



Japan's New Prime Minister Galvanizes Defense and Security

By

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Sanae Takaichi was elected Japan's [first female](#) prime minister (PM), heralding a new dawn for the country's defense and security policy. This watershed moment witnesses the conservative Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) [shift](#) away from its pacifist former coalition partner Komeito, toward Nippon Ishin no Kai (Japan Innovation Party).

A protégée of former PM [Shinzo Abe](#), this Kansai (West Japan) [Iron Lady](#) admires former British PM Margret Thatcher. Her cabinet picks of Shinjiro Koizumi for Defense, Toshimitsu Motegi for Foreign Affairs, and Kimi Onoda for Economic Security will [revitalize](#) the administration.

Onoda is further designated "minister in charge of a society of well-ordered and harmonious coexistence with foreign nationals." This means the government will begin [cracking down](#) on fraudulent immigration.

The [market](#) hailed PM Takaichi's upcoming [stimulus package](#) and her appointment of senior lawmaker Katayama as [finance minister](#) ahead of Tokyo welcoming President Donald Trump to discuss economic [cooperation](#) and major [defense policy](#) changes. President Trump was gifted Shinzo Abe's golf putter.

Takaichi also announced that she was going to nominate Trump for the Nobel Peace Prize, observing that "the nature of warfare has changed significantly." She also intends to fast-track the [revision](#) of three key security [frameworks](#): National Security Strategy, National Defense Strategy, and the Defense Buildup Program. The prime minister outlined a defense budget totaling 43 trillion yen (\$284 billion) through fiscal year 2027, which means that defense [spending](#) should exceed 2 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) shortly and reach 3.5 percent later.

Threats and Challenges

Security concerns in relation with [China](#) top the agenda. PM Takaichi stated she would "continue to engage in [frank dialogue](#)" by acting neither confrontational nor spineless. With upcoming Japan-US and Japan-South Korea diplomatic summits, she demonstrated willingness to acknowledge [regional sensitivities](#) over historical grievances, refraining from visits to the controversial Yasukuni shrine that Asia brands as worshipping [convicted war criminals](#).

The Takaichi administration will face several [challenges](#) as it implements these changes and must navigate coalition instability while dealing with inflationary pressures such as the price of rice exploding. Further, the administration must contend with public opinion that is both wary of the increasing threats caused by Russia, China, and North Korea but reluctant to accept tax increases to fund the country's ambitious defense program.

Revising the Constitution

Japan's question of a potential revision of its constitution, [Article 9](#), has again reemerged. It is useful to reexamine the original text born from the ashes of 1945. The Constitution of Japan, Chapter II, Article 9, says,

Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes. In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized.

The reality is that “will never be maintained” is not how things turned out. Japan has, for decades, steadily built up an arsenal under the umbrella of its Self-Defense Force, which covers all domains, including cyber and space. It fields the Indo-Pacific’s most powerful military forces outside China.

Japan did so while avoiding revision of Article 9, instead sticking to a mere reinterpretation of the pacifist constitution. That self-defense alone is a means of justifying massive re-armament has worked well in the past and could still work for decades to come, as long as it is supported by the Diet and the public.

However, Japan has made sure to never commit boots on the ground to engage in active conflict, other than by providing logistical support, such as during the US campaign in Afghanistan. There are still major ambiguities for engagement in collective defense, such as Japan shooting down an enemy missile on its way to American bases in the Western Pacific or the American homeland.

Most critical is what happens if Japanese forces, in seas surrounding the archipelago, are directly threatened, or the Japanese homeland falls under missile attack during enemy operations over Taiwan, the Korean Peninsula, the Sea of Japan, or the Northern Territories seized by Russia at the end of World War II.

That makes the constitutional “right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized” both obsolete and counter-productive, as it prevents Japan from clearly establishing formal deterrence and from actively defending itself, including by preemptive attacks against enemy capabilities. Additionally, with US-Japan military cooperation and ubiquitous joint-basing, Japan has a giant bullseye on the country.

Japan’s Problematic Three Non-Nuclear Principles

Japan has more than sufficient plutonium reserves to arm itself if desires to do so. While PM Takaichi stated that she upholds the principles of “not possessing” and “not manufacturing” nuclear weapons, she is opposed to the third principle of “no nuclear weapons to be brought into Japan,” as it stifles extended deterrence—the American nuclear umbrella.

Her previous attempts to remove these principles from Japan’s national security strategy were rejected. Perhaps the PM will have her say this time around. Positioning American weapons in Japan would ensure Japanese nonproliferation and postpone weaponizing its plutonium stockpile.

PM Takaichi is a long overdue [leader](#) who can rebuild a more robust economic and security capability. Normalizing Japan’s [national security policy](#) means a realist shift in defense and [military space posture](#). In these transformative times when obsolete arrangements collapse and new fit-for-purpose relevance has yet to form, a more strategically autonomous and sovereign Japan might emerge, engaging the [Indo-Pacific](#) and globally.

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