS) characterizes the actions of China as an 'unparalleled and significant strategic challenge' and identifies North Korea's activities as a 'severe and immediate threat.' The document also asserts that Russia's aggression against Ukraine constitutes a significant violation of the fundamental principles governing the international system. Furthermore, the National Defense Strategy (NDS) critically assesses that Russia's aggression was made possible by Ukraine's inadequate defense capabilities, which failed to effectively deter the invasion. As Liff and Hornung (2023) conclude, the convergence of these threats has made the necessity for Japan to promptly adjust its security posture significantly greater than that expressed in the 2013 NSS.⁴

2.1.1 China

China's military modernization efforts, particularly since 2010, have fundamentally reshaped the regional security environment. Driven by its ambition to become a leading global power, Beijing has prioritized the integration of information technology into its military, while also significantly enhancing its force projection capabilities and long-range missile forces. This modernization has been accompanied by a more assertive and confrontational posture in the East and South China Seas.

This assertiveness is most acutely felt by Japan in the East China Sea, where China has escalated its "gray zone" activities around the Japanese-administered Senkaku Islands. These actions, which are intended to alter the status quo without triggering a military conflict, include a 2016 incident where a Chinese naval vessel entered the contiguous zone for the first time, and a separate event that year where 28 government vessels entered Japan's territorial waters. Through these persistent incursions, China appears to be attempting to establish a new normal, asserting its administrative claims and pressuring Japan to acknowledge a territorial dispute where Tokyo maintains none exists.

For Japan, these actions present an existential challenge. Japan adamantly rejects China's claims, viewing the Senkaku Islands as an integral part of its territory with no dispute over sovereignty. As Ohnishi (2017) argues, China's actions are likely to persist as part of a broader strategic motivation to establish a substantial buffer zone against the United States.⁵ Consequently, Japan's latest National Security Strategy characterizes China as presenting an "unparalleled and significant strategic challenge," a designation that underscores the severity of the threat and justifies Japan's need for a proactive and robust security response.

2.1.2 North Korea

Japan confronts a unique and immediate security challenge posed by North Korea⁶. As Kim (2022) asserts, Pyongyang's persistent pursuit of nuclear-capable missiles represents a significant security issue for Tokyo.

⁷ Beyond its nuclear program, North Korea has made substantial

advancements in ballistic missile technology, including the development of submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), as evidenced by numerous test launches in recent years. This proliferation of advanced capabilities is particularly alarming for Japan, as there is a potential for North Korea to launch ballistic missile attacks on U.S. bases and other strategic locations in Japan during periods of heightened military tensions. Ohnishi argues that this risk to Japan would escalate dramatically if North Korea were to employ its nuclear capabilities.⁸

Since 2018, Japan's defense policy has officially designated North Korea as a significant and immediate threat, yet recent events have profoundly heightened this perception. Following Chairman Kim Jong-un's presentation of a five-year military development plan in early 2021, North Korea has designated its missile program as the "highest priority," leading to an unprecedented frequency of missile tests. In 2022 alone, North Korea conducted a record 37 missile trials, launching over 90 missiles in total⁹. This culminated in the firing of a Hwasong-12 intermediate-range ballistic missile in October, which triggered Japan's J-ALERT missile warning system for the first time in five years and caused widespread public concern.

Ultimately, North Korea's rapid advancements in nuclear and missile development present a more pressing and heightened threat to Japan than ever before. With approximately 100 missile tests conducted since the beginning of 2022—including intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs)—there are growing concerns that North Korea now possesses the capability to launch a nuclear attack on Japan. This escalation has been a key factor in compelling Tokyo to fundamentally reassess its security posture.

2.1.3 Russian Invasion of Ukraine

The Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, served as a powerful catalyst for Japan's new security strategy, occurring just as Tokyo was drafting its updated National Security Strategy (NSS), National Defense Strategy (NDS), and Defense Build-up Plan (DBP)¹⁰. For Japan, the invasion was a visceral reminder that a major-power conflict was no longer a theoretical concern, but a present danger. Tokyo became concerned

that a similar situation could arise in the Indo-Pacific, with analysts frequently noting that "today's Ukraine may be tomorrow's Asia"¹¹. Youn (2023) points out that this event prompted a "major transformation" in Japan's strategic planning and military readiness.¹²

In response, Japan's reaction was swift and robust, marking a departure from its more cautious approach to Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea¹³. Japan joined its G7 allies in implementing a wide range of sanctions against Moscow, including financial restrictions and a phased discontinuation of Russian energy imports. Japan also provided significant non-lethal defense equipment, humanitarian aid, and financial support to Ukraine, signaling a strong commitment to the principles of territorial integrity and sovereignty.

The invasion of Ukraine, combined with the pre-existing security challenges from China and North Korea, sparked a crucial domestic conversation in Japan. High-ranking officials, including former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, openly debated controversial policy options such as a pre-emptive strike capability and even the possibility of a "nuclear-sharing" arrangement with the United States. This heightened apprehension about conventional and nuclear threats, particularly in the Taiwan Strait, led to the political will necessary to adopt a comprehensive security approach and pursue major changes in defense policy, including a dramatic increase in defense spending and the acquisition of counterstrike capabilities.

Ultimately, Russia's invasion of Ukraine underscored the necessity for nations to be ready to defend themselves in order to garner strong and lasting international support, as stressed by Solís (2023)¹⁴. This principle has significantly shaped the trajectory of Japan's new security strategy, expanding the geographical scope of U.S.-Japan strategic coordination and justifying a more proactive and self-reliant defense posture for a new era of major power competition.

2.2 Japan's New Security Strategy

Japan has started a historic change in its national security posture in response to a drastically changing geopolitical environment. This section will examine the key elements that led to this strategic change, starting with Japan's strategic response to Indo-Pacific threats, followed by a description of Japan's strategic foundations, including defense buildup and partnerships, and concluding with an analysis of the challenges and opportunities associated with implementing Japan's new strategy. The goal of this new course is to prepare Japan to deal with a regional and global environment that is becoming more complicated and difficult.

2.2.1 Japan's Strategic Response to Indo-Pacific Threats

Due to the current intense security situation, especially with the Russian invasion of Ukraine, tension over the Taiwan Strait, and the nuclear and missile ambitions of North Korea, the cabinet of Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio has authorized the largest and swiftest expansion of military capability in Japan since the formation of the country's Self-Defense Forces (SDF) in 1954¹⁵. Kishida unveiled a new national security and defense strategy in December of 2022, marking a significant departure from Japan's post-World War II trajectory¹⁶.

The Japanese government claims that Japan is currently confronting the most intricate and demanding security risks it has encountered since the conclusion of World War II. Due to its strategic positioning, Japan is confronted with a complex and delicate security situation, contending with various threats and challenges¹⁷. The country is bordered by three nuclear-armed nations - China, North Korea, and Russia - all of which are enhancing their military capacities and operations in close proximity to Japan¹⁸.

The immediate consequences of the invasion of Ukraine were just as significant as had been widely anticipated. In light of Russia's aggressive actions towards Ukraine, Tokyo is concerned that a similar situation could arise in the Indo-Pacific or East Asia¹⁹. Youn (2023) points out that Japan has undergone a major transformation due to this, resulting in a notable change in Tokyo's strategic planning and military readiness²⁰. This heightened apprehension about the potential for heightened conflicts involving conventional or nuclear threats is why analysts have been more

frequently noting that a "Taiwan contingency is a Japanese contingency" and that "today's Ukraine may be tomorrow's Asia."

2.2.2 Japan's Strategic Foundations: Defense Buildup and Partnerships

The Kishida government has given the green light to three security-related papers: the National Security Strategy (2022 NSS), which sets out Japan's security policy for the next ten years; the National Defense Strategy (2022 NDS), which details defense tactics; and the Defense Build-up Program (DBP), outlining the process for acquiring necessary equipment²¹. Since 1946, these papers have provided the means to make significant changes to Japan's exclusively defense-oriented policy. This includes the ability for Japan to more actively engage in collective self-defense with the United States and to significantly enhance its capacity to extend military power beyond its own borders.²² Heino Klinck believes that these documents are a practical reaction to increasing security challenges from various sources such as China, North Korea, Russia, and threats from the cyber domain.²³

Sheila Smith states that the NSS has a dual purpose: (1) to enhance Japan's capacity to prevent aggression; and (2) to ensure that the SDF are prepared to engage in combat if a conflict arises.²⁴ Additionally, Smith attributes the increase in arming the SDF to a combination of factors: the increasing presence of foreign military forces in and around Japan, and the rapid pace of technological advancements in the region's militaries, which has caused Japan to lag behind. The main emphasis of these documents is to strengthen Japan's ability to deter potential threats and respond to provocations. Japan noted that Russia was able to invade Ukraine due to Ukraine's insufficient defense capability. Due to its size, Japan identified similarities between itself and Ukraine and regarded Russia in a comparable way to China, as both are big, authoritarian countries. As a result, Japan acknowledged the necessity of improving its defense capabilities to address its security shortfall, an action that Ukraine was unable to take. The change led to Japan moving from its "proactive contribution to peace" policy in its 2013 NSS to a defensive strategy using counterstrike missile capabilities, like cruise missiles.²⁵

In addition to other measures, the government made the decision to raise Japan's defense budget to 2 percent of its gross domestic product

(GDP) by fiscal year 2027.²⁶ Prime Minister Kishida Fumio has set a new goal for military expenditure for the next five years at ¥43 trillion (\$315 billion), which is 1.5 times the current amount. In the upcoming 5 to 10 years, Japan aims to raise its defense budget to around 2 percent of its GDP.²⁷

Japan has also shown strong support for Ukraine's efforts to resist Russia's invasion, along with its European allies, by providing non-lethal defense equipment, emergency humanitarian and financial aid, and by accepting evacuees. Japan also took part in global sanctions by implementing various financial measures, such as limiting transactions with Russia's central bank and excluding certain Russian banks from SWIFT, and gradually discontinuing imports of Russian oil and coal. Prime Minister Kishida traveled to several G7 countries the month after the NSS was published in December 2022 to secure guarantees and strengthen security alliances with Western allies.

Besides the Quad minilateral which includes the United States, India, and Australia, Japan is also making progress in forming trilateral security groupings.²⁸ Russia's invasion of Ukraine also caused the geographical scope of U.S.-Japan strategic coordination to greatly increase, with Tokyo being one of the first to publicly denounce the violence and join the international coalition to punish Putin's aggressive war. Solís (2023) stressed the importance of nations being ready to defend themselves in order to garner strong and lasting international support.²⁹

2.2.3 Implementing Japan's New Strategy: Hurdles and Horizons

Japan's new National Security Strategy was released nearly a decade after the country's first-ever document of its kind, which was issued under then-Prime Minister Abe Shinzo in 2013. Abe created the National Security Secretariat in the same year to enhance collaboration between government ministries and agencies in decision-making, and it was instrumental in developing the 2023 strategy. The security situation in Japan has worsened considerably since the initial strategy was released. Hence, the latest document offers a glimpse into Tokyo's approach to addressing the new challenges.³⁰

Nonetheless, the significant change does not pertain to "core principles and policies" but instead to the implementation of the strategies outlined in the documents. In reality, the fundamental three foundations of

national security policy are still largely unchanged. The NDS sets out clear objectives, including strengthening Japan's national defense structure, enhancing joint deterrence and response capabilities with the Japan-U.S. Alliance, and increasing collaboration with similar countries. The fundamental framework of the defense buildup also remains unchanged. The National Defense Strategy (NDS) affirms that Japan will strengthen the existing Multi-Domain Defense Force through increased efforts. As a result, Japan's national security policy is not undergoing a major shift in direction, but rather an intensification of the previous course of action in response to the worsening security environment. Hideshi (2023) argues that the significant change is more of an evolution with a big leap rather than a revolution.³¹

The strategic overhaul of the Kishida cabinet not only reflects the views of the defense planning community in Tokyo but also indicates the increasing concern among the Japanese public, particularly regarding China. According to a recent Yomiuri-Gallup poll, 90% of Japanese participants expressed mistrust towards China and 61% believed that Beijing had intentions to invade Taiwan. Smith (2022) notes that one of the most remarkable things about the 2022 strategic review is the lack of opposition the government's plans have faced.³² A recent public survey carried out by Kyodo News (telephone survey conducted on December 17 and 18, 2022) revealed that 39% of respondents supported an increase in defense spending, while 53.6% were against it. Additionally, 30.0% were in favor of raising taxes to support the increased defense spending, while 64.9% were against it.³³

Japan's post-war national security strategy is reaching a significant point with the introduction of new policies. However, as others have mentioned, putting the plan into action will involve addressing challenging issues, such as the allocation of resources. Securing funds for the proposed spending plans will be a significant hurdle and will require ongoing support from the national community, especially if it entails raising taxes and reducing expenditures.

The second concern is about whether the new military stance actually increases Japan's security or if it actually puts the country at a higher risk. Despite Tokyo's claims that its intentions are peaceful, its neighbors may view its significant military expansion as a potential threat, the largest since World War II. Beijing has already shown its dissatisfaction

with the new NSS, especially with its classification of China as ‘an unprecedented strategic challenge’. Japan's new policies were condemned by North Korea and Russia for heightening security threats in the region. Simultaneously, there are security risks that cannot be easily ignored if Japan becomes involved in conflicts outside its own territory.

While Japan has a strong security alliance and partnerships with the United States and others, there is still room for improvement in terms of military interoperability and joint command and control.³⁴ Overall, Japan's defense direction remains largely the same in important ways. However, these new strategies show that the government is reassessing what it should do to better strengthen deterrence in response to a deteriorating security environment, shifting power dynamics in East Asia, and the start of a 'new era of strategic competition.' They are outlining the reasons for Tokyo to take on a more active role in deterring and maintaining regional stability in light of what the documents describe as Japan's most serious and complex security environment since the end of World War II.³⁵

3. The U.S.-Japan Alliance in a New Era

The concept of the "Spear and Shield" is often used to explain how security responsibilities are divided between Japan and the United States. This metaphor depicts Japan as the "shield," prioritizing a defensive stance, while the United States takes on the role of the "spear," responsible for both conventional and nuclear offensive operations. This strategy is in line with the Yoshida doctrine, which allows Japan to focus on economic development by minimizing defense spending (capped at less than one percent of GDP).

The recent announcement of changes to Japan's national security and defense strategy by Prime Minister Kishida Fumio's cabinet has sparked questions about the potential impact on the U.S.-Japan alliance, a partnership forged from the ashes of conflict into one of the most critical security relationships in the Indo-Pacific

3.1 The U.S.-Japan Security Alliance: an historical overview

The US-Japan partnership marks a remarkable shift from wartime foes

to crucial partners. It was formed in the aftermath of World War II and has evolved in response to changing geopolitical circumstances, strategic imperatives, and Japan's growing defense posture. This section will outline the alliance's important historical milestones, from its inception and early evolution (1950s-1960s), to its periods of adaptation to regional and global shifts (1970s-Early 2000s), to its recent modernization and strategic realignment (2010s-Present). Understanding this complex history is critical to understanding the origins and future trajectory of the US-Japan security alliance.

3.1.1 Origins and Early Evolution (1950s-1960s)

In 1951, Japan and the United States formed an alliance by signing the U.S.-Japan Mutual Security Treaty, which was done alongside the Treaty of San Francisco that officially concluded World War II. Japan and the U.S. agreed to a ten-year renewable deal that detailed the conditions under which American forces could remain in Japan following the country's regaining of sovereignty, despite Japan's pacifist constitution. This early agreement aligned with the Yoshida Doctrine, a strategy developed by Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida after World War II. The doctrine called for Japan to depend on the United States for security, allowing the country to concentrate on economic reconstruction. This arrangement effectively established the "Spear and Shield" division of labor, with Japan as the defensive "shield" and the U.S. as the offensive "spear."

During that period, the United States was eager to utilize the alliance to strengthen its strategic position in East Asia. After the Korean War, the country was dealing with a split Korea and a tense Cold War environment where the Chinese and Soviet armies were growing in size and strength. In the midst of this security situation, the Yoshida administration established the Self-Defense Force (SDF) in 1954, despite facing strong opposition within the country due to Article Nine of the postwar constitution, which prohibits the maintenance of military forces or their use in resolving international conflicts.³⁶

The security partnership between the U.S. and Japan has proven to be incredibly strong and is the foundation of stability in the region. Initially named the Mutual Security Pact in 1952, the alliance was later formalized as the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security in 1960. Under this agreement, Japan agreed to allow U.S. forces to use its bases in exchange

for protection against external threats.³⁷ In 1967, Prime Minister Eisaku Sato introduced the Three Non-Nuclear Principles, which prohibited the possession, production, or introduction of nuclear arms in Japan. This was done in response to worries that the presence of nuclear weapons on U.S. bases in Japan would make the country vulnerable to attacks. From that time onwards, Japan has depended on the U.S. nuclear umbrella as a deterrent against potential aggressors.

3.1.2 Adapting to Regional and Global Shifts (1970s-Early 2000s)

During the 1970s, while the United States was pulling out of Vietnam, Japan started to establish a more significant position within the alliance. It released its initial defense strategy after the war and began to outline its collaboration with the U.S. military. The two allies conducted research on interoperability and initiated collaborative training and exercises.

The Japan's constitution was questioned during the Gulf War in 1990-91, as there was a debate about whether the Self-Defense Forces were allowed to participate in the U.S.-led coalition to remove Iraq from Kuwait, a coalition that had been approved by the UN Security Council. In the end, Japan provided financial support but did not deploy any soldiers. Japanese military officers and government officials admitted feeling ashamed by their lack of involvement in the war and pledged to amend the country's pacifist constitution. A new law in 1992 established the requirements for SDF participation in UN peacekeeping missions, and in the next year, the initial SDF unit was deployed to Cambodia.

In 1997, the allies decided to redefine the boundaries for Japan's military operations, allowing them to move beyond the country's home islands to the "surrounding areas" due to the collapse of the Soviet Union. Some people interpreted this action as Japan assuming more accountability for its own defense. The beginning of the 2000s saw a rise in defense cooperation. During November 2001, Japan's government, led by Junichiro Koizumi, sent the Maritime Self-Defense Force to the Indian Ocean to offer logistical assistance to the U.S. military efforts in Afghanistan. This marked Japan's initial overseas military involvement in a combat mission. In 2003, it deployed troops to help with the reconstruction of Iraq after the war.

3.1.3 Modernization and Strategic Realignment (2010s-Present)

In a landmark decision in 2015, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe oversaw the reinterpretation of Japan's constitution, granting the military the ability to defend allies for the first time, albeit with certain restrictions. This adjustment allowed the United States and Japan to once again update their defense guidelines, broadening their military cooperation and targeting current threats like those from China and North Korea, as well as new technologies.

From that time onwards, the nations have continued to strengthen their collaborative efforts in defense. Yoshihide Suga and Fumio Kishida, who are also members of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), have largely held the same views on foreign policy as Abe, expressing worry about China's growing influence and endorsing higher defense expenditures. The United States and Japan have collaborated extensively on the development of ballistic missile technology, and the 2019 U.S. Department of Defense Missile Defense Review has recognized Japan as one of the United States' most reliable partners in missile defense.

In 2020, Japan was given approval by the United States to purchase 105 F-35 fighters. In the meantime, Japan has agreed to collaborate with the United States to enhance space, cyber, and maritime awareness capabilities and strengthen cooperation in the fields of science and technology, particularly in the area of defense applications of unmanned systems and artificial intelligence.³⁸

3.2 Realigning the U.S.-Japan Alliance

Japan's ambitious new security strategy represents a watershed point in the US-Japan alliance, significantly changing their long-standing collaboration. Moving beyond traditional roles defined by postwar constraints, Tokyo's increased defense ambitions and proactive stance are resulting in unprecedented levels of cooperation and integration. This section will investigate the profound implications of Japan's strategic shift, examining the Shifting Strategic Imperatives and Alliance Evolution that underpin this transformation, analyzing the U.S. Endorsement and Deepened Cooperation that has quickly followed, and finally discussing the alliance's pivot toward Integrated Deterrence: Preparing for Contingency in an Increasingly Volatile Indo-Pacific.

3.2.1 Shifting Strategic Imperatives and Alliance Evolution

For years, the partnership with Japan has been the foundation of U.S. security strategy in East Asia. During the Cold War, the United States and Japan were primarily concerned with the threat posed by the Soviet Union. However, as tensions rise over Taiwan, Japan has now shifted its focus to the south. Today, as challenges from China and North Korea increase, Japan's role in global security is expanding. This raises a fundamental question: What is driving Japan's new security strategy and what implications does this have for the future of the US-Japan security partnership in response to escalating threats from China? This question was notably posed by Brian Hanson in his podcast after Japan revealed its ambitious military plans in advance of the Biden-Kishida meeting on January 13, 2023.³⁹

The security strategy of Japan continues to rely heavily on the Japan–US alliance. Over the past sixty years since the signing of the 1960 Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security, the alliance has shifted from Japan being reliant on US protection to both nations working together for increased security consultation through the bilateral Security Consultative Committee ('2+2') and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad). There is also a greater focus on military integration in missile defense, cyber, and space domains.⁴⁰

3.2.2 U.S. Endorsement and Deepened Cooperation

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's first visit to Washington as leader on January 13, 2023, marked a significant moment in the U.S.-Japan alliance. Japan's new security reforms have been positively received in Washington, indicating a more determined Japan to strengthen its own defense capabilities and contribute to regional deterrence. This also shows potential for the bilateral partnership to address serious challenges to the international order.⁴¹

In mid-January 2023, Prime Minister Kishida and US President Joe Biden met, and additionally, the foreign and defense ministers of both countries convened in Washington for the 2+2 talks to discuss the implications of Japan's change of course for bilateral cooperation. The response from the US to Japan's plans was extremely positive. In their joint statement, Biden expressed admiration for Japan's "bold leadership" in enhancing its defense capabilities. Antony Blinken, the US Secretary of State, and Lloyd Austin, the Secretary of Defense, also commended Tokyo's

decision to boost its defense budget and enhance its ability to counter-strike. Japan is becoming an even stronger ally of the US thanks to its armament. This is notable considering the country's growing significance in US security policy over the past few years. With Washington's attention increasingly turning towards China as the primary challenger to American dominance, its partnership with Tokyo holds significant strategic importance, as do the troops it has stationed in Japan. If there is a dispute over Taiwan, it would be difficult for the American military to operate without the support of Japan.⁴²

3.2.3 Towards Integrated Deterrence: Preparing for Contingency

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's trip to Washington marks a notable shift in the U.S.-Japan alliance. For the first time in many years, Tokyo and Washington are actively getting ready for the potential of a significant conflict in the near future. Japan's new National Security Strategy acknowledges the chance of a serious situation arising in the Indo-Pacific region, particularly in East Asia. In their last meeting, the leaders of the alliance unveiled a series of adjustments to defense posture, updated command relationships, and new training agreements. In essence, the U.S.-Japan alliance is transitioning to a stance of preparedness for war.

It may appear evident that Japan and the United States need to prepare for potential conflict in the Indo-Pacific region. This is because both countries are facing increasing challenges from three nuclear-armed adversaries: China, Russia, and North Korea. While the US and Japan have been gradually strengthening their military capabilities to deter conflict over the past decade, recent events such as President Putin's invasion of Ukraine and General Secretary Xi Jinping's escalating pressure on Taiwan have underscored the potential failure of deterrence efforts and the severe consequences that can result. As a result, there is now a need for a more assertive set of responses to address the new uncertainties.⁴³

The new security documents in Japan represent a crucial moment for the nation's security policy. The revised security policy is revolutionary, not just because of Tokyo's growing investment in national defense with higher defense spending and acquiring new capabilities, but also because it signifies a significant shift in Japan's national security mindset. The significant changes in Japan's security policy aim to address the unique challenges in alliance politics that can impede military efficiency. Reviving alliances to address the current challenges of major power competition,

these steps are essential.⁴⁴ It could also be crucial to adjust the U.S.-Japan alliance to align with Tokyo's new aspirations and capabilities, particularly if both nations determine that reevaluating the traditional division of labor and responsibilities as "shield and spear" is needed.⁴⁵

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this article has argued that Japan has made important and difficult choices to strengthen its ability to discourage threats from various sources. While these significant policy declarations and published plans are commendable, much still needs to be accomplished beyond their initial announcement. The critical factor for Japan's new security strategy will be its prioritized implementation.

Essentially, the strength of the U.S.-Japanese alliance as a whole remains the most effective defense against aggression. Both the United States and Japan must be prepared to constantly ensure that this alliance is robust and ready for the future, especially as adversaries continue to increase and expand their capabilities.

The U.S.-Japan alliance has demonstrably evolved to address increasing regional threats, allowing Japan to assume a more balanced partnership and leadership role in the Indo-Pacific. However, despite this progress, Japan still encounters significant domestic obstacles, including the challenges of sluggish decision-making processes, persistent legal restrictions stemming from its post-war constitution, and hurdles within its defense industry.

It is clear that Japan now views it as crucial to double its spending on security and defense, and to significantly improve its ability to project force beyond its borders in direct response to a worsening security environment. Only time will tell if Japan can successfully implement these transformative changes and what ultimate impact they will have on the long-term security of Japan and the broader region.

5. Bibliography List:

- ¹ Maj Young K. Youn, Japan at a Historical Inflection Point Untangling the Complex Knot of Geopolitics, Domestic Politics, and the Security Alliance, *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs*, (July -August 2023). P.61.available on: <https://cutt.us/4dhQ8>.
- ² Alexandra Sakaki, A New Course for Japan's Security Policy. SWP Comment,No.13,(March 2023).p.01. available on: <https://cutt.us/Oor3Z>.
- ³ Jennifer Lind,Japan Steps Up: How Asia's Rising Threats Convinced Tokyo to Abandon Its Defense Taboos, *foreign affairs*, (December 23, 2022). Available on: <https://cutt.us/BHoIR>.
- ⁴ Adam P. Liff & Jeffrey W. Hornung ,Japan's new security policies: A long road to full implementation. The Brookings Institution, (March 27, 2023). Available on: <https://cutt.us/GzuyT>.
- ⁵ Tokuchi Hideshi, Japan's New National Security Strategy and Contribution to a Networked Regional Security Architecture, *Center for Strategic & International Studies*,(June 23, 2023). pp.138-138. Available on: <https://cutt.us/JGSwk>.
- ⁶ Hideshi,Op.cit,p.138.
- ⁷ Hyung--Jin Kim, North Korea threatens strong military step against Japan, (December 20, 2022). Available on: <https://cutt.us/Pd9Ge>.
- ⁸ Ibidem.
- ⁹ Yasuyo Sakata, Japan's National Security Strategy & the Two Koreas. (February 21, 2023),Available on: <https://cutt.us/ItiKY>.
- ¹⁰ Yuki Tatsumi, How Russia's Invasion of Ukraine Changed Japan's Approach to National Security, (February 16, 2023), Available on: <https://cutt.us/BoYyE>.
- ¹¹ Sakaki,Op.Cit,p.01.
- ¹² Youn , Op.Cit,p. 62.
- ¹³ Sakata, Op.Cit.
- ¹⁴ Mireya Solís, As Kishida meets Biden, what is the state of the US-Japan alliance? The Brookings Institution, (January 20, 2023), Available on: <https://cutt.us/Kto1d>.
- ¹⁵ Sheila A. Smith, How Japan Is Doubling Down on Its Military Power. Council on Foreign Relations,(December 20, 2022),Available on: <https://cutt.us/xSU09>.
- ¹⁶ Christopher Johnstone,To Make Japan Stronger, America Must Pull It Closer, *foreign affairs*,(January 12, 2023). Available on:

- https://cutt.us/G74LQ.
- ¹⁷ Youn , Op.Cit,p. 61.
- ¹⁸ Sakaki,Op.Cit,p.01.
- ¹⁹ Ibidem.
- ²⁰ Youn , Op.Cit,p. 62.
- ²¹ Takashi Hosoda, Japan has changed its approach to national security and defense, (February 13,2023),Available on: <https://cutt.us/11uMO>.
- ²² Jingdong Yuan,Japan's new military policies: Origins and implications, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), (2 February 2023), Available on: <https://cutt.us/wtE4S>.
- ²³ Heino Klinck, Japan's Defense Priorities and Implications for the U.S.-Japan Alliance. Center for Strategic & International Studies, (June 23, 2023), Available on: <https://cutt.us/gYAXL>.
- ²⁴ Smith, Op.Cit.
- ²⁵ Youn, Op.Cit,p. 61.
- ²⁶ Sakaki, Op.Cit, p.01.
- ²⁷ Klinck, Op.Cit.
- ²⁸ Youn, Op.Cit,p. 61.
- ²⁹ Solís, Op.Cit.
- ³⁰ Sakaki, Op.Cit, p.01.
- ³¹ Hideshi, Op.cit, p.138.
- ³² Smith, Op.Cit.
- ³³ Takashi Hosoda, Japan has changed its approach to national security and defense, (February 13,2023), Available on: <https://cutt.us/11uMO>.
- ³⁴ Yuan , Op.Cit.
- ³⁵ Liff & Hornung, Op.Cit.
- ³⁶ Lindsay Maizland & Nathanael Cheng, The U.S.-Japan Security Alliance, Council on Foreign Relations, (November 4, 2021), Available on: <https://cutt.us/R1IKZ>.
- ³⁷ John Allen & Benjamin Sugg, The U.S.-Japan Alliance, Asian Alliances Working Paper Series, (July 2016), P.01.available on: <https://cutt.us/K9UyN>.
- ³⁸ Maizland & Cheng ,Op.Cit.
- ³⁹ Brian Hanson, Japan Unveils Ambitious Military Plans Ahead of Biden-Kishida Meeting, Poacast DEEP DISH, The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, (January 12, 2023), Available on: <https://cutt.us/IcIu8>.

⁴⁰ Yuan ,Op.Cit.

⁴¹ Solís, Op.Cit.

⁴² Sakaki, Op.Cit, p.01.

⁴³ Zack Cooper & Eric Sayers, *Japan's Shift to War Footing*, (January 12, 2023). Available on: <https://cutt.us/DpHJJ>.

⁴⁴ Takuya Matsuda, *Japan's Emerging Security Strategy*, *The Washington Quarterly*, (Spring 2023), P.96.

⁴⁵ Liff & Hornung, Op.Cit.