JAPAN STEPS UP: SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY UNDER KISHIDA

ROBERT WARD
IISS Japan Chair, Director of Geo-economics and Strategy

YUKA KOSHINO
Research Fellow for Security and Technology Policy, IISS
Japan's new National Security Strategy (NSS) published in December 2022 reflects a step change in Tokyo's thinking about its defence and security posture in favour of greater activism within the US–Japan Alliance as a means of boosting the alliance's overall deterrence capabilities. This document thus marks an historic break with the norms that have governed Japan's defence policy since the end of the Second World War.

JAPAN’S DETERIORATING STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

Tokyo’s updated NSS paints a bleak picture of Japan’s strategic environment, which it describes as being the most ‘severe and complex’ it has been since 1945. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has aggravated Japan’s concerns about threats to the Indo-Pacific status quo, particularly with regard to China’s intentions towards Taiwan. The recent chill in Japan’s relations with Russia, the evolving China–Russia strategic relationship and North Korea’s accelerating development of weapons of mass destruction have added to Tokyo’s concerns.

JAPAN’S RESPONSE

Key changes posited by the new NSS include a doubling of the defence budget in the next five years; acquisition of counterstrike capabilities; enhancing capabilities in new domains, such as space; the establishment of a Permanent Joint Headquarters to unify command over the armed services; a strategic focus on the islands in Japan’s southwest, which would be most immediately threatened by a Taiwan contingency; and boosting Japan’s war-fighting sustainability and resilience.

CHALLENGES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Notwithstanding the ambition of the new NSS, Japan faces a number of implementation challenges, including capacity shortages in terms of human resources and defence-technological capabilities, and the question of how to pay for the defence-budget increase.
Viewed from Tokyo, 2022 brought a marked deterioration in the security environment around Japan that has widened the geopolitical fault lines in its immediate neighbourhood and beyond. The Japanese government’s bleak assessment of the strategic environment was evident in the historic new National Security Strategy (NSS) and two related documents, the National Defense Strategy (NDS) and the Defense Buildup Program (DBP), which were all published on 16 December 2022.1 Replacing the 2013 NSS – Japan’s first such document – the 2022 NSS speaks of ‘historical changes in power balances, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region’ that are ‘defining an era’, recognising that Japan’s security environment is ‘as severe and complex as it has ever been since the end of World War II’.2 This assessment contrasts with the previous NSS, which, while for example flagging concerns about threats to the global commons from unilateral attempts to change the status quo, took a relatively benign view of Japan’s strategic challenges.3

**JAPAN’S DETERIORATING STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT**

**Deteriorating relations with Russia**

An important trigger for Japan’s rising alarm was Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Japan’s alignment with the other members of the G7 in terms of condemning and imposing economic sanctions in response to Russia’s war of aggression, together with financial and material support for Ukraine, chilled already tepid Japan–Russia relations.4 The immediate impact was to stall bilateral negotiations over the four disputed islands north of Hokkaido (the southern Kuril Islands, annexed by Soviet forces in 1945 and claimed by Japan as the Northern Territories) and for Russia to suspend related talks with Japan on a bilateral peace treaty.5 Consequently, Tokyo’s position regarding the islands has also hardened, signalling the end of the more emollient Russia policy pursued under the late Abe Shinzo’s second premiership from 2012–20. In March 2022, Tokyo reverted to its description of the islands as ‘inherent territories of Japan’ that are ‘under illegal occupation’, replacing a formulation describing them as ‘islands over which Japan has sovereignty’.6

Abe’s engagement strategy towards Russia was premised in part on Japan’s strategic need to prevent cooperation between Russia and China. However, securing significant concessions from Moscow always appeared an optimistic ambition, particularly given Russia’s strategic need to retain the islands and the changes to its constitution in July 2020, which, inter alia, prohibited the ‘alienation’ of Russian territories.7 Notwithstanding China’s concerns over Russia’s prosecution of its war against Ukraine and, notably, Moscow’s threats to use nuclear weapons, the rapid evolution of Sino-Russian strategic relations is adding more fuel to Tokyo’s strategic concerns. Examples of the operationalisation of these relations around Japan include the Sino-Russian aerial patrols over the Sea of Japan (East Sea) and the East China Sea in November 2022 – in which Russian bombers
### Map 5.1: China and Russia: selected joint patrols and exercises, 2019–22

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Equipment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23 Jul 2019</td>
<td>East China Sea; Sea of Japan (East Sea)</td>
<td>Aerial patrol</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>2x Tu-95 bomber ac; 1x A-50 ADVAC ac; 2x H-6 bomber ac</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 Dec 2020</td>
<td>East China Sea; Sea of Japan (East Sea)</td>
<td>Aerial patrol</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>2x H-6 bomber ac*; 2x H-6 bomber ac**; 2x Tu-95MS bomber ac</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18–23 Oct 2021</td>
<td>Tsugaru Strait; offshore SW Okushiri Island (Hokkaido); Pacific Ocean</td>
<td>Maritime patrol and exercise</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>1x CGHM; 1x DDGHM; 2x FFGHM; 1x AORH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 Nov 2021</td>
<td>Sea of Japan (East Sea); East China Sea; Pacific Ocean</td>
<td>Aerial patrol</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>2x H-6 bomber ac; 2x Tu-95 bomber ac</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 Jan 2022</td>
<td>Arabian Sea</td>
<td>Maritime exercise</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>2x DDGHM; 1x AOR; 1x DDGHM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 May 2022</td>
<td>Sea of Japan (East Sea); East China Sea</td>
<td>Aerial patrol</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>2x H-6 bomber ac***; 2x H-6 bomber ac****; 2x Tu-95MS bomber ac; 1x Il-20 ELINT ac</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–7 Sep 2022</td>
<td>Russia; Sea of Japan (East Sea)</td>
<td>Maritime patrol and exercise</td>
<td>Russia and CSTO states</td>
<td>China reportedly sent around 2,000 troops, tanks and armoured fighting vehicles and artillery pieces, 21 aircraft (reportedly including J-10C ac) and helicopters, as well as three naval vessels, reportedly 1x CGHM, 1x FFGHM, 1x AOR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3–29 Sep 2022</td>
<td>Sea of Japan (East Sea); Pacific Ocean</td>
<td>Maritime patrol and exercise</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>1x DDGHM; 3x FFGHM; 1x CGHM; 1x AOR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 Nov 2022</td>
<td>East China Sea; Tsushima Strait; Sea of Japan (East Sea); Sea of Japan (East Sea); Sea of Japan (East Sea); Sea of Japan (East Sea); Sea of Japan (East Sea); Sea of Japan (East Sea)</td>
<td>Aerial patrol</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>2x H-6 bomber ac; 2x J-16 FGA ac; 2x Chinese combat aircraft, type n.k; 2x Tu-95 bomber ac</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21–27 Dec 2022</td>
<td>East China Sea</td>
<td>Maritime exercise</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>2x DDGHM; 2x FFGHM; 1x AORH; 1x CGHM; 1x DDGHM</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: IISS, Japan, Ministry of Defense, www.mod.go.jp

Landed in China for the first time and Chinese aircraft then flew to Russia – and a joint maritime patrol in October 2021 that cruised around Japan’s Honshu, Shikoku and Kyushu islands en route to the East China Sea (see Map 5.1).
Rising tensions around Taiwan

Particularly since the 2020–21 administration of prime minister Suga Yoshihide, Japan has been more willing to articulate its concerns about Taiwan’s security. A joint statement following a summit between Suga and US President Joe Biden in April 2021 included a reference to the ‘importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait’. It was the first time that Taiwan had been mentioned in a US–Japan leaders’ statement since the 1969 summit between then US president Richard Nixon and then Japanese prime minister Sato Eisaku. It was followed in July 2021 by the first mention in a Japanese defence white paper of the importance of the stability of the ‘situation surrounding Taiwan’ for Japan’s security.

Concurrently, Japan has sought to strengthen its international partners’ interest in participating in efforts to preserve Taiwan’s security. Thus, in his keynote address to the June 2022 Shangri-La Dialogue, Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio linked European and East Asian security, asserting that ‘Ukraine today may be East Asia tomorrow’. Kishida’s subsequent attendance at a NATO summit – becoming the first Japanese prime minister to do so – in Madrid in June further underscored his linking of European and Asian security.

Note: North Korea also launched a modified KN-23 SRBM on 25 March 2021, which Japan initially assessed not to have landed in its EEZ – however, South Korea’s reassessment indicates that it may have.
Triggers for Japan’s greater willingness to voice its concerns about the stability of its southern flank include the increasingly strong rhetoric from Chinese President Xi Jinping regarding Beijing’s intent to absorb Taiwan into the People’s Republic of China; China’s intense territorial needling around the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, which Japan controls and China claims; and the rapid rise in China’s military spending, which is now estimated to be some five times larger than that of Japan. Moreover, in a belligerent response to then-speaker of the US House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi’s visit to Taiwan in August 2022, China conducted its largest-ever live-fire military exercises around the island, firing five ballistic missiles into Japan’s exclusive economic zone (EEZ) (See Map 5.2). This crisis focused Japanese attention on both the vulnerability of the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, which lie just 170 kilometres east of Taiwan, and the strategic importance of the Nansei Islands, which lie close to the disputed territory and would be a key staging post for any joint response by the United States and Japan to a Chinese attack on Taiwan.

**Intensification of North Korean missile launches**

In 2022, there was also a ratcheting up of the threat to Japanese security posed by North Korea. Pyongyang fired around 90 cruise and ballistic missiles, notching up a record for the number of missiles fired in one year. Indeed, one assessment indicated that 2022 accounted for some one-quarter of the 270 missiles fired and nuclear devices tested by North Korea since 1984. Pyongyang’s activities included the resumption of intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) tests for the first time since 2017. Of particular concern to Japan were the launch of an ICBM on 24 March (Pyongyang claimed this was a Hwasong-15, which would allow it to strike the US mainland with a large payload); the launch of an intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM) over Japan on 4 October – the first anniversary of Kishida’s becoming prime minister – marking the first time since 2017 that a North Korean missile had overflown Japanese territory; a Hwasong-17 launch on 18 November (the missile landed in Japan’s EEZ some 200 km off the west coast of Hokkaido); and the launch on 18 December (shortly after Japan’s release of its new NSS) of two ballistic missiles capable of reaching Japan, which landed in the Sea of Japan (East Sea) outside Japan’s EEZ.

As of February 2023, North Korea had not yet resumed testing nuclear devices despite scrapping in March 2022 a self-imposed moratorium on such tests in effect since November 2017. However, the intensity of Pyongyang’s ballistic-missile tests in 2022 and early 2023 (a Hwasong-15 ICBM launch took place on 18 February, landing in Japan’s EEZ off the west coast of Hokkaido) suggests that it continues to prioritise development of asymmetric capabilities. US intelligence reports in late 2022 suggesting that North Korea was supplying Russia with materiel for its war against Ukraine added further to Tokyo’s perception of the vulnerability of Japan’s western flank.

**JAPAN’S RESPONSE**

Against this background, the 2022 NSS represents an historic break with the norms that have governed Japan’s defence policy since 1945. One important initiative mentioned in the document is that Japan will develop ‘comprehensive national power’, which includes diplomatic, defence, economic, technological and intelligence capabilities and reflects the
The articulation of these capabilities is in itself a major advancement from the 2013 NSS, which attempted to take a cross-governmental approach to national security for the first time but remained primarily focused on diplomatic and defence capabilities. The most transformative element of the 2022 NSS, however, was the government’s commitment to bolster its national defence capabilities to an unprecedented level to take ‘primary responsibility’ to defend itself in the event that Japan is invaded. This is a step change from Japan’s previous defence and security policy, which relied on US security guarantees, and has broader implications for Japan’s role in the US–Japan Alliance as well as in regional security more generally in the event of conflict, for example over Taiwan.

Shift in approach, unprecedented spending increases

Although the second Abe administration laid out much of the groundwork for this shift to occur, Kishida’s administration deserves credit for revamping Japan’s defence and security posture in two ways. Firstly, it has developed Japan’s first post-war NDS, positing ends, means and ways to deter aggression and to disrupt and repel an invasion of Japan in the next decade. The NDS, modelled after the US National Security Strategy, was a structural break from previous recommendations made through the National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG), which were first introduced in 1976 amid the Cold War detente between the Soviet Union and the US and were updated most recently in 2018. The purpose of the NDPG was to define the size of the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF, Japan’s de facto armed forces) and to inform the five-year procurement plan – the Mid-Term Defense Program – needed to meet the ‘minimum necessary’ capability standard suggested by Article 9 of the Japanese constitution, which renounces ‘war as a sovereign right’ and prohibits the country from possessing land, sea and air forces. Therefore, the NDPG was not based on a war-fighting strategy per se. Indeed, the first NDPG in 1976 recommended building a ‘Basic Defence Force’ sufficient to prevent a power vacuum from emerging in East Asia; therefore, the force structure it described was not meant to counter particular threats. In contrast, the NDS seeks to respond to an ‘opponent’s capabilities and new ways of warfare’ to inform the five-year DBP.

Secondly, the Kishida administration has committed Tokyo to doubling defence-related spending to 2% of GDP and to invest ¥43 trillion (US$325 billion) to cover Japan’s ‘fundamentally reinforced defense capabilities’ in fiscal years 2023/24 to 2027/28. For Japan, the unparalleled size and speed of this defence-spending increase is an historic departure from the ceiling (1% of GDP) adopted by the Miki Takeo government in 1976 and continued even under the second Abe administration, which pursued robust security reforms to respond
to growing security challenges from North Korea and China. If realised, this increase will make Japan’s defence budget the third largest globally after the US and China.

Important influences on the planned increase in defence spending were the Japanese government’s threat assessments and simulations, which revealed that the JSDF would not be ready to deter aggression and respond to the threats potentially posed to Japan by 2027/28. Referring to Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the NDS claimed that unilateral changes to the status quo by force could also happen in the Indo-Pacific and that intentions of aggression are difficult to assess. It may not be a coincidence that the NSS’s target coincides with former commander of US Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) Admiral Philip Davidson’s assessment – conveyed in March 2021 – that China could invade Taiwan as early as 2027.

The government’s effort to implement step changes in JSDF capabilities focuses on seven key areas (see Figure 5.1 for more detail):

- stand-off defence capabilities
- integrated air and missile defence (IAMD)
- uncrewed defence capabilities
- cross-domain operational capabilities
- mobile deployment capabilities and protection of civilians
- command and control (C2) and intelligence-related capabilities
- the sustainability and resiliency of JSDF operations during wartime

**Implications for JSDF posture and operations**

Drawing lessons from the war in Ukraine, these capabilities are expected to enhance Japan’s defence and security posture in the three areas most relevant to potential contingencies around Japan. The first

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PREVIOUS PLAN</th>
<th>CAPABILITY</th>
<th>NEW PLAN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total 126.93bn</td>
<td>Stand-off defence capabilities</td>
<td>28.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Integrated air and missile defence (IAMD)</td>
<td>23.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uncrewed defence capabilities</td>
<td>7.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cross-domain operational capabilities</td>
<td>62.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mobile deployment capabilities and protection of civilians</td>
<td>15.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Command and control (C2) and intelligence-related capabilities</td>
<td>7.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sustainability and resilience</td>
<td>116.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strengthening the defence production base, research and development</td>
<td>10.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Base measures</td>
<td>20.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Education and training, fuel costs</td>
<td>31.15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 5.1: Japan’s Defense Buildup Program, 2022**

- Procurement of Joint Strike Missile (JSM) to arm the F-35A and Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile (JASSM) to arm the F-15
- Tomahawk Block V land-attack cruise missile procurement
- Improved Type 12 anti-ship missile production
- Hypersonic-missile development and production
- Hyper Velocity Gliding Projectile (HVGP) production
- 6 CH-47J/LA heavy transport helicopters, 77 UH-2 (Bell 412EP) multi-role helicopters
- 8 C-2 medium transport aircraft
- 10 aerial refuelling/transport aircraft (KC-46A etc.)
- Utilisation of civilian maritime-transport capacity (private finance initiative (PFI) vessels)
- 8 transport vessels
- Enhancements to the Defense Information Infrastructure (DII)
- 3 RC-2 electronic intelligence aircraft
- Increasing quantity and ensuring adequate inventory of ammunition and guided missiles
- Maintenance of equipment, and expansion of storage facilities
- Improving the resilience of defence facilities

**Source:** Japan, Ministry of Defense, mod.go.jp
is Japan’s response to the diverse missile threats posed by China and North Korea. The 2022 NSS established the ambition for the JSDF to possess the capability to ‘mount effective counterstrikes against the opponent to prevent further attacks’ in the case of attacks against Japan or a third country. The documents are vague regarding the specific targets (and whether to include the opponent’s C2 structure) and they are expected to be decided on a case-by-case basis.

This is a major shift from Japan’s existing missile-defence architecture, which relies on intercepting missiles through ballistic missile defence (BMD) systems rather than possessing a counterstrike capability. The debate over acquiring counterstrike capability is not new – the constitutionality of the capability was first stated by then-prime minister Hatoyama Ichiro as early as 1956. However, political, budgetary and technical challenges prevented successive governments from acquiring the capability, despite growing public support for this since 2017, when North Korea increased its missile launches.

To develop this counterstrike capability, Tokyo seeks to deploy indigenous stand-off missiles that are currently under development. It is also consulting with the US over the purchase of Tomahawk land-attack missiles for earlier deployment in 2026. First outlined in the 2018 NDPG, stand-off defence is defined by the government as ‘capabilities to deal with ships and landing forces attempting to invade Japan including remote islands from the outside of their threat envelopes’. Three types of indigenous missiles are under development: upgraded Type-12 anti-ship missiles with their range extended from 200 km to 900 km and with a new capacity to attack mobile targets; Block 1 hyper-velocity gliding projectiles; and hypersonic cruise missiles.

Developing a counterstrike capability to pursue a US-like ‘integrated air and missile defence’ (IAMD) would strengthen Japan’s deterrence against the emerging missile challenges posed by highly manoeuvrable Chinese hypersonic-weapons systems, as well as saturation attacks from both China and North Korea. Rapid development and mass production of diverse stand-off missiles could also help reduce the growing discrepancy in IRBM numbers between China on the one hand and the US and Japan on the other, adding credibility to deterrence.

The second area of enhancement is cross-domain operational capability, including the relatively new domains of space, cyber and the electromagnetic spectrum. Under the 2018 NDPG, Japan established several new units to enhance capabilities in these domains, such as Space Domain Mission Units for space situational awareness; a Cyber Defense Command to enhance the defence of JSDF networks across its branches; and electronic-warfare units within the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force (JGSDF, Japan’s de facto army) to monitor radar and other emissions from potential adversaries. However, the NDS
goes further by recognising these domains as ‘vitaly important’ for carrying out cross-domain operations in response to the complex threats facing Japan.\(^3^4\) In particular, it underscores the importance of the role of space in information gathering, communications and positioning functions in support of Japan’s new counterstrike capability.\(^3^5\) It also calls for a major expansion of the number of personnel working in the cyber-related units – such as the JSDF Cyber Defense Command – from 800 to about 4,000 by 2027, to enhance protection of its critical networks. The total number of defence-ministry and JSDF personnel engaging in cyber is expected to grow to 20,000 by the end of fiscal year 2027.\(^3^6\)

The 2022 NSS emphasised the need to strengthen Japan’s cyber security through a whole-of-government approach. Among the most innovative measures in this regard was the introduction of an ‘active cyber defence’, which allows the relevant government authority, including the JSDF, to use a limited offensive capability to ‘penetrate and neutralize attacker’s servers’ in advance of potential attacks against Japan’s networks.\(^3^7\) This makes strategic sense for Japan, given that the current porosity of its cyber defences and the weakness of its security-clearance frameworks are barriers to closer security cooperation with the US and like-minded partners. The NSS also calls for a restructuring of the National Center of Incident Readiness and Strategy for Cybersecurity (known as NISC), which, inter alia, coordinates intra-government cyber-policy formation, to create a new centralised organisation to implement these cyber-security policies.\(^3^8\)

Highly significantly for cross-domain operations is the establishment of the Permanent Joint Headquarters (PJH) headed by a joint-service commander, which will unify the command of the JGSDF, the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF, Japan’s de facto navy) and the Japan Air Self-Defense Force (JASDF, Japan’s de facto air force) to conduct joint operations in times of conflict as well as in peacetime.\(^3^9\) This is a breakthrough from organisational and operational standpoints. Under the existing Japan Self-Defense Forces Law, the JSDF can form joint task forces (JTFs) temporarily to conduct specific missions, such as BMD. However, in practice JTFs have not operated comprehensively across domains despite being joint units (formed by units from two or three branches of the JSDF). Moreover, JTFs have been led by senior commanding officers from different branches of the JSDF. As a result, the chain of command has been complex – undermining efforts to develop a unified approach for cross-domain operations.\(^4^0\) The new PJH and its commander will be indispensable as Japan seeks to operationalise the envisaged counterstrike capabilities, given that the relevant missile systems are expected to be deployed across the three JSDF branches.\(^4^1\)

The third area of enhancement is the defence of the southwestern region, where Japan’s Ryukyu Islands are located, to prepare for a potential contingency in the Senkaku/Diaoyu
islands or the Taiwan Strait. Since 2016, Japan has been rapidly expanding JSDF units in the Ryukyu Islands – as well as deploying new units there – to enhance its capabilities to defend this relatively remote territory.\(^{42}\) In light of growing tensions in the Taiwan Strait and increased naval activities by China in the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands and the Western Pacific, which China accessed through the Ryukyu Islands, the three documents take further steps to ensure that, from peacetime to contingency, preparations for a potential conflict in the southwest region of Japan are informed by a whole-of-government approach. For example, the JSDF, the Japan Coast Guard (JCG) and the police will conduct training and exercises to practise responses to potential ‘grey-zone’ and wartime challenges, including the protection of critical infrastructure, such as nuclear-power plants.\(^{43}\) The JSDF and the JCG will further enhance coordination by establishing an information-sharing mechanism and by developing new procedures so that the Ministry of Defense may exercise operational control over the JCG in the event of an armed attack against Japan.\(^{44}\)

The document also calls for Japan to increase investment in transport capabilities and to conduct a major military reorganisation in order to facilitate the mobile and rapid deployment of JSDF and civil-protection capabilities. To help achieve this aspiration, Tokyo seeks to expand the use and functions of existing airports and seaports as well as civilian aircraft and vessels.\(^{45}\) In addition, major procurement for the JSDF under the DBP includes eight transport ships, six C-2 transport aircraft and 13 KC-46A aerial refuelling/transport aircraft.\(^{46}\) To make JSDF units more mobile across the Japanese archipelago, the DBP calls for the reorganisation of 14 ground divisions and brigades based outside Okinawa into deployable mobile units.\(^{47}\)

The government has also earmarked one-third (approximately US$112bn) of the total new investment in defence for war-fighting sustainability and resilience, such as procurement of ammunition stocks and fuel, development of storage facilities, and improvement of the operational availability of defence equipment in Japan’s southwestern region.\(^{48}\) It also seeks to enhance the hardening of JSDF bases and to expand the functions and capacity of JSDF hospitals in the region.\(^{49}\)

Developing other elements of ‘comprehensive national power’, such as economic and intelligence capabilities, will also be important for Japan as it seeks to implement its defence goals and shape a favourable security environment. For example, the NSS outlines an ‘all-of-economy’ response to threats of economic coercion that includes promoting the rules-based economic order under the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership and enhancing economic security through supply-chain resilience and dual-use-technology protection and promotion. These steps serve to continue the efforts made by the Japanese government to enhance inter-agency coordination of economic-security policy under the 2022 Economic Security Promotion Act.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR THE US AND LIKE-MINDED PARTNERS**

Through these defence reforms, Tokyo seeks to play a greater role – in conjunction with the US and other like-minded partners – in responding to the spectrum of security threats, ranging from peacetime and grey-zone challenges to outright conflict. In relation to the US–Japan Alliance, the new strategic documents emphasise their alignment with the national-security
and defence strategies released by the Biden administration in 2022 and call for the alliance to enhance ‘joint deterrence capabilities of both countries in an integrated manner’. The NDS states that Japan will play a larger role in regional security and that the government’s approach is supported by the Japanese public. The US administration welcomed Japan’s new security-policy documents immediately after their release and held a series of high-level meetings – such as the Biden–Kishida summit and the US–Japan Security Consultative Committee (also known as the Foreign and Defense Ministers’ Meeting, or ‘2+2’) – within a month of their publication to deepen cooperation.

There are several areas of opportunity for enhancing joint deterrence and response capability under the new Japanese posture. One is counterstrike capability. The NDS states that Japan will gain support from the US in the realm of information gathering to make Japan’s counterstrike capability more effective. Japan’s development of a US-style IAMD – a concept that seeks to respond to airborne threats through ‘unified and optimized operation of various sensors and shooters through networks’ – leaves room for Japan to become integrated into the US IAMD if the two forces develop a joint C2 structure like that of NATO. The JSDF’s new PJH commander is expected to serve as a direct counterpart to the INDOPACOM commander, enabling enhanced operational coordination and bilateral planning for a potential regional conflict. An increase in joint and shared use of Japanese and US military facilities is expected to further enhance readiness for such a contingency.

Beyond cooperation under the US–Japan Alliance, the NSS further states ambitions to ‘build a multilayered network’ among US regional alliances and like-minded countries in pursuit of both Japan’s Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) framework and enhanced deterrence. In particular, the NSS calls for increased military-to-military engagement; intelligence exchanges through signing information-protection agreements; acquisition and cross-servicing agreements; reciprocal access agreements (RAAs); joint development and transfer of defence equipment and technology; provision of capacity-building support; cooperation and coordination of strategic communication; and the expansion and deepening of joint Flexible Deterrent Options with Japan’s partners through diplomatic, intelligence and economic means. The signing of regional RAAs with Australia in 2021 and the United Kingdom in 2022, the second and third countries, respectively, with which Japan has such agreements (after the US), were historically significant and further demonstrated Tokyo’s willingness to intensify security cooperation with like-minded partners. Following the first Japan–Philippines Foreign and Defense Ministerial Meeting in 2022, Tokyo is also deepening military exchanges with the Philippines, both bilaterally.
Due to the Philippines’ geographical location, this cooperation has strategic importance in the context of preparations for potential regional contingencies.

The promotion of defence-equipment and -technology transfer is another area where Tokyo seeks to make progress in cooperation with like-minded countries. As of February 2022, Japan had signed defence-equipment and -technology transfer agreements with 12 countries. However, the only major agreement on the transfer of equipment to another country’s armed forces (rather than to coastguards or other paramilitary forces) so far has been a 2020 contract to sell three fixed long-range radar systems and one mobile air-surveillance radar system to the Philippines for deployment in the Bashi Channel. Tokyo sees its collaboration with the UK and Italy on joint next-generation fighter development – through the Global Combat Air Programme (GCAP) – as a major opportunity to integrate its defence businesses into global defence-industrial supply chains and to develop Japan’s advanced defence-industrial base and increase its opportunities for international sales. The GCAP intends to produce a replacement for Japan’s F-2 combat aircraft by 2035.

CHALLENGES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Japan, however, faces a number of challenges in implementing its defence- and security-reform agenda. One challenge will be whether Japan can overcome its shortages of funding, manpower and defence-technological capabilities. The Kishida administration is seeking to increase taxes to support the defence-budget increase. However, there is no political consensus on such measures. While Japanese public opinion seems broadly supportive of the need to bolster national defence, polls suggest some 60–80% of the public wants Kishida to hold a snap general election before any defence-budget tax increases are implemented. JSDF capacity will also face
constraints as the government does not plan to increase the number of JSDF personnel in order to implement new initiatives, such as counterstrike capability and cyber defence. Tokyo seeks to accelerate investments to develop and use uncrewed naval, aerial and ground systems to mitigate personnel shortages. However, this approach will still require skilled personnel capable of developing and operating the new systems. Former senior JSDF personnel have claimed that Tokyo has to increase JSDF personnel numbers to 300,000 – from the current 247,000 – but the JSDF continues to face serious recruitment challenges.

The challenge is exacerbated by the rapid ageing of Japanese society and the country’s declining population. Japan’s defence-industrial and -technological base may also struggle to meet the JSDF’s requirements. Major Japanese defence businesses are generally only small parts of much larger conglomerates, contributing an average of just 4% of total group revenue and with only a single customer, Japan’s Ministry of Defense. According to Japan’s Ministry of Finance, the operating profit margin for defence equipment was 7.7% in the 2020/21 financial year, compared with 10% in major Western defence industries. Although Tokyo eased its arms-export restrictions in 2014, overseas sales have remained minimal due to the costly procedures of going through multiple approval processes across governments and the unpredictability of the government’s decision-making process. The lack of overseas sales reflects Japan’s dearth of experience in selling defence equipment abroad, one leading example of which was its unsuccessful bid in 2016 to sell Soryu-class submarines to Australia.

Tokyo is preparing to introduce a series of new measures, including new legislation by mid-2023 to reinforce its defence industry through cash injections; support for cyber-security protection to prevent technology outflow; and further revisions to the arms-export guidelines to facilitate third-country transfers of defence equipment. Government and public efforts to improve the predictability of sales opportunities abroad...
will be a vital factor in maintaining and expanding the domestic production and technology base.68

Another set of challenges is the administration’s need to overcome sectionalism across government as it attempts to meet its comprehensive national power development targets. The new defence and security documents call for close cooperation between the Ministry of Defense, the JSDF and civilian agencies – such as the police, JCG and local governments – to enhance Japan’s national security (such as through closer coordination across government to ensure the security of the Ryukyu Islands), cyber security and intelligence activities. It will not be an easy task to overcome cultural and organisational differences to improve the stove-piped nature of communications between them. Enduring sectionalism within the JSDF is a good example, and may be an obstacle to effective and timely implementation of the daunting list of goals included in the NDS and DBP. A report has suggested that the JGSDF, the JMSDF and the JASDF are struggling to reach agreement on the location of the PJH, leading its establishment to be postponed to 2024 or 2025.69 A delay could have major implications for Tokyo’s push to improve cross-domain operations and for US-Japan defence cooperation.

The new documents also call for close coordination with civilian research institutions and commercial technology firms to facilitate the JSDF’s adoption of advanced dual-use technologies in the realms of space and cyber. Interactions between the civilian sector and defence agencies have improved following, for example, new government initiatives to better coordinate strategy-making for dual-use-technology protection and promotion. These include sending defence-ministry officials to the Cabinet Office to offer expertise for inward-direct-investment screening and information management, and the government’s ¥500bn (almost US$3.73bn) investment fund for advanced technologies, such as artificial intelligence and quantum technologies.70 However, there remains a significant gap between defence and civilian research and development and there is room for improvement in non-military agencies’ understanding of future war-fighting trends and techniques – a shortcoming that threatens to undermine Japan’s potential in defence-relevant advanced technology.

The last set of challenges for implementation concerns Japan’s ability to manage relations with and control the expectations of domestic and external stakeholders and partners. High public support for a defence build-up and for deepening Japan’s role within the US-Japan Alliance – demonstrated in poll surveys – signals strong support for Japan to play a greater role in maintaining regional stability, including in the event of conflict. However, the sustainability of this support is still in question. While the government seeks to enhance ammunition stockpiles and facilities for wartime resiliency and sustainability in the Ryukyu Islands, the plan risks resistance from local governments, as in the case of Tokyo’s failure to deploy surface-to-ship and surface-to-air missiles on Miyako Island after establishing a new base there in 2019.71 Experts from the US and Japan have speculated about a possible nuclear threat from China, for example, as a scenario that could constrain Japan’s course of action in the event of regional conflict.72 Thus, discussions with local stakeholders and US counterparts will be critical to foster greater understanding of and support for Tokyo’s policies among local stakeholders and to manage the expectations of
the US regarding a realistic role for Japan in a potential Taiwan contingency.

Tokyo will further need to be attentive to extra-regional partners’ capacity and political will to engage in Indo-Pacific security. Since 2018, for example, several European countries have launched Indo-Pacific policy documents – which echo elements of Japan’s FOIP – to demonstrate their interest in preserving the rules-based order and stability in Asia. These include France (2018), Germany (2020) and the United Kingdom (2021). The EU also published such a document in 2021. These actors have also been increasing their military engagement in the region to help deter any coercive attempts to challenge the status quo. However, Russia’s war on Ukraine and the robust military assistance from Europe to help Ukraine defend itself are raising questions about their ability to continue their engagement, especially given post-coronavirus-pandemic budget constraints and economic pressures. The signing of an RAA with the UK in January 2023 was significant for Tokyo. However, whether the two countries’ militaries can significantly enhance practical defence cooperation will depend on the UK’s political and financial capacity to commit a larger persistent presence to the region or, at least, to undertake a major military deployment to the region on the scale of the 2021 Carrier Strike Group. Active diplomacy may therefore be required from Tokyo to encourage its European partners to maintain the momentum of deeper defence and security involvement in its region.

CONCLUSION

The security policies of the Kishida administration represent a structural break in Japan’s security posture. In effect, they put an end to the so-called Yoshida Doctrine, under which Japan relied on the US for its defence, maintained a ‘low posture’ in international affairs and pursued an economy-first domestic-policy stance, and which dominated Japan’s security discourse for most of the post-war period. If successful, the reforms outlined in the new NSS will increase significantly Japan’s role in its security alliance with the US and thereby reinforce Tokyo’s deterrence capabilities in terms of lethality and range. Moreover, Tokyo’s efforts to build and reinforce friendly coalitions and networks in the region are designed to further amplify Japan’s influence there. The discussions in February 2023 between Japan and the Philippines on deepening their bilateral security cooperation are yet another example of this. By extension, Tokyo hopes that these reforms will provide a credible security underpinning for the foreign-policy activism that gathered pace under the second Abe administration, with an emphasis on deployment of Japanese geo-economic power.

Japanese public opinion is largely supportive of the planned changes. This support is all the more striking given the intensity of the negative public reaction to the legislation
the Diet passed in 2015 to enable ‘collective self-defence’ in situations in which Japan’s survival was threatened. The Liberal Democratic Party’s policy platform for the July 2022 upper-house election, which led on foreign and security policy, was another sign of how much the public debate in Japan has changed with regard to security issues. The focus in the new NSS on ‘reinforcing the social base’ suggests the government is aware that it will have to continue to proselytise on the need for further security reforms. However, rising public concern about China’s intentions in the region suggests that a return to the Yoshida Doctrine is now highly unlikely. Notwithstanding political differences over how to pay for the expansion of Japan’s security role, the coming decade is likely to bring with it further profound changes in Japan’s security posture that will be transformative both for Japan and for the broader Indo-Pacific.

NOTES


10 Japan, Ministry of Defense, ‘Defense of Japan


five things to know about Japan’s possible acquisition of strike capability—pub-737210.


35 Ibid., p. 5.


41 Ibid.


45 Ibid., p. 16.

46 Ibid., pp. 15–16.


Japan steps up: Security and Defence Policy under Kishida


57 Ibid.


67 ‘<Dokuji> Tōgō Shireibu, Rainendo Sōsetsu Miokuri, Basho Meguri Tairitsu mo’ [Exclusive: Permanent Joint Headquarters will not be established in the next fiscal year due to competition over location], Sankei News, 29 December 2022, https://www.sankei.com/article/20221229-4XIS73AZQVONKLMNKH-ZCH2CSQ/.


69 ‘Miyako-jima e no Danyaku Hanyū ni “Beigun Shien no Misairu Iranai” Shushō Kantei Mae de Shimin ga Demo’ [‘We do not need missiles supported by the US’, residents protest in front of the Prime Minister’s Office regarding ammunition deployment on Miyako Island], Tokyo Shimbun, 11 November 2021, https://www.tokyo-np.co.jp/article/142242.


Robert Ward (@RobertAlanWard),
tweet, 17 June 2022, https://twitter.com/
search?q=robertalanward%20kishida%20plat-
form&src=typed_query&f=top.

Japan, Cabinet Secretariat, ‘National Security
Strategy of Japan’, December 2022, p. 34.