

# Japan's new defence documents target China

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Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's government unveiled new 10-year National Defence Guidelines and the country's first National Security Strategy last Wednesday. They outline a drive to strengthen the US-Japan alliance, expand Japan's military buildup in its southwestern maritime region facing China and build Japan's own network of alliances.

The two documents, to be approved by Abe's cabinet tomorrow, demonstrate that the one-year-old Liberal Democratic Party-led government is moving rapidly to materialise Abe's slogan of making Japan a "strong military power."

Encouraged by the US to transform Japan into a major forward base against China as part of Washington's "pivot to Asia" strategy, the previous guidelines published in 2010 by the Democratic Party of Japan government of former PM Nanto Kan, already contained the basic elements of shifting the defence posture to the southwestern region in the East China Sea. After Abe came to office last December, however, he immediately called for a review of the guidelines, regarding them as insufficiently aggressive.

The documents are being released amid mounting tensions triggered by China's declaration of an air defence identification zone (ADIZ) in the East China Sea on November 23. The US and its allies, Japan and South Korea, quickly dispatched military aircraft, including two US B-52 strategic bombers, to the zone to challenge Chinese authority. The Chinese and Japanese ADIZs now overlap, and both cover the disputed Senkaku islands, known as Diaoyu in China. The Obama administration has repeatedly declared that the US would back Japan if war broke out over these rocky islets.

Abe called the National Security Strategy a "historic document" that would "shape our country's national security," along with a new American-style National Security Council, which began operating two weeks

ago.

Beijing swiftly criticised the documents. Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Hong Lei declared: "Japan's unreasonable criticism of China's normal maritime activities and its hyping up of the China threat has hidden political motives." He accused Japan of making "provocations."

In fact, China's reckless move to demarcate the ADIZ, which requires any foreign plane, civilian or military, to identify itself and maintain radio contact, or potentially face emergency military measures, has provided ample excuses for Abe's government to hype up the "Chinese threat."

On the same day that Tokyo unveiled its strategic documents, it conducted a joint maritime rescue exercise with South Korea within the Chinese ADIZ, without informing Beijing. South Korea has extended its own ADIZ to cover a submerged rock in dispute with China, a move directly approved by the visiting US vice president Joe Biden a week ago. The US has long encouraged Japan and South Korea to cooperate militarily, as an element of its "pivot" strategy to encircle China with allies and bases.

Japan's National Security Strategy condemns the Chinese air defence zone, saying it is an attempt "at changing the current situation by force, and is irreconcilable with the international order." The strategy insists that Japan must "strengthen its own capabilities and expand its own roles" by boosting its anti-ballistic missile and military capacities to ensure "freedom of navigation" in the surrounding seas—a pointed reference to China's emerging naval power. This is in line with the US-Japanese defence and foreign ministerial meetings in October, which issued a joint statement urging Japan to play a more "balanced role" in the alliance, i.e., assume direct offensive military roles.

To expand Japan's already technologically advanced

defence industry, the National Security Strategy also calls for an easing of a longstanding ban on weapon exports, in order to allow Japan to jointly develop weapon systems with the US and other countries.

The strategy further calls for Japan to “work even harder to become a major player in international society” by building alliances with Australia, South Korea and South East Asian countries. Already, Abe has boasted of being the first Japanese leader to visit every Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) member country within his first year in office. This has signalled an assertive Japanese diplomacy directed at countering Chinese influence in Asia.

Last weekend, Tokyo hosted a special summit with ASEAN. Abe pressed the meeting to produce a joint statement calling for “enhanced cooperation in ensuring freedom of flight and civil aviation safety”—a reference to China’s air defence zone. To compete against China, especially in the Mekong River region, Abe unveiled some \$20 billion worth of concessionary loans and aids to ASEAN over the next five years.

Concerns were expressed at the summit about the rising Japan-China rivalry. Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono declared: “Indonesia is deeply concerned at the prospect of disputes erupting into open conflicts, which will have adverse impacts on all countries in the region.”

Abe’s new defence guidelines call for a doubling of Japan’s fighter jet squadrons at its Naha base on Okinawa to two (20 planes each), in order to enhance Japan’s air power adjacent to China’s air defence zone. New surveillance drones will also be stationed at the Naha base, along with a fresh unit of E-2C early warning planes. Japan uses E-2Cs to monitor the region around the Senkakus, but they are currently based at Misawa, further north. The guidelines advocate the creation of a “Dynamic Joint Defence Force” for rapid deployment to retake remote islands—a preparation for island warfare with China.

The guidelines do not openly call for a “pre-emptive” strike capacity, which was suggested by Japanese officials earlier this year supposedly to deal with the threat of North Korea launching missile attacks on Japan. Waging an openly aggressive war would violate the Japanese constitution, which was drafted by the US following World War II, both to ensure that Japan

would never again challenge the US and to placate the antiwar sentiment within the Japanese working class.

Well aware of the deep-rooted domestic opposition to any resurrection of Japanese militarism, Abe’s security strategy seeks to overcome it by promoting “love of country” and expanding “security education” programs in universities. This is likely to encounter resistance, given the bitter memories of the nationalist indoctrination under the repressive wartime regime. Abe’s previous push to introduce compulsory patriotic curricula in schools, during his first term as prime minister in 2007, contributed to his resignation that year, amid public hostility to his commitment to provide logistical support to the US-led occupation of Afghanistan.

There are signs of renewed opposition to Abe’s militarist policy. After the government this month rammed through a draconian state secrets law, threatening to jail officials and journalists for disclosing any information that the government wants to protect, Abe’s opinion poll approval rating dropped 10 percentage points, to below 50 percent. The law resembles a pre-war law that allowed the militarist regime to arrest political opponents.



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