

# From Pacifism to Pillar: Japan's Rearmament as an Enabler of U.S.-China Deterrence in the Indo-Pacific

**Alonso Izquierdo Grados**

IE University, Madrid, Spain.  
Bachelor's in Business Administration and Bachelor's in International Relations

E-mail: [aizquierdo.ieu2023@student.ie.edu](mailto:aizquierdo.ieu2023@student.ie.edu)

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## Abstract

Japan's post-Second World War identity has been defined by Article 9 of the 1947 Constitution, reflecting a position fixed in pacifism and dependent on the United States for security. However, recent developments from Shinzo Abe, including the 2022 National Security Strategy, National Defence Strategy, and Defence Buildup Program, indicate a significant but gradual shift toward strict self-defence and limited collective action. This article examines Japan's rearmament through capability, legal-operational and industrial reforms. Using Snyder's denial-punishment framework, it demonstrates how long-range strike systems, resilient bases and integrated air and missile defences strengthen deterrence against China. Walt's balance of threat logic frames these moves as targeted responses to regional threats rather than a departure from pacifism. Freedman's perspective on deterrence as signalling helps to explain why strengthened counterstrike capabilities and alliance coordination both reassure allies but heighten the risks of intensifying Chinese threat perceptions. The article highlights that Japan's military rearmament increases deterrence effectiveness, but it also increases escalation and entrapment risks, requiring complementary solutions such as crisis management mechanisms.

Keywords: Japan, Military Rearmament, Deterrence, U.S.-Japan Alliance, Indo-Pacific Security, China

## 1. Introduction

The end of the Second World War marked the beginning of Japan's transition towards democracy and long-term commitment to peace. The country committed to forgoing the use of force to resolve international disputes and to renounce war as a sovereign right, when it adopted its new postwar constitution in 1947.

In late 2022, the paradigm on how Japan approached global affairs, however, changed drastically. Defence expenditure increased by 26.3% from one quarter to another, including buying 400 U.S.-made Tomahawk cruise missiles for \$1.6 billion, thus making it Japan's biggest military reinforcement since World War Two.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Elaine Lies, "Japan to Hike Annual Defence Budget by a Quarter, Buy Tomahawks, Other Weapons," *Reuters*, December 23, 2022,

China is currently seen as Japan's biggest strategic challenge to maintaining peace and stability in the international community. As a result, Japan has shifted from its post-war pacifist posture and pledged to double defence spending to 2% of GDP by FY2027, under the 2022 National Security Strategy (NSS).

Japan faces the challenge of balancing its re-armament and extended militarisation with its long-term pacifistic norms and constitutional constraints, as stated in Article 9 of the 1947 Constitution. These constraints, however, have frequently been misinterpreted to allow fortifying the relationship with the United States.

Japan's militarisation has followed a gradual and legal stance rather than an abrupt change of paradigm. Within the post-war constitutional framework, Japan has moved gradually toward strict self-defence, eroding many post-war pacifistic constraints. Tokyo has reinforced the U.S.-Japan Alliance and taken a stronger military stance.

Externally, Japan's decisions move together with the US-Indo-Pacific Strategy (2022). The U.S. has framed Japan as one of its five most important regional treaty allies and described Japan as 'the cornerstone of regional peace, security and prosperity'.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the U.S. has strengthened extended deterrence and coordination with Japan.

The U.S. has built an asymmetric alliance in all of the Indo-Pacific. The U.S.-Japan alliance has acted as a

'powerplay' tool, where the U.S has used its strategic partnership to project influence and maintain regional stability. The United States has used its alliance with Japan for 'deterrence against communist threats, and control over Japan's postwar development'.<sup>3</sup> As a consequence, Japan has been dependent on U.S. protection.

The U.S.-Japan alliance has acted as a key stabilising force in Asia-Pacific since 1945, undermining hegemony. The 'hub-and-spokes' system has allowed the U.S. to anchor its military presence and extend deterrence in the region. Today, the U.S.-Japan alliance and the U.S. stance in Asia-Pacific face two big challenges: North Korea's nuclear and military progress and China's assertiveness in the region.

Additionally, the appearance of the 2024 US-Japan-Philippines Trilateral Partnership represents a strategy shift towards deterring Chinese coercion in the South and East China Seas and areas surrounding Taiwan. The Trilateral Partnership includes joint naval trading and coast guard exercises. Plans include the militarisation of the Philippines and developing maritime training activity around Japan in 2025. This marks a bigger Japan role in active deterrence.

Therefore, the U.S alliance strategy to demoralise China in the Indo-Pacific is strengthened by Japan's military rearmament, which includes capability building, legislative reform, and industrial policy. However, it creates the

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<sup>2</sup> White House, *Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States* (Washington, DC: Executive Office of the President, February 2022),

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<sup>3</sup> Victor D. Cha, *Powerplay: Origins of the U.S. Alliance System in Asia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), page number.

environment for Chinese military expansion and hostility in the area, raising the possibilities of entrapment risks based on U.S policy decisions.

Against this evolving environment, the article aims to answer: To what extent does Japan's rearmament—encompassing capability enhancement, legislative reform, and industrial policy—strengthen the U.S. alliance strategy to deter China in the Indo-Pacific?

## 2. Background Analysis

### 2.1 From Pacifism to Abe-Era Interpretation

Japan's post-Second World War military stance has been explained by Article 9 of the Constitution of 1947. After the Second World War, Japan promoted pacifism by renouncing war as a sovereign right and renouncing the threat of the use of force as a way for settling international disputes.<sup>4</sup> Article 9 established a long-lasting pacifistic commitment, which shaped Japanese foreign policy for many decades. As Thomas U Berger (1998) argues, anti-militarism became a legal norm but also embedded in the public narrative. Antimilitary sentiments were impacted by Japan's moral failure and loss during the Second World War. Japanese national identity was shaped around peace, and around access to trade and foreign markets for economic recovery.<sup>5</sup>

However, by the early 2000s, the military and security paradigm in Japan began to shift dramatically. The first

nuclear test made by North Korea in 2006, as well as China's assertiveness in the East China Sea, led Japanese politicians to reconsider their pacifistic stance. Furthermore, U.S priorities shifted from containing Japan to containing China in the Asia-Pacific, motivating Japanese re-militarisation.<sup>6</sup>

Under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Japan began to reinterpret its pacifist constitution. This can be seen as part of what Samuels (2007) describes as a "quiet transformation" through which Japan has become better prepared legally to act in its own defence.<sup>7</sup> On July 1, 2014, Abe's Cabinet constructed Article 9 to permit 'collective self-defence', marking a significant turning point by allowing the Japan Self-Defence Forces (JSDF) to defend an ally in the event of an attack. This was the first significant departure from Japan's long-standing pacifist policy, which forbade collective self-defence.

Abe's reinterpretation of Article 9 was enacted and put into effect by the Legislation for Peace and Security (2015), which changed Japan's security strategy a year later. As a result, by directly supporting American-led missions and protecting its friends, Japan deepened its connection with the United States. According to the Centre for Strategic Studies (CSIS) report, Abe's measures established the legal foundation for Japan's "Proactive Contribution to Peace", based on international cooperation. The reinterpretation

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<sup>4</sup> Prime Minister's Office of Japan, "The Constitution of Japan," accessed November 15, 2025,

<sup>5</sup> Thomas U. Berger, *Cultures of Antimilitarism: National Security in Germany and Japan* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998)

<sup>6</sup> Khithie Robinson, "US Pivot to the Asia-Pacific: Implications for Sino-Indian Relations," *World Affairs: The Journal of International Issues* 19, no. 4 (Winter 2015): 74–91.

<sup>7</sup> Richard J. Samuels, *Securing Japan: Tokyo's Grand Strategy and the Future of East Asia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007)

of Article 9 marked a critical turning point, closing legal gaps and allowing the JSDF to provide logistical and operational support to the U.S, strengthening coordination.<sup>8</sup>

### *2.2 NDS, NSS and the Defence Building Program*

In December 2022, Tokyo released the three security documents, the National Defence Strategy (NDS), the National Security Strategy (NSS) and the Defence Building Program (DBP), marking Japan's most important security and military shift since 1947. These statements describe China as “the greatest strategic challenge” to ensuring the peace and security of Japan. Japan has committed to raising defence spending to 2% of GDP by FY2027 and strengthening its alliance with the U.S. to increase capabilities for deterrence strategy and resist coercion.

The NDS defines the security environment as “the most severe and complex” since the Second World War. Operationally, it calls for a “fundamental reinforcement” of Japanese defence capabilities. This includes strengthening their key mission areas such as missile defence and integrated air, unmanned capabilities, cross-domain operations, resilience, and command, control and Intelligence-related functions (C4ISR). All of this, to establish joint operations with the U.S and deepen planning and interoperability. The NDS establishes three clear security objectives, (1) shape a security environment

that does not tolerate unilateral changes to the status quo by force, (2) deter unilateral changes to the status quo by force or attempts that risk Japan's security, through collaboration with Japan's allies and (3) if deterrence fails, rapidly respond to the invasion in a seamless manner and receive support from allies.

The NSS reframes security as comprehensive (space, cyber, electromagnetic, air, maritime, mobility priority and improved coverage). Also, it builds the stage for the creation of an external environment that reinforces security and economic growth through deterrence and disrupting attacks on Japan. Furthermore, Japan has introduced the need for counterstrike capabilities due to the recent military escalation of North Korea and China. Relying only on ballistic missile defences will make it increasingly complex for Japan to deal with missile threats. As a result, counterstrike capabilities will be essential for Japan to deal with coercion and deterrence. If an armed attack against Japan occurs, counterstrike capabilities enable Japan to mount effective counterstrikes against the opponent's territory.

The DBP translates both the NDS and the NSS into actionable measures. For strengthening Japanese air defence capabilities, Aegis System Equipped Vessels, radars and interceptors will be procured. This also includes the incorporation of U.S.-made Tomahawk Missiles. Furthermore, non-kinetic tools will be developed, encompassing high-power lasers and high-power microwaves. Munition depots will be added, as well as

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<sup>8</sup> Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), “New Japan Self-Defense Force Missions under the ‘Proactive Contribution to Peace’ Policy,” accessed November 15, 2025,

expanding and fueling stockpiles and hardening military facilities, making them harder to find and disable.

This three-document package consolidates the Abe-Era legal interpretations into capabilities and alliance reinforcement. Japan has built the framework to credibly contribute to U.S.-led China deterrence through robust longer-range capabilities and air defences. Still, Japanese measures lie within the boundaries of Article 9. As Adam Liff argues, Japanese re-militarisation is historic yet evolutionary, turning these plans into reality will take years of sustained funding, legal reforms and tighter US-Japan roles and coordination.

### 2.3 Capability Enhancement

Japan's military enhancement from 2022 is best defined by Glenn H. Snyder's argument, which states that deterrence and defence are complementary forces.<sup>9</sup> Deterrence threatens punishment after an attack and the defence tries to deny gains during it. Snyder highlights two main strategies for stopping aggression: making an aggression fail (denial) and making it costly (punishment). In other words, denial builds the military capabilities to stop an attack and punishment builds the military capabilities to retaliate. Snyder states that any national security strategy must choose and find a balance between 'deterrence of, and defence against, military attacks'. Where denial is mainly measured by the deterrer's capabilities ('denial capabilities') and punishment by intent (the

adversary's perceived probability that you will retaliate). Japan is buying tools and strengthening on both sides, making deterrence theoretical but also practical.

A Letter of Acceptance (LOA) has been signed by Tokyo, opening the door for it to purchase 400 Tomahawk cruise missiles manufactured in the U.S. As a result, the JMSDF's Aegis-equipped ships may launch long-range strikes. Additionally, the new long-range Type 12 missiles (land, air and ships) have been advanced by a year by the Japanese Ministry of Defence (MOD), increasing their range to 1,000 km. Consequently, the Ryukyu Island chain's coastal and marine denial will be strengthened.

On the defensive side, Japan is strengthening the IAMD (Integrated Air Missile Defence) capabilities by adding two new Aegis System Equipped Vessels to provide widespread national missile protection. These new vessels will work along PAC-3 interceptors and the JADGE (Japan Aerospace Defence Ground Environment) to create a structured and layered defence system. The objective of defence building is to stay resilient under an attack and buy time for Japan until alliance responses arrive.

Japan's three key strategy documents explain why a strike as a retaliation capability is added to the defence system. The NSS (2022) warns that if Japan continues to rely solely on ballistic missile defences, it will become increasingly difficult to fully address missile threats. As a result, building counterstrike capabilities is essential for enabling Japan to mount effective counterstrikes against its opponents and prevent prospective attacks. Japan's military doctrine emphasises two ideas: intercept the

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<sup>9</sup> Glenn H. Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense: Toward a Theory of National Security* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961)

attack, if the attack succeeds, suppress the attack using counterstrike capabilities.

Independent studies show the scale and implications of these military changes. The IISS (International Institute for Strategic Studies) judges that Japan's recently incorporated long-range weapons, especially the Upgraded Type 12 missile, will greatly strengthen its coastal defence and ability to strike in key East Asian Waters.<sup>10</sup> However, risks have been raised regarding whether Japan is going to be able to introduce infrastructure which supports industrial capacity. RAND Corporation adds the perspective that these long-range military systems will force alliance integration (shared targeting and avoiding friendly fire).<sup>11</sup> The objective is that alliance forces act as a single, stronger defence instead of two separate ones with overlapping arsenals.

Snyder makes this idea easier to understand. He distinguishes between deterrence by denial and deterrence by punishment. Deterrence by denial means raising the probability of failure from an attack and the latter one means raising the expected cost through retaliation, basically making an attack too costly because of the threat of retaliation. He also identifies a perception gap: denial depends on how strong the deterrer's capabilities seem and punishment depends on whether the deterrer seems willing to strike back. Japan's new defence plan targets both

perspectives. Missiles like the Upgraded Type 12 and HGVP (Hyper Velocity Gliding Projectile) increase Japan's ability to stop an attack (denial). On the other hand, Japan's Tomahawk and JSM (Joint Strike Missile) missiles, used in coordination with allies, show Japan's capabilities to retaliate (punishment).

Lawrence Freedman's signalling point complements this. He argues that deterrence works as structured signalling by 'setting boundaries for actions and establishing risks associated with crossing these boundaries'.<sup>12</sup> However, its effectiveness depends on how threats are perceived and interpreted by the adversary, making communication a key pillar in the deterrence strategy. Japanese laws and policies, like its new defensive position and the Three Security Documents establish and ensure Japanese counterstrike and defence measures are bounded. Thus, helping prevent misunderstandings while keeping Japan's threats credible and bound to existing laws and international policies. Through the combination of clear rules with strong capabilities, Japan turns weapons into defence, but also into reassurance from its allies and into warnings and dangers to possible aggressors.

Geography plays an important role in Japan's strategy. As Yoshira and Holmes argue, whoever controls the area around the first island chain (mostly including territory from Japan, Taiwan and the Philippines) will have the

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<sup>10</sup> International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), "Japan Set to Enhance Its Anti-Ship Missile Inventory," accessed November 15, 2025, .

<sup>11</sup>David A. Ochmanek et al., *Inflection Point: How to Reverse the Erosion of U.S. and Allied Military Power and Influence* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2023)

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<sup>12</sup> Lawrence Freedman, *Deterrence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004)

ability to influence Chinese naval options.<sup>13</sup> Allies positioned along the first island chain will have the ability to limit China's freedom to move and to act. Japan's spread out long-range military capabilities, such as the Upgraded Type 12 missiles, ship-and-air long range missiles and improved maritime ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance) tighten and strengthen the Japanese defensive line, stretching from Kyushu through the Ryukyus toward Taiwan. Thus, making a quick fait accompli significantly more challenging for China to execute, thereby constraining its ability to attempt a surprise takeover and alter the status quo.

#### 2.4 Legal–Operational Reform and Alliance Reliability

Japan's post-2014 legal and operational reforms have not only expanded military capacity, but they have also targeted core problems in alliances: reliability and credibility. As Stephen M. Walt defines in his book 'The Origins of Alliances' (1987) that alliance alignment depends on whether the partners assess threats in the same way (proximity, offensive capability), and whether trust that allies will show up when needed exists.<sup>14</sup> Japan's reinterpretation. Furthermore, Walt introduced a redefined balance of power idea into the international arena. He said that states balance against threats. Threat acts as a function of offensive capabilities, aggressive intent, proximity and aggregate power. As a result, most states balance against the actor that scores high on those dimensions. Japan's recent

actions fit this framework, they are responses to shifting threat perceptions rather than power politics alone. By linking new authorities and military capabilities to specific contingencies, Japan increases alliance credibility while avoiding entrapment in unwanted conflicts, aligning actions with Walt's balance-of-threat theory. Japan's reinterpretation of collective self-defence (2014), the enactment of the Legislation for Peace and Security (2015) and the updated U.S.-Japan Defence Guidelines (2015) reduce uncertainty on when and how Japan can support the United States (and vice versa). This marks a critical paradigm shift, from Japan's "shield" stance during the Cold War towards a more flexible and conditional collective action stance. The 2022 three military document package translates legal changes into counterstrike options, integrated intelligence systems and higher munition depth. Together, these legal and operational changes make deterrence stronger by ensuring more reliable support and aid if a conflict occurs.

Operationally, the 2015 Guidelines shift the U.S.-Japan alliance from focusing on areas surrounding Japan to mission-based coordination across air, cyber, maritime, grey-zone and contingencies. The Alliance Coordination Mechanism (ACM), created under the 2015 Guidelines, institutionalises crisis planning, information-sharing, and logistics coordination. The U.S.-Japan alliance builds reliability through coordination, joint missile planning and defence, intelligence sharing and logistics support. Leeds finds that alliances are more successful when commitments

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<sup>13</sup> James R. Holmes and Toshi Yoshihara, *Red Star Over the Pacific: China's Rise and the Challenge to U.S. Maritime Strategy*, 2nd ed. (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2019)

<sup>14</sup> Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987)

are specific and routinised.<sup>15</sup> Japan's reforms support this idea. They set defined conditions ("important influence" on Japan's peace and security) and authorised the Self-Defence forces to support U.S operations and coordinate joint training and interoperable communications, making non-cooperation visible and costly.

Japan's legal reforms provide clarity and boundaries for alliance commitments. Allowing collective self-defence narrows the gap between fear of abandonment and fear of entrapment. Pre-2014, uncertainty about defending U.S forces or acting beyond the homeland fueled mutual doubts. The 2014-2015 reforms set clear, conditional triggers, support when Japan's survival is threatened, giving Washington a clear planning baseline without a blank check. As Green (2017) argues, effective alliance management depends on realistic divisions of labour and consistent signalling. Counterstrike capabilities paired with layered defence systems signal both restraint and resolve, making the alliance credible to adversaries and acceptable to domestic and regional actors.<sup>16</sup>

The 2022 package deepens alliance reliability in two ways. Capability credibility (a) through new missiles, larger stockpiles, improved bases, making sustained operations possible and turning denial and punishment into reality. Procedural Capability (b) through joint planning,

integrated air missile defences, and cross-domain coordination, speeding up execution. Japan shortens the 'credibility chain' (plan → forces → logistics), lowering the risk that errors trigger a conflict.

The 2024 U.S.-Japan-Philippines Trilateral Statement increases predictability through cost-guard cooperation, domain awareness and capacity building along the first island chain. CSIS argues this as a trilateral deterrence, in which posture, signalling, and partner capabilities are coordinated so that China faces consistent costs.<sup>17</sup> For Japan, this trilateral alliance reduces the risk of abandonment, while clarifying roles such as an integrated air missile defence system and logistics, helping to avoid entrapment. Credibility is also rooted domestically, Japan's proactive contribution to peace doctrine creates audience costs if Tokyo fails to act within its own rules and boundaries, while letting actors justify restraint.

As Japan's trilateral and counterstrike capabilities develop, adversaries, especially China, will test for weaknesses. Alliance reliability hinges on three areas: (1) clear legal rules, (2) visible but controlled operations with the U.S and the Philippines and (3) tight diplomatic and military coordination so signals are coherent, not escalatory. Japan's legal and operational evolution makes commitments capable, practised and conditional,

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<sup>15</sup> Brett Ashley Leeds, "Alliance Reliability in Times of War: Explaining State Decisions to Violate Treaties," *International Organization* 57, no. 4 (2003): 801–27.

<sup>16</sup> Aaron L. Friedberg, *By More Than Providence: Grand Strategy and American Power in the Asia Pacific Since 1783* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017),

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<sup>17</sup> Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), "Building a U.S.–Japan–Philippines Triad," accessed November 15, 2025,

deepening alliances, deterring threats and if necessary, retaliating effectively.

### 2.5 Industrial Base and Export Liberalisation

Japan's post-2022 transformation has not only been legal and operational, but it has also been industrial. Japan now considers defence production capacity as a strategic area for its deterrence posture. The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) has driven this transformation. In 2023, the 'Three Principles on Transfer of Defence Equipment and Technology' were revisited. The revision expanded permissible defence equipment exports, including certain lethal items and to third countries through jointly developed projects. Furthermore, Japan recognises that maintaining a strong defence industrial base is key to its defence capabilities and exports can support this goal. METI presents these new measures as a way to strengthen supply chains, stabilise domestic production and promote innovation. In the end, Japanese companies are being included in the supply chains so that capabilities stated in the NDS, NSS and NBP can be produced and sustained.

Historically, the Japanese defence industry was limited by post-war rules and a model centred on licensed production for domestic use. RAND (2022) characterises the results as capable engineering being trapped in a weak system, with low production, small profits, dependence on a single supplier and export prohibitions that limited investment in R&D.<sup>18</sup> The new policy shifts the logic from

'just-in-time' to 'ready-to-sustain', prioritising the use of technologies dually (sensors, software), modularity and surge capacity. The final goal is to make Japan's deterrence industrially scalable, ensuring that munitions and critical subcomponents can be produced and delivered in time.

Operationally, the 2023 policy rests on three main pillars. First, an industrial base reinforcement which strengthens smaller industrial suppliers by giving them subsidies and guaranteed sales, helping them avoid production delays and supply shortages. Second, incentivising co-development and co-production with trusted allies (U.S., U.K. and Australia), such as in the GCAP (Global Combat Air Programme) fighter project. Thus, achieving economies of scale, shared standards and flexible support. Third, controlled export liberalisation with monitoring and transparency. Joint development programmes and platforms will be established and shared with partners which have similar objectives as Japan. METI's focus is clear: exports are not only commercial, but they are also a resilient tool which keeps production lines active and sustained in peacetime, and scalable in crises.

Christopher Hughes describes Japan's turn as strategic industrial logic in his *Japan as a Global Military Power* work (2021).<sup>19</sup> Japan's strategy has been to use international cooperation to sustain domestic production and national security, instead of isolating itself. Policymakers have developed the idea of 'deterrence by production', where reliable stockpiles, rapid re-supply and

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<sup>18</sup> Jeffrey W. Hornung, "Japan's Upcoming Defense Efforts: What to Expect," *RAND Corporation*, December 2022,

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<sup>19</sup> Christopher W. Hughes, *Japan as a Global Military Power: New Capabilities, Alliance Integration, Bilateralism-Plus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022)

repair capabilities strengthen both denial and punishment strategies by ensuring that domestic operations are sustainable over time. To maintain political legitimacy in a pacifistic democracy, METI and the Cabinet have framed liberalisation within Japan's 'Proactive Contribution to Peace' framework. Japan has emphasised that the transfer of military-related equipment is constrained by law, allies and transparency. The goal is to reassure on two fronts: to allies, that Japan can provide equipment when needed, reducing abandonment risks, and to domestic audiences, making weapon sales strengthen security and not only profits.

Nevertheless, implementation challenges are real, just as Adam Liff argued. Japan's defence sector remains small and concentrated by G7 standards, with a limited number of prime contractors (such as Mitsubishi Heavy Industries) dominating procurement. Japan faces profitability challenges that deter private investment and limit the number of qualified suppliers. Without reliable procurement and consistent export channels, firms will be reluctant to increase capacity or to invest consistently in R&D. Warnings have been issued on whether co-production succeeds only when partners synchronise on standards, data architectures, cybersecurity and export controls, areas where bureaucratic coordination is improving but unevenly. Brookings (2024) highlights another constraint: building resilient allied supply chains requires redundancy, which can look inefficient in peacetime. Finally, concentration among a few prime contractors may cause consistently higher than expected

costs and discourage new entrants. Procurement and intellectual property frameworks must be shifted towards incentivising competition and modular, open systems.

The strategic benefit, however, is significant. Industrial cooperation and development turn Japan's deterrence from a force posture into a production posture. By embedding Japanese production in allied programs, abandonment risks are reduced and the costs of coercion are raised. Japan's capabilities are built into partner platforms and if any enemy disrupts Japan's supply chains, multiple allies would be involved, escalating further conflicts. In crises, diversified co-production of military equipment and sharing common standards between allies improve endurance. Munitions can be refilled, components swapped, and repairs made across all of the established domestic facilities. In peacetime, steady export demands keep production running, lowering unitary costs and helping keep skilled workers ready for crisis periods.

Japan's industrial and export reforms are the connectors between its three document packages and real-world capabilities. Success depends on sustained funding, accountability, predictability and careful domestic political framing. If Tokyo delivers on these conditions, its rearmament will result in an industrial deterrent network, credible to allies and to enemies because it can be built and sustained and stabilised because it links Japan's security to the strong resilience of allied supply chains.

### **3. Discussion of Findings**

Japan's rearmament illustrates a dual perspective: it strengthens the credibility of the U.S.-Japan alliance deterrence against China and at the same time, it intensifies the regional security dilemma and increases the risks of escalation. Japan's strengthening of military capabilities through the acquisition of long-range strike systems and layered missile defence improves denial by complicating Chinese plans for a rapid takeover in the first island chain. On the other hand, counterstrike capabilities such as the Upgraded Type 12 systems and the Tomahawk cruise missiles strengthen punishment by showing that any aggression against Japan could prompt costly retaliatory measures carried out alongside the U.S.

From the viewpoint of alliance politics, these changes directly engage with long-standing concerns about reliability and allocation of burdens. Walt's balance of threat logic shows that states respond strongly to nearby powers that are strong and unpredictable. Japan's legal interpretations, industrial reforms and the three document package can be seen as a measured reaction to China's growing threat, not just a generic attempt to balance power. Freedman's emphasis on deterrence as structured signalling is key: by adding new capabilities within specific legal constraints and alliance frameworks, Tokyo shows its determination while bounding its behaviour, thus reassuring audiences domestically and partners.

At the same time, the very signalling that strengthens deterrence can also increase friction. Freedman argues that deterrence depends not only on capabilities but also on how signals and threats are perceived. Japan's clear legal

powers, its counterstrike posture, and closer coordination with allies are intended to be considered as stabilising measures. However, in a competitive environment, China might see these steps as a more assertive Japanese role along the first island chain. While Japan looks more credible and reliable to allies, China may feel more threatened. This interpretative gap creates a risk: Japan's building of capabilities or joint exercises with allies can be misread as preparations for containment against China. Thus, entering into a reinforcing cycle of counter-armament, even if Japan has no intention of attacking.

In reality, this pattern is most evident in the East China Sea near and around Taiwan, where regular air and sea encounters, coast guard standoffs and overlapping Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) are present. In these areas, Japan's enhanced role and military capabilities strengthen deterrence credibility, but it may also undermine crisis stability by forcing accelerated decisions and increasing the number of armed actors in close proximity.

In summary, evidence suggests that Japan's military rearmament and stronger alliance integration and coordination will make deterrence stronger and more reliable, especially in preventing quick coercive moves by China. However, the same actions increase escalation risks by making China feel more threatened, increasing daily frictions and leaving less room for mistakes or miscalculations. The main challenge for policymakers isn't just to build military capacity. It also requires putting in place strong crisis-management channels, maintaining clear

and open intentions and building precise guidelines for military conduct. By doing this, these measures will cause deterrence to be effective while minimising the chances of unintended escalation.

#### 4. Policy Recommendations

The findings show that Japan's military buildup has made deterrence more credible but also increased the risks of escalation and entrapment. Rather than following a single path, the following policy recommendations suggest ways for Japan and its allies to boost denial and punishment while keeping associated risks under control.

##### 5.1 Consolidate Industrial Integration with Allies

Japan's post-2022 industrial shift treats defence production as a strategic measure for making deterrence stronger. Building on METI's reforms, the three Principles on Transfer of Defence Equipment and Technology, DICAS and projects such as GCAP, they could make Japan deepen cooperative production with trusted partners, thus making deterrence by production into a long-term reality.

One possible option is to prioritise jointly developing and maintaining key systems already mentioned in the three security documents: air and missile defence, long-range missiles, C4SIR (Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance) and stockpiles of munitions. Establishing these systems steadily and reliably would address the weaknesses pointed out by RAND and others, such as small production runs, low profits and

over-reliance on a few main contractors, while also making it easier for companies to invest in capacity building and R&D.

At the same time, Tokyo can maintain domestic legitimacy by making sure weapons exports clearly follow the "Proactive Contribution to Peace" doctrine and increasing transparency by keeping the Parliament informed, keeping Japan still aligned with its durable attachment to the peace framework.

##### 5.2 Institutionalise Trilateral Maritime Coordination

The 2024 U.S.-Japan-Philippines Trilateral Agreement creates an opportunity for strengthening defences along the first island chain. As a result, this would reinforce deterrence by denial without seeming aggressive. By establishing joint naval, coast-guard exercises and training around Japan from 2025, the three allies could form a permanent mechanism focused on maritime domain awareness, sharing information and using the same operation processes.

This framework would operationalise the geographic theory established by Yoshihara and Holmes: having coordinated allied forces along the first island chain makes it much harder for China to take control quickly. It would also lower the chances of friendly-fire risks and confusion, a concern raised in RAND's discussion on alliance integration.

### *5.3 Strengthen De-Escalation and Crisis Management Communication*

Better crisis management techniques should be used to counterbalance stronger deterrence. In accordance with Freedman's theory that deterrence is about signalling, Japan could encourage concrete measures like establishing hotlines with important allies, standardising incident reporting procedures for air forces and coast guards, and providing advance notice of major military drills or new deployments in sensitive areas.

These measures make deterrence clearer. By making Japan's rules, limits and intentions more legible, they ensure that new alliance and counterstrike capabilities are seen as protective rather than offensive. This supports Walt's balance-of-threat approach: Japan can respond to growing regional dangers while lowering the risks of misperception, rather than deliberate actions driving the region towards a conflict.

## **5. Conclusion**

Japan's post-war trajectory has moved from strict pacifism to careful rearmament. Article 9 created a strong anti-military identity that limited policy developments for decades. However, reinterpretations such as the 2014-2015 legal changes and the 2022 three security documents show a consistent shift towards self-defence and limited collective action. This evolution has not ended pacifism but has allowed it to be accommodated in an increasingly security-demanding environment, shaped by North Korea's nuclear developments and China's assertiveness.

Japan has been building a layered deterrent network through capabilities, industrial policies and legal-operational reforms. Long-range strike systems and integrated air and missile defence strengthen denial and punishment. The concept of deterrence by production is supported by industrial changes and export liberalisation, while updated rules and stronger trilateral cooperation mechanisms improve alliance credibility and reliability. When taken as a whole, these achievements make the U.S.-Japan alliance more credible and long-lasting than it has been since the Second World War ended, all while adhering to Article 9 restrictions.

However, the actions that strengthen Japan's deterrence also raise the risks of entrapment and aggravate the regional security dilemma. China could view defensive modernisation as a component of a larger containment strategy, leading to counter-armament, as Japan increases its cooperation with the United States and takes a more proactive role in the U.S.-Japan-Philippines Trilateral Agreement. Therefore, the main policy challenge is to manage Japan's growing capabilities with cautious signalling and implementing well-designed crisis management procedures. Japan may strengthen regional stability even as it grows if it can match its growing capabilities, alliances, pledges and industry reforms with open regulations and communication. Thus, demonstrating Freedman's realisation that deterrence depends not just on the quantity of power but also on how it is arranged, transmitted and perceived.

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