



By: TA | AP Brief

# Japan scraps a ban on lethal weapons exports



Japan on Tuesday scrapped a ban on lethal weapons exports, a major change in its postwar pacifist policy as the country seeks to build up its arms industry amid worries over Chinese and North Korean aggression.

The approval by Prime Minister **Sanae Takaichi's** Cabinet of the new guideline clears a final set of hurdles for many arms sales, including of Japanese-developed warships, combat drones and other weapons.

**China criticized** the change in policy, but it has been largely welcomed by Japanese defense partners like Australia and attracted interest from Southeast Asia and Europe.

Opponents say the change violates Japan's pacifist constitution and will increase global tensions and threaten the safety of the Japanese people.

The new policy will "ensure safety for Japan and further contribute to the peace and stability in the region and the international society as the security environment around our country rapidly changes," Chief Cabinet Secretary Minoru Kihara told reporters.

"The government will strategically promote defense equipment transfers to create a security environment that is desirable for Japan and to build up the industrial base that can support fighting resilience."

## Japan could start selling weapons like missiles and destroyers

Japan has long prohibited most arms exports under its post-World War II pacifist constitution. It has made recent changes because of rising global and regional tensions, but exports were limited to five areas: rescue, transport, alerts, surveillance and minesweeping.

The new guidelines scrap those limits and allows the export of equipment such as fighter jets, missiles and destroyers.

That's a major change from existing exports such as flak jackets, gas masks and civilian-use vehicles that Japan has sent to Ukraine and intelligence radars sold to the Philippines.

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They also must be approved by the National Security Council, and the government will monitor how the weapons are managed afterward.

Japan remains committed to strict screening and export controls to third countries and will not offer lethal weapons to countries at war, officials said, but granted that exceptions could be made to that limit.

Japan began to export some non-lethal military supplies in 2014, and in December 2023 it approved a change that would allow sales of dozens of lethal weapons and components that it manufactures under licenses from other countries back to the licensors, clearing the way for Japan to sell U.S.-designed Patriot missiles to America to make up for munitions that Washington sent to Ukraine.

The 2023 revision also paved the way for Japan to jointly develop a sixth-generation fighter jet with Britain and Italy, and for Japan's biggest arms deal ever, which was formalized last week with Australia.

It calls for Japan to deliver the first three of a \$6.5 billion fleet of Japanese-designed frigates for the Australian navy and jointly build eight others in that country.