

**JAPAN'S TRANSFORMING DEFENCE
AND SECURITY STRATEGIES:
RADICAL PRAGMATISM
FROM ABE TO KISHIDA**

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Executive Summary

1. Japan's defence and security policy transformed significantly during Shinzo Abe's second administration (2012-20) and is further transformed under Prime Minister Fumio Kishida who took office in late 2021.
2. While preserving its 'pacifist constitution', Japan has introduced over the years many incremental changes in legislation, cabinet decisions and policy that have profoundly impacted its defence policy and the meaning of a 'pacifist state'.
3. The changes accelerated, particularly since 2013, with the the first-ever National Security Strategy, updated in December 2022 and the simultaneous publication of the National Defence Strategy and Defence Build-up Plan, advocating larger defence spending and much-enhanced defence capabilities. The July 2023 Defence White Paper further confirms Japan's hardening of its defence stance.
4. These policy revisions and changes, as noted by official documents, have occurred mainly in response to China's increasing assertiveness in the region and beyond and the strong perception that China is a threat to Japan's national sovereignty and territorial integrity. North Korea's rapidly developing ballistic missile and nuclear programmes are also of grave concern to Japan's security.
5. Russia's military intervention in Ukraine has also profoundly impacted Japan's security thinking and the country's public attitude, which now endorses increases in the military capability and activity of Japan's Self-Defence Forces.
6. Long and deep-seated public aversion to the idea of making Japan a 'normal country' and a militarily active state have weakened significantly. Opinion polls convey the shift in public attitude, favouring greater defence capabilities and larger spending on defence above the limit of 1% of gross domestic product.
7. No less a factor is the continuing pressure from Japan's principal security provider, the United States, for Japan to do more in defence and share a greater burden in preserving peace, security and status quo in the Indo-Pacific and beyond.

8. While strengthening its military ties with the United States, Japan has developed new security networks not just with like-minded countries in the Indo-Pacific but in Europe and elsewhere given developing insecurities, which the United States alone is unable to handle due to its diminishing military resources.
9. Whilst shifting its defence and security strategies appropriate to the altered geo-security environment, Japan has not abandoned its long-held pacifist and anti-military stance and staunchly adheres to its *defence*-oriented policy.
10. Amending the constitution, especially Article IX, the peace clause, espoused by several political leaders, including the late Shinzo Abe, is difficult to undertake, at least in the near future, as consensus to amending the constitution even within the ruling Liberal Democratic Party remains elusive. Prime Minister Kishida's position on this issue is ambiguous and not a priority on his policy agenda.
11. Japan today actively pursues its 'free and open Indo-Pacific' and is proactive in defence and security. It has introduced institutional changes, shifted its defence stance, increased its spending on defence and created a security network for better management of global peace, stability and order in a multilateral setting.