

Significance of Japan's 2022 National Security Strategy

Saroshi Siddiqui

Introduction

Japan spent the better part of seven decades after World War II staying out of military politics, something unusual for a major economy. Article 9¹ of its Constitution renounced war as a sovereign right, and Japan took that commitment seriously. Backed by Washington, it built one of the world's largest economies while maintaining a small military footprint.

Today, the question arises whether Japan is walking away from the pacifism rooted in its constitution, or merely stretching the definition without breaking it?

The 2022 National Security Strategy² marks the point at which Japan formally acknowledged that its post-war approach to security was no longer adequate for the region in which it actually finds itself. This is not just a technical shift in military capability, but a decision that points at something fundamental: how does Japan want to project itself going forward.

Role of the New Strategy

Japan's first National Security Strategy, published in 2013³, marked a departure from its long-held strategic tradition. Nine years later, the Kishida Government decided that the document needs a new direction.

The Kishida Government revised Japan's three key security documents. The National Defence Program Guidelines were replaced by the National Defence Strategy.⁴ The Medium-Term Defence Program was renamed as the Defence Buildup Program. When a government restructures and updates its security architecture, it clearly suggests that these are not merely small adjustments.

This is significant because Japan is a country that does not move quickly on security matters. The fact that it moved this decisively in 2022 indicates how seriously it views the current situation.

China's Rise and Japan's Security Concerns

China has become a central concern in Japan's changing security environment. Over the past few decades, Beijing has rapidly expanded its military capabilities, including naval, air, missile and nuclear forces, while increasing its activities in the East and South China Seas and around Taiwan. For Japan, this is not simply a question of China becoming a military power. Tokyo is particularly concerned by the developments around the Senkaku Islands and Taiwan because of their proximity to Japan and their implications for regional security.

Japan's concern is, therefore, also about how China might use its growing power. Tokyo has become increasingly concerned about attempts to alter the regional status quo through coercion or force, particularly around the East China Sea. China's expanding missile capabilities and strengthening strategic ties with Russia add to these concerns.

Impact of Russia's Invasion of Ukraine

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in Feb 2022 became another major factor in Japan's reassessment. For Tokyo, the conflict demonstrated that a major power could use military force against another state. Japan described the invasion as a serious challenge to the international order based on the rule of law.

The conflict also posed a direct regional threat to Tokyo. Russia has continued its military activities around Jaan and has strengthened strategic coordination with China, including joint military exercises and activities near its mainland. The 2022 NSS, therefore, identifies Russia's aggression against Ukraine, its military activities near Japan, and its strategic coordination with China as significant security concerns for Tokyo.

Japan's Diplomatic Bluebook⁵ explicitly argues that such challenges are no longer unique to Europe and can arise anywhere, including East Asia. This strengthened Tokyo's emphasis on credible deterrence and on working with allies and like-minded partners to protect the regional order.

The North Korean Factor

North Korea has spent decades developing nuclear weapons and missiles. Japan has closely monitored these developments. Japan's concern became more serious after a North Korean ballistic missile flew over Aomori prefecture in 2022.

Since then, Pyongyang has continued developing its capabilities with no serious indication of a change in direction. As Togashi argues⁶, denuclearisation is at an impasse, and Japan faces a genuine strategic question about whether its current approach to North Korea is still viable.

Counterstrike Capability: What is it and Why does it Matter

The most debated part of the National Security Strategy is the mention of counterstrike capability. The key distinction is between counterstrike capability and a pre-emptive strike. A preventive strike is launched to eliminate a threat before it materialises, which is not permitted under Japan's existing interpretation of the right to self-defence. According to a 1956 government interpretation, if an armed attack against Japan was imminent and there were no other means of defence, striking an enemy missile base could fall within the scope of self-defence.

Jain⁷ argues that Japan is no longer pursuing a passive or reactive diplomacy that characterised its earlier security policy. Instead, faced with a rapidly changing security environment, Tokyo has adopted a more proactive approach to preserve peace, stability, and international order. This represents a shift away from the earlier idea of 'One-nation Pacifism', under which Japan mainly focused on defending itself.

Japan is expanding how it can protect its security and contribute to regional stability without changing its constitution. Japan is taking on a more proactive security role, but the legal and political constraints that have shaped its post-war identity remain in place.

Japan's Defence Buildup and Military Modernisation

The Defence Buildup Program allocates JPY 43 trillion⁸ in defence spending over five years. It is a major increase aimed at strengthening the country's overall defence capabilities. Japan also plans to improve stand-off capabilities, integrated air and missile defence, and the use of unmanned systems, rather than limiting itself to traditional weapons. The nation is also making great efforts in space, cyber, and electromagnetic capabilities.

This defence buildup is important because it attempts to create a more integrated defence system. Japan wants to improve its ability to detect and respond to threats at greater distances while also improving its ability to operate across different domains. The development of stand-off missiles, stronger missile defence, unmanned systems, and space and cyber capabilities, therefore, goes beyond simply increasing the number of weapons.

Growing Uncertainty in the Indo-Pacific

The Indo-Pacific is an economic lifeline for Japan as it relies greatly on maritime routes for energy and resource imports, marking South China Sea and Strait of Malacca as strategically important routes. Any disruption to these would have immediate consequences on the Japanese economy.

Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) concept reflects the kind of regional order Tokyo seeks to preserve; one built on international law, freedom of navigation, and predictable rules. The National Security Strategy is partly about Japan's ability to help maintain that order.

Economic Security as National Security

The 2022 National Security Strategy treats economic security as a national concern, recognising that economic and technological vulnerabilities can directly affect Japan's security. It places particular importance on protecting critical technologies and strengthening the resilience of supply chains for essential goods and technologies. The Covid-19 pandemic exposed vulnerabilities in global supply chains, while Russia's aggression against Ukraine further increased risks to energy and food supplies.⁹ Japan has, therefore, sought to diversify supply chains, secure critical technologies and reduce vulnerabilities in the supply of strategically important goods.

Importance of the United States (US)–Japan Alliance

The NSS does not change Japan's fundamental opinion that the US–Japan alliance. At the same time, Japan wants to improve its own capability to respond to threats. The two countries have also been working to improve coordination and make the alliance more capable of responding to a changing security environment.

Japan contributes more to regional security through a larger defence budget and expanded capabilities, becoming a stronger partner within the alliance. It is not trying to replace the US security role in the region. Instead, it is trying to shift from being primarily a security recipient to a more capable security partner.

The NSS also notes expanded cooperation with Australia, South Korea, and India. The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue receives relatively little emphasis, which suggests that Japan continues to treat the US–Japan alliance as its primary focus and views multilateral frameworks as complementary rather than central.

Why the NSS Is Considered Historic

The 2022 NSS was unusually explicit in acknowledging that Japan's post-war security approach might no longer be sufficient under current conditions. That is a meaningful admission from a country whose national identity has been built substantially around the renunciation of military power. As Sheila A Smith¹⁰ documents in *Japan Rearmed*, Japan's security policy has undergone a gradual transformation over the past two decades. The evolution becomes evident in the 2022 NSS.

Implications for India

India and Japan already have a Special Strategic and Global Partnership, supported by regular high-level strategic and defence dialogues. In 2024, the two countries held the 17th Foreign Ministers' Strategic Dialogue and the third Japan–India 2+2 Foreign and Defence Ministerial Meeting, during which they discussed defence cooperation, FOIP, and regional security. Cooperation has also expanded into economic security: the first Japan–India Economic Security Dialogue in Nov 2024¹¹ discussed supply-chain resilience and critical and emerging technologies.

For India, this means Japan's defence buildup is not happening in isolation. It creates greater scope for practical cooperation in maritime security, defence technology, and economic security, while strengthening the network of partnerships that supports a free and open Indo-Pacific. The challenge for both countries will be to strengthen deterrence and contribute to regional stability without increasing the risk of escalation.

Conclusion

The 2022 NSS represents Japan's clearest strategic statement since the end of the Cold War. In the era of an increasingly confident China, a nuclear North Korea and Russia that demonstrated a willingness to wage war on its neighbour, Japan assessed that its post-war security posture could no longer suffice.

For India, a more capable Japan is a genuine opportunity. The alignment of interests in the Indo-Pacific is real, and the Special Strategic and Global Partnership gives both countries a working foundation. The open question is China. Japan has been careful to frame

the NSS in defensive terms, but whether that framing holds will depend on how Beijing responds to Japan's expanding capabilities. Managing that relationship without triggering the escalation on neither side is the central challenge.

Endnotes

¹ House of Representatives of Japan, “The Constitution of Japan”, *Government of Japan*, 03 Nov 1946, accessed 17 Sep 2026, https://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_english.nsf/html/statics/english/constitution_e.html

² Japan, “National Security Strategy of Japan”, *Cabinet Secretariat*, 16 Dec 2022, accessed 17 Sep 2026, <https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/siryoku/221216anzenhoshou/nss-e.pdf>

³ Prime Minister’s Office of Japan, “National Security Strategy and Related Documents”, *Government of Japan*, 2013, accessed 17 Sep 2026, https://japan.kantei.go.jp/96_abe/documents/2013/_icsFiles/afiedfile/2013/12/18/NSS.pdf

⁴ Japan Ministry of Defense, “Strategic Documents of National Security and Defense”, *Government of Japan*, accessed 17 Sep 2026, https://www.mod.go.jp/en/d_policy/basis/index.html

⁵ Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Global Security”, *Diplomatic Bluebook 2025*, accessed 17 Sep 2026, https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/2025/en_html/chapter3/c030103.html

⁶ Brookings Institution, “Should Japan Change Its Approach to North Korean Denuclearization?”, *Brookings*, 2025, accessed 17 Sep 2026, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/should-japan-change-its-approach-to-north-korean-denuclearization/>

⁷ Purnendra Jain, “Proactive Pacifism and Beyond: Japan’s Foreign and Security Policy Pivots to Pragmatism Replacing Idealism”, *Sage Publications*, accessed 17 Sep 2026, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/23477970251403706>

⁸ Japan Ministry of Defense, “National Defense Program Guidelines for FY2019 and Beyond”, *Government of Japan*, 2018, accessed 17 Sep 2026, https://www.mod.go.jp/en/images/guidline_pamph_english.pdf

⁹ Japan Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, “White Paper on International Economy and Trade 2023”, *Government of Japan*, accessed 17 Sep 2026, <https://www.meti.go.jp/english/report/data/wp2023/pdf/1-2-1.pdf>

¹⁰ Sheila A Smith, *Japan Rearmed: The Politics of Military Power*, (MA: Harvard University Press, 2019).

¹¹ Ministry of External Affairs, “Inaugural Round of India-Japan Dialogue on Economic Security, Including Strategic Trade and Technology”, *Government of India*, 2025, accessed 17 Sep 2026, <https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases?dtl/38603/Inaugural+round+of+IndiaJapan+Dialogue+on+Economic+Security+including+Strategic+Trade+and+Technology>

Saroshi Siddqui is a researcher with an academic interest in Japan's foreign and security policy, and Indo-Pacific security. She has interned with the United Services Institution of India (USI) and Geojuristoday. She is currently pursuing advanced studies in Japanese language and international relations from St Stephen College.

Article uploaded on 25-09-2026

Disclaimer: The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the organisation that he/she belongs to or of the USI of India.