



By: *Tomorrow's Affairs Staff*

Japan's new, larger military budget - a response to new problems in the region



Japan will significantly increase its military budget over the next five years, seeking to increase its defence capabilities and ability to respond to the new challenges it faces in the region. Japan is thus announcing a departure from its demilitarised position, which has been in force since World War II, and suggesting far greater participation in security activities in Northeast Asia.

Preparations for an increase in Japan's military budget for the period from 2023 to 2027 have been discussed for a long time, with the intention of reaching 2% of GDP from the current 1.2% of GDP allocated for defence purposes, which is the standard in NATO member states. In August 2022, the Japanese Ministry of Defence requested 5.59 trillion yen (\$40.4 billion) for the 2023 fiscal year, which was the largest request for an increase in the military budget yet - by 1.1% compared to the current fiscal year. It was the eleventh time in a row that the government under the leadership of the Liberal Democratic Party requested a budget increase. Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has vowed to "fundamentally reinforce Japan's defence capabilities within the next five years".

Parties in the government coalition, including the Liberal Democratic Party and minority partner Komeito, have reached an agreement for Japan to achieve "counterstrike capabilities", Kyodo News reported on December 2. Counterstrike capabilities would allow Japan to carry out pre-emptive missile attacks on enemy installations, before a missile attack on Japan.

This decision is primarily motivated by the potential danger posed by North Korea and its missile capabilities. Japan, in coordination with partners in South Korea and American forces, could then pre-emptively oppose possible ballistic or nuclear missile attacks by North Korea. Such capacities of Japan should be taken into account by Moscow and Beijing, considering that their military goals would also be within range.

A prerequisite for the implementation of this new Japanese defence doctrine is a

significantly increased military budget, which is under way, and is estimated at 285 billion USD and up to 318 billion USD for the five-year period, starting in March 2023. This is a large increase compared to the current five-year military budget that amounts to 203 billion USD.

With this growth, Japan seeks to support the new "counterstrike capabilities" doctrine, through the acquisition and production of long-range missiles, the strengthening of its forces for the defence against various types of missiles, the wider use of drones, and there is also a request from the Ministry of Defence for the acquisition of six more Lockheed Martin F-35A Lightning II Joint Strike Fighters and six more F-35B Lightning multirole fighter aircraft.

Is Japan remilitarising?

Professor Kunihiko Miyake, research director of The Canon Institute for Global Studies, has previously advocated a strong increase in Japan's military budget. He thinks that a government in Tokyo has to raise the Japanese public's awareness of the need to increase defence spending from 1.2 percent of gross domestic product. The public also needs to understand the reasoning for increased defence spending that is likely to emerge in three important national security-related strategy documents due by the end of the year: the National Security Strategy, National Defence Program Guidelines and Medium-Term Defence Program.

In earlier remarks, Miyake said for USMI News, "we cannot defend ourselves" without an ally, like the United States. But Japan needs to help secure itself as well through security spending and strategy. "Even if we have an alliance, if you don't have a defence, allies won't help you", making it imperative that the Japanese public see what the current close military relationship between Moscow and Beijing means in terms of their own security.

Regarding the Japanese government's intention to increase its military budget from

the current 1.2% of GDP to 2% of GDP, Scott Kardas, RANE's Asia Pacific analyst, says that in this way Japan "wants its independence and remove its dependence on the US" in terms of security. "It is important for Japan because of the proximity of North Korea and its missile threat. Although it is sometimes not a real threat, Japan does not want to watch missiles fly over its territory and beg America for help. It is extremely incredible that Japan has the ambition to be a global security power, like the US, but also has the desire to be influential in regional frameworks".

For Kardas, this strategy of Japan suits America, because the US does not want to bear the burden of being present everywhere, and would like Japan to develop a more active role in regional security, so that the US can be more active in some other areas.