

REVISION OF JAPAN'S DEFENCE POLICY AMIDST CONTEMPORARY INTERNATIONAL SECURITY THREATS: NEW HORIZONS FOR STRATEGIC BILATERAL PARTNERSHIP

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Introduction. Since the start of Russia's full-scale military invasion of Ukraine, the Japanese government has provided financial, humanitarian, non-lethal military and other forms of assistance, both bilaterally and through international organizations. The total amount of Japan's assistance to Ukraine has exceeded USD 20 billion. Besides of that, Japan have also provided equipment such as bulletproof vests and Japan Self-Defence Force vehicles, among other forms of support (MOFA of Japan, 2026). Japan's military aid is limited to non-lethal categories due to constitutional restrictions on the transfer of weapons to other countries and participation in military operations outside the country. As a result, Japan's military aid has been provided in the form of defensive equipment and vehicles. Article 9 of the Constitution of Japan promulgated forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, to accomplish which, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained and the right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized (the Constitution of Japan, 1946). At the same time, the interpretation of this article's provisions has been the subject of heated debate within the Japanese government and society, as well as among foreign governments, with interpretations ranging from the need to eliminate the country's military capabilities entirely to the need to rearm in response to recent security challenges in the region and around the world. Based on the latter, Prime Minister of Japan Sanae Takaichi and her government have declared a clear intention to review the country's policy in international security, which, given its current megatrend – the constant emergence of crises and their subsequent escalation – has, in our view, a significant chance of success and could present a good opportunity for Ukraine to expand areas of bilateral cooperation in the field of collective self-defence.

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Methods. To achieve the research objectives, a comprehensive set of scientific methods was employed: historical-comparative method, documentary analysis, prognostic method.

Results. Emerging from the Allied occupation, Japan's 1946 Constitution reflected the occupiers' early strategic priority: the permanent dissolution of Japan's military capabilities. This policy of disarmament was accepted by the Japanese government, fundamentally reshaping the nation's sovereign identity. Researchers generally concur that the concept of renouncing war originated during deliberations between Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers General MacArthur and Prime Minister Shidehara, with MacArthur being the first to formally document the idea (Umeda, 2015, p. 8).

The legal boundaries of Article 9 have proven to be fluid. As global tensions and American strategic priorities in East Asia shifted, the Japanese government adapted its constitutional stance to meet new security demands. Following the total disarmament mandate of 1945, where an exception was made for naval mine-sweeping activities. Japanese government firstly renounced war based even on the right of self-defence (Umeda, 2015, pp. 9-10), which was in line with the wishes of the American side. However, considering the growing challenges to American influence in the Asia-Pacific region, the United States began to independently initiate Japan's rearmament in response to the expansion of Soviet influence and the Korean War, which led to the establishment of the National Police Reserve – the precursor to the modern Japan Self-Defense Forces (SDF) (pp. 10-12). The need for some restoration of military capabilities on the archipelago, following certain discussions, was, in our view, addressed by paragraphs (c) and (a) of Articles 5 and 6 of Part III of the Treaty of Peace with Japan, signed at San Francisco on September 8, 1951, respectively. Thus, these articles provide for the recognition of Japan's "inherent right of individual or collective self-defense" in accordance with the UN Charter and establish a legal framework for the subsequent deployment of foreign troops on Japanese territory based on bilateral agreements (Treaty of Peace with Japan, 1951), which effectively integrated the country into the U.S. security architecture in the region.

The further evolution of Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution reflects a transition from total demilitarisation to a strategy of "burden-sharing" within the U.S.-Japan alliance. While the 1947 Constitution technically prohibits the maintenance of war potential, the creation of the SDF in 1954 established a precedent for a more flexible, technical interpretation of the law. This legal framework expanded significantly through the 1992 Peacekeeping Operations Act and the landmark 2014 cabinet decision, which authorized the exercise of collective self-defence. Despite deep-seated public attachment to pacifism, contemporary security threats have shifted the national discourse toward constitutional amendment, as the government increasingly prioritises strategic necessity over traditional scholarly interpretations (Umeda, 2015, p.1).

Thus, Japan provided USD 13 billion in funding for the operations of multinational force regarding Iraq's August 1990 invasion of Kuwait but did not provide any personnel. After a ceasefire was reached, Japan approved the dispatch of six Maritime SDF minesweepers to the Persian Gulf, what marked the first overseas SDF deployment classified as a special measure, a specific, time-limited mission approved by legislation, under the Self-Defense Forces Act. The SDF's next military operation was Rear-Area Support for the War on Terror, in response to the U.S. call for international support in its war against international terrorism following the events of September 11, 2021. In this case Japan focused on refuelling operations and other rear-area support, with Maritime SDF supply ships providing diesel and aviation fuel at no cost to the multinational forces operating in the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean. In 2003, responding to U.S. requests for "boots on the ground", the Prime Minister Koizumi administration passed special legislation to dispatch the SDF for Iraq's reconstruction. From 2004 to 2006, Japanese ground forces conducted humanitarian and infrastructure projects in Samawah, while the air force provided vital logistics and transport from Kuwait, marking a major expansion of Japan's overseas military role (nippon.com, 2026).

In our view, Japan's latest review of its security policy was initiated by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, whose cabinet adopted a resolution outlining the shift, which also relaxes limits on activities in U.N.-led peace-keeping operations and "grey zone" incidents short of full-scale war (Sieg & Takenaka, 2014). The adopted legislative also updated aim to expand Japan's military operational scope to include defending U.S. assets, intercepting transiting missiles, protecting international peacekeepers, and conducting strategic maritime minesweeping under the framework of collective self-defence (The Associated Press, 2014). By 2017, Prime Minister Abe sought to implement the inaugural revision of the nation's 1947 Constitution by 2020, with the primary objective of constitutionalizing the existence of Japan's military forces (Reuters, 2017). In 2020, following regional tanker attacks, Japan launched an independent intelligence-gathering mission in the Middle East to balance its U.S. alliance with Iranian relations. Utilizing «survey and research» provisions under the Ministry of Defense Establishment Act, the Maritime SDF deployed escort vessels and aircraft to monitor maritime security in the Gulf of Oman, demonstrating Japan's shift toward autonomous strategic operations (nippon.com, 2026).

Following the 2026 general elections, the pro-revisionist bloc, led by the Liberal Democratic Party and the Japan Innovation Party, secured a commanding supermajority (over three-quarters) in the House of Representatives, easily surpassing the two-thirds threshold required to initiate constitutional reform. Under Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi, a long-time advocate for amending Article 9 to bolster national security, the administration is expected to leverage its decisive electoral mandate to push for fundamental

constitutional reform. The primary challenge remains whether the Prime Minister Takaichi government possesses the political vision to resolve the Article 9 dilemma definitively.

Secured the political leverage to redefine East Asia's security landscape by overturning key postwar settlements, current administration is now positioned to pursue an ambitious defence agenda, including the creation of a foreign intelligence service, stricter anti-espionage legislation, and the development of a top-tier global military. Shifting public opinion now increasingly favours amending the pacifist charter to formalize Japan's military status. This trend is driven by a deteriorating regional security environment – marked by threats from China and North Korea – alongside declining confidence in the reliability of the U.S.-Japan security alliance. Japan's defence forces underwent serious changes in 2022 following Russia's invasion of Ukraine and China's launch of missiles over Taiwan that landed near Japanese islands. Funds were allocated for "counterstrike" missiles capable of striking China or North Korea in the event of an attack on Japan. In its largest military buildup in a decade, the country rushed to deploy missile batteries, radar towers, and ammunition storage facilities across the archipelago. Military spending was set to reach 2% of GDP by March 2028, compared to an unofficial cap of 1% (Gale, 2026).

Discussion. Considering the ongoing escalation of military conflicts worldwide, the emergence of new ones, and the growing tension in Japan's relations with other countries in the Asian region regarding security policy, we believe there is a significant possibility that Japan may amend its Constitution or adopt other measures that would expand the military component of its policy in case of failing such an attempt. In this regard, it is crucially important to proactively explore avenues for expanding defence cooperation with Japan, which will undoubtedly be of a bilateral nature, as Ukraine currently possesses the most relevant experience in waging high-tech warfare within the framework of collective self-defence. Such experience, in turn, could become a priority on the agenda and a valuable asset in securing Japanese support for Ukraine's defence sector to counter and mitigate the consequences of Russia's aggressive war against our country. Similarly, the very fact of bilateral cooperation will have a positive political effect on Japanese voters and political forces, encouraging them to continue supporting our country.

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