Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power

POLICY BRIEF

Japan's Transformed Security and Military Posture: Sustainability and Ramifications

Author

Anil Chopra

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Core 5A, 1st Floor, India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road, New Delhi- 110003

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Author

Vice Admiral Anil Chopra (Retd.), PVSM, AVSM, Distinguished Fellow, Delhi Policy Group

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Cover Images:

1. US Secretary of War Pete Hegseth met with Japan's Minister of Defence Shinjirō Koizumi in the Philippines, on October 27, 2026. Source: X/@ModJapan_en

2. On Oct 28, 2026, Japan's Defence Minister Shinjirō Koizumi held a meeting with Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh. Source: X/@rajnathsingh

3. Japan's Defence Minister Shinjirō Koizumi held a Defense Ministers' Meeting with U.S. Secretary of War Hegseth, Australian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence Marles, and Philippine Secretary of National Defense Teodoro, October 29, 2026. Source: X/@ModJapan_en

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Introduction

Japan's security posture has recently witnessed a fairly remarkable transformation in short time, with Tokyo launching its most significant defence policy initiatives since the end of WWII. The upsurge in its military profile is clearly driven by Tokyo's heightened perception of the increasing, and possibly collusive, military threat from China, DPRK and Russia, and is also indicative of far greater realism than hitherto. The policy change has indeed been impressive, given that Japan concurrently faces severe economic and demographic headwinds.

While the push for change in Japan's security policies was initiated by late Premier Shinzo Abe, it has been more starkly evident from 2022, when the Kishida government took the first steps in breaking away from decades of self-imposed pacifist constraints, including a 1% of GDP ceiling for defence expenditure, and authorising procurement of long-range, counter- strike (pre-emptive) missiles. China's muscle-flexing over the last decade has doubtless been the motivating factor, as has the more recent volatility in relations with the US.

This already ongoing process is seeing rapid acceleration under Prime Minister Takaichi's leadership. Japan is now clearly in transition from a post-war pacifist posture to a proactive and realist security stance. Building upon Abe's security legacy, Takaichi's strategy integrates military modernisation, fiscal reorganisation, geo-economic resilience, and strategic alliances.

The messaging from Beijing conveys that it sees the regional order as being China-dominated, and warns that other states should accommodate rather than resist its regional preeminence. Growing military cooperation between Tokyo's triad of adversarial neighbours makes the risk of a two-front confrontation a possibility to Japan's west and north. As questions also grow about the durability of US commitment, Japan clearly intends to strengthen its own defence capabilities.

The revamping of Japan's security dimension is bound to have ramifications for the Indo-Pacific in general, and North-East Asia in particular, as also for Japan's strategic

ties with major regional powers such as India, Australia and the ROK. It may also alter ASEAN security dynamics, as its constituents weigh the China-Japan equation afresh.

Transformation

Security Policy and Posture

The Japanese government has initiated comprehensive revisions to its foundational security documents - the National Security Strategy (NSS), National Defence Strategy (NDS), and Defence Buildup Program (DBP) - to address its stressed security environment and the evolving demands of multi-domain operations, high-intensity conflict, and grey-zone warfare.

Japan is also expanding its long-range strike and counterstrike capabilities, moving beyond its traditionally restrictive defensive posture. These efforts include the procurement and deployment of stand-off weapons, upgraded anti-ship missiles, cruise missiles, and systems intended to intercept hypersonic glide vehicles.

Alongside these military developments, the government has strongly advocated revising Article 9 of the Constitution to give explicit constitutional recognition to the Self-Defence Forces. Following the ruling coalition's electoral success, momentum has reportedly increased for constitutional reform and a reassessment of long-standing security constraints, including the Three Non-Nuclear Principles.

The government has also revised the operational guidelines governing transfers of defence equipment and technology, broadening opportunities for the export of lethal defence equipment and international co-production. These changes are intended to expand the role of Japanese defence firms in international manufacturing arrangements, including government-owned, contractor-operated models.

In intelligence gathering and information security, the government has established a National Intelligence Council and introduced anti-espionage legislation. These measures also aim to strengthen the country's response to foreign influence operations, information warfare, and preserve the intended meaning of that power in a contested cognitive environment.

Funding and Fiscal Recasting

The government has accelerated Japan's commitment to raising defence expenditure to 2% of gross domestic product, moving the target forward from its original timeline. This shift reflects a stronger emphasis on defence readiness and long-term strategic investment. Under its framework of "responsible proactive fiscal policy," the

administration has approved record defence budgets. Defence allocations have now exceeded ¥9 trillion, representing a nearly 4 percent year-on-year increase within Japan's national budget.

A major change has also been the move away from heavy dependence on annual supplementary budgets toward more stable multi-year funding frameworks. This approach provides greater predictability for military research and development, long-term procurement programs, and investments in dual-use technologies.

Government funding has increasingly been directed toward strengthening Japan's domestic defence-industrial base. Key areas of support include drone development, subsea infrastructure security, and autonomous unmanned surface and underwater vehicles, all of which are intended to revitalise the country's defence-industrial ecosystem.

Geopolitics and Alliances

Japan's geopolitical strategy has increasingly focused on strengthening the U.S.-Japan alliance and expanding security cooperation across the Indo-Pacific and beyond. Tokyo has reinforced interoperability with Washington through closer coordination on command-and-control operations, integrated air and missile defence systems, and joint deterrence planning. These efforts reflect Japan's broader shift toward a more proactive defence posture, aimed at improving readiness and ensuring a coordinated response to regional security challenges.

Beyond the bilateral alliance with the United States, Japan has deepened its commitment to a Free and Open Indo-Pacific by widening security partnerships with like-minded countries. Through frameworks such as the Quad, and cooperation linked to AUKUS, Japan has expanded technological, maritime, and strategic coordination with partners including Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom, and India. These mini-lateral arrangements have become important tools for strengthening regional deterrence, enhancing maritime domain awareness, and supporting a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific.

Japan has also intensified engagement with Southeast Asian partners through initiatives such as the Official Security Assistance program. By providing defence-related equipment, patrol vessels, surveillance systems, and capacity-building support to countries such as the Philippines, Vietnam, and Indonesia, Tokyo is helping regional partners improve their maritime security capabilities. This approach allows Japan to contribute to stability in contested waters, while building deeper defence relationships across Southeast Asia.

Concerns over Taiwan and the East China Sea have further shaped Japan's security outlook. The Japanese government has increasingly linked peace and stability in the

Taiwan Strait to Japan's own national security, while the Japan Self Defence Forces have expanded surveillance and readiness activities around its southwestern island chain. This reflects Tokyo's growing awareness that any escalation in the Taiwan Strait or the East China Sea could have direct implications for Japan's territorial security and regional stability.

Japan has also strengthened its ties with NATO and European partners. In addition to maintaining a dedicated diplomatic mission to NATO, Tokyo has expanded military-industrial cooperation with Nordic and European allies, particularly in joint defence technology research and development. These partnerships demonstrate Japan's effort to connect Indo-Pacific security with broader Euro-Atlantic security concerns, reinforcing its role as a key democratic security partner in an increasingly interconnected strategic environment.

However, closer partnerships may also encourage counter-alignments among major neighbouring powers, requiring Tokyo to balance stronger deterrence with careful management of regional tensions.

Economic Security

Tokyo's geoeconomics agenda focuses on reducing vulnerability to economic coercion, particularly from China. Central to this approach is strengthening the resilience of supply chains for critical minerals, semiconductor manufacturing, and green energy infrastructure. These efforts seek to limit strategic dependencies and secure access to resources and technologies essential to economic resilience and national security.

Stronger implementation of economic security legislation is another pillar of this agenda.The government's approach emphasises safeguarding intellectual property, preventing the unauthorised transfer of dual-use technologies, and strengthening vetting procedures for vendors supplying critical national infrastructure. Together, these measures aim to protect sensitive capabilities and reduce exposure to external interference.

Japan's strategy also positions proactive public investment as a means of advancing economic resilience and national security. State support for strategic sectors - including artificial intelligence, subsea fibre-optic cables, quantum technology, and microelectronics - is framed not simply as industrial policy, but as an investment in the country's long-term security and technological capabilities.

Sustainability

However, the durability of Japan's expanded security posture depends on more than higher defence expenditure and wider diplomatic engagement. Demographic decline, fiscal constraints, energy dependence and the need for domestic consent create interconnected challenges that could limit the scale and pace of implementation. Sustaining this transformation will therefore require aligning strategic ambitions with the country's economic capacity and competing domestic priorities.

Demographic decline constrains both the economic foundations and the operational capacity of this transformation. A shrinking workforce and an ageing population weigh on productive capacity, domestic demand and long-term growth, while narrowing the pool of potential recruits for the Self-Defence Forces. Recruitment and retention difficulties could restrict the personnel available to operate and maintain additional equipment and sustain expanded operations, reducing the practical returns from higher defence investment.

Fiscal pressures further narrow the scope for sustained expansion. Japan's substantial public debt burden is compounded by a shrinking tax base and rising expenditure on healthcare, pensions and other age-related welfare commitments. Increased defence expenditure also coincides with heavy fiscal demands for 'Green' initiatives. Balancing security, energy transition and social welfare priorities will require difficult choices on taxation, borrowing and expenditure.

Energy dependence adds an external vulnerability to these domestic constraints. Heavy reliance on imported energy exposes Japan's industrial base and defence activities to supply disruptions, including those affecting maritime chokepoints. Expanding renewable energy and strengthening electricity-grid resilience could help reduce this exposure, but the transition must also accommodate continued reliance on imported fossil fuels and the role of nuclear power. Energy security, therefore, requires balancing diversification and decarbonisation with affordability and reliable supply.

Ultimately, domestic consent will shape the pace and durability of Japan's security transformation. Pacifist norms associated with Article 9, and public concerns over tax burdens, impose political limits on military expansion. Support for alliance cooperation or recognition of regional security risks does not necessarily imply acceptance of every defence initiative or the measures needed to finance it. If economic gains fail to improve household living standards, support for additional security expenditure may weaken. A sustainable approach must therefore reconcile defence objectives with public expectations, fiscal discipline and tangible domestic benefits.

Ramification for Indo-Pacific Security

Irrespective of the sustainability or success of Japan's resurgent military posture, there is little gainsaying Tokyo's much greater assertiveness in strategic matters and military intentions. This necessarily has to be factored in by friend and foe alike. The developments in Japan's security framework have the potential to both enhance tensions in the region, or to mitigate them through increased deterrence afforded by multiple security initiatives.

The Mirror Dilemma. Increasing China-Japan tensions are often described as a 'mirror' security problem, in which one's response to insecurity translates into perceived threat by the other. Recent strategic risk assessments in both countries are incredibly reciprocal, and serve to paint each other as both the immediate military threat, as well as a significant actor in larger adversarial combines. Each country increasingly sees the other's actions as requiring an immediate counter. The East China Sea, Taiwan and the larger Western Pacific, including the South China Sea, have become one interconnected security continuum for both powers. All this does not bode well for regional stability, or for economic growth.

Russian Rapprochement. Though chances are remote, a possible thaw between Moscow and Tokyo remains a possibility, as Japan may find it prudent to make some overtures. This may well find takers in Moscow, as any rapprochement would expand Russia's room for geopolitical manoeuvring in Asia, and decrease its dependence on China. However, this scenario will also depend on when Moscow is more likely to re-examine its strategic and security approach, especially if faced with a militarily resurgent Japan and ferment in China.

The Koreas. Japan security resurgence is driving a pragmatic convergence with the Republic of Korea, even as historical and territorial sensitivities persist. Both countries are making efforts to stabilise their relationship and institutionalise security ties. Tokyo and Seoul face increasing security challenges from North Korea's strategic moves involving China and Russia, and its unpredictable leadership. It is more than likely that the Japan-ROK relationship will consolidate under the US umbrella, as Japan ups its military profile.

Nuclear Japan. Japanese leaders and public have been increasingly engaged in recent years on the need to change the country's hitherto sacrosanct stance in regard to nuclear weapons. However, if pushed into a corner by multiple security concerns, there is every possibility that Tokyo may look down the nuclear road in real earnest. This will not only change the strategic balance in North East Asia, but also increase the chances of a nuclear mishap through miscalculation or hubris on the part of any

of four nuclear powers which will then be concentrated in a volatile and geographically compressed region.

Implications for India-Japan Security Ties

While high level summits, 2+2 ministerial meetings and military exercises between the two countries are well established, defence industrial corporation and operational coordination remain far short of the rhetoric. Japan's changed security posture has the potential to be a game-changer for ties between New Delhi and Tokyo, specially given the uncertainty about the future US strategic stance in Asia.

The relaxation of arms export restrictions could certainly accelerate the Tokyo-Delhi strategic relationship in concrete terms, as defence technology sharing between India and Japan has been weighed down by Japan's strict pacifist constraints. Its current policy shifts may gradually lead to concrete progress. However, as a defence development and manufacturing destination, India will have to compete for Japanese attention with developed regions, such as Europe and Australia.

With proactive geopolitical engagement on Tokyo's part, the operational exchanges between the Indian Navy and the JMSDF could translate into year-long activities, rather than occasional events. The two sides have recently institutionalised real time intelligence sharing and enhanced maritime domain awareness, following the landmark maritime security memorandum of arrangement (MoA) signed in August 2026.

The timelines for deployment of forces in the Indian Ocean and across the Indo-Pacific can be greatly minimised by the reciprocal logistics agreements already in force, giving each country access to the other's naval bases for repairs, maintenance and supplies, should they opt to do so. This is potentially another game-changer for both deterrence and security in the larger Indo-Pacific.

In so far as economic security is concerned, the two countries are making attempts to align their efforts on emerging technologies to counter regional economic coercion through collaboration in semiconductors, critical minerals, AI and battery supply chains.

Conclusion

Japan's military resurgence is generating the expected pushback from its three adversarial neighbours in North East Asia, who have all sharply criticised Tokyo for abandoning pacifism and increasing tensions. Tokyo on its part is making efforts to

deepen security ties with the US, the UK, Australia, South Korea and the Philippines to strengthen its hand in the Western Pacific.

India and Japan are unlikely to enter into a military alliance. However, Japan's security transition has the potential of aligning the security policies of both Tokyo and Delhi as a democratic hedge against rising volatility in the Indo-Pacific.

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India

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