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Japan's security policy under Prime Minister Takaichi

Pushing a realist agenda into higher gear

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Summary

- Sanae Takaichi, Japan's first female prime minister, is advancing a realism-based security and defence agenda rooted in Shinzō Abe's legacy and now backed by stronger political consensus.
- Takaichi's key achievements include expanding defence exports and dual-use R&D, strengthening intelligence structures, and pushing economic security measures against China. Constitutional revision remains her most ambitious goal, not least to legally recognize Japan's military forces.
- Takaichi's policies have heightened tensions with China, while strengthening defence ties with the US and regional partners such as Australia, the Philippines, and Indonesia.
- Japan's shift from arms importer to co-producer creates new opportunities for Finland, Europe, and NATO in defence technology, industrial cooperation, and intelligence sharing.
- Major uncertainties remain, including whether constitutional reform can succeed, how relations with China will evolve, whether the new export and cooperation frameworks will deliver concrete results, and how the debate over Japan's Three Non-Nuclear Principles will develop.

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Introduction

Sanae Takaichi was appointed as Japan's first female prime minister on 22 October 2025 and secured a historic supermajority in the Japanese Diet in February 2026. Ten months into her tenure, under the slogan "The Japanese archipelago: strong and prosperous", Takaichi is steadily fulfilling her campaign pledges.¹ In terms of foreign and security policy, Japan's defence alliance with the United States remains the backbone. However, from the outset, Takaichi has signalled her intention to implement a conservative security agenda rooted in realist thinking and centred on strengthening Japan's own military capabilities.

This Briefing Paper offers a bird's-eye overview of the most significant changes in Japan's defence and security policy and examines their broader implications. The paper is divided into four parts. It first assesses Takaichi's principal security and defence policy achievements against her campaign pledges. It then surveys a few remaining political challenges. Subsequently, the paper analyses the implications of her agenda for the wider Indo-Pacific region. Finally, now that Europe and NATO are ramping up their own defence capabilities, the paper identifies resulting opportunities for cooperation.

Ten months in: Takaichi's policy record so far

Known as a staunch admirer of Margaret Thatcher, Sanae Takaichi is widely characterized as nationalist on social and historical questions, and as hawkish in terms of defence and security policy. Domestically, she is strongly influenced by the political line of Shinzō Abe, Japan's longest-serving prime minister (2006–7 and 2012–2020), who was assassinated in 2022. While recalibrating defence budgets and institutional frameworks to reinforce the alliance with the United States, Abe created a National Security Council, passed a Secrecy Bill, and reversed Japan's self-imposed ban on exercising the right to collective self-defence. This enabled Japan, in principle, to come to the aid of allied countries in maritime conflicts, intercept missiles aimed at the US, or use force to protect the military forces of third countries in collective security operations.

Takaichi's campaign pledges closely follow the Abe administration's political line and set out her ambitions in terms of defence and security policy. Yet while her reforms may represent continuity rather than a historic rupture, what distinguishes this period from the Abe era is the broader political consensus underpinning the reforms in this policy area. Of particular importance here is the new right-of-centre coalition between Takaichi's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and *Nippon ishin no kai* (the Japan Innovation Party, JIP). This coalition ended the LDP's 26-year-long partnership with the *Kōmeitō* (Clean Government Party), a social-conservative party. The realignment constituted a watershed moment in Japan's post-war political history, setting the country on a more conservative domestic trajectory and towards a more realism-based foreign and security policy.

1 Takaichi, Sanae (2025) *Kōyaku: Nippon rettō, tsuyoku yutaka ni* [Political Pledge: 'The Japanese archipelago, strong and prosperous']. <https://www.jimin.jp/policy/pamphlet/>. Translation by the author. Accessed October 2025; the full pamphlet is no longer available online. A copy of the pamphlet is in the author's possession.

Against this backdrop, several security and defence policy achievements stand out during Takaichi's first ten months in office. First, Takaichi's pledge to enhance Japan's foreign and defence policy is most clearly reflected in her plan to revise the "three security documents" during 2026. Most recently updated under Prime Minister Fumio Kishida in December 2022, the National Security Strategy (NSS), together with the National Defense Strategy (NDS) and Defense Buildup Program (DBP), forms the basis of Tokyo's envisaged fundamental strengthening of its defence capabilities. Takaichi has framed this revision as necessitated by the emergence of new forms of warfare and the growing need to prepare for protracted conflict.²

Second, Japan is actively promoting the growth of defence industries through dual-use technologies, with a focus on state-directed research and development (R&D) funding for artificial intelligence (AI), quantum computing, subsea cables, and unmanned vehicles. Relatedly, the Takaichi administration made the groundbreaking decision to allow all finished products, including lethal weapons, to be exported to partner countries that have concluded relevant agreements with Japan, with certain exceptions such as countries involved in armed conflict. The government is also considering allowing state ownership of some defence production facilities to secure the stable domestic supply of critical equipment in a prolonged contingency.³ This would be based on the government-owned, contractor-operated model (GOCO). Taken together, these measures mark Japan's momentous shift from a consumer of military hardware to an important producer.

Third, Takaichi is strengthening Japan's intelligence apparatus to counter espionage and foreign interference, an issue that has become more pressing as information warfare and grey-zone activities have intensified in the region. This is in line with her campaign promise to establish a National Intelligence Bureau as the central command centre

for intelligence-related government bodies, alongside a National Intelligence Council within the Cabinet. Takaichi has long argued that Japan needs a stronger system for security clearance and for protecting sensitive government and industrial information. Having relied on the US for intelligence services throughout the post-war era, Japan now plans to establish its first centralized foreign intelligence agency since the Second World War. Anti-espionage legislation passed Japan's National Diet in May 2026.

Fourth, Takaichi has elevated economic security to a central pillar of Japan's national security. The issue has gained urgency amid growing concerns about economic coercion by major powers, "whereby control over upstream materials in global supply chains – on which the world depends and which are widely used in commercial products – is used to attempt to force other countries to comply with certain claims".⁴ To safeguard Japan's strategic autonomy, the Takaichi administration has pursued a threefold policy: rebuilding supply chains that decouple from "specific countries" (read: China) by strengthening cooperation with like-minded countries; promoting active investment through public-private partnership frameworks and relevant tax measures in growth fields essential to economic security (AI, semiconductors, digital technology, submarine cables, etc.); and establishing a "Committee on Foreign Investment in Japan", modelled on the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS), to strictly screen inbound direct investment from overseas.

Finally, many of these policies converge with Takaichi's pledge to strengthen cooperation with allied and like-minded nations. This includes the development and procurement of defence equipment to improve interoperability within the Japan-US security alliance; deepened defence cooperation with South Korea, the Philippines and other Southeast Asian countries, including through the provision of Official Security Assistance (OSA);⁵ and strengthened cooperative relationships with countries referred to as quasi-allies, such as the United Kingdom, Italy, and Australia. In this respect, Takaichi is continuing Abe's

2 Takaichi, Sanae (2026) "Policy Speech by Prime Minister Takaichi Sanae to the 221st Session of the Diet". Prime Minister's Office of Japan, 20 February. <https://japan.kantei.go.jp/105/statement/202602/20shiseihoshin.html>.

3 Yoshida, Kenji (2026a) "Japan weighs state ownership of defense plants to boost arms supply". *The Japan Times*, 1 July. <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2026/07/01/japan/politics/japan-defense-nationalization/>.

4 Takaichi 2026.

5 OSA refers to the use of foreign aid for security purposes, allowing Japan to strengthen the maritime security capabilities of countries in Southeast Asia, for example.



Japan's Defense Minister Shinjiro Koizumi (C) walks onto the factory floor with Shunsuke Toya (L), CEO and President of Prodrone, at the Prodrone research facility in Nagoya in May 2026, as Japan pushes to expand military drone capabilities with nearly USD 850 million earmarked for unmanned defence systems in its 2026 defence budget.

Source: Andrew Caballero-Reynolds, AFP/Lehtikuva

signature project of broadening ties with friendly countries beyond the US alliance under the banner of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP), a vision Abe launched in 2016.

What remains: Key challenges ahead

In terms of security and defence policy, three issues remain uncertain. First, the emphasis on economic security and “de-risking” from China implies a stronger role for the state in the economy, which might lead to friction with business interests. The above-mentioned potential state ownership of defence production facilities, for example, could impact profitability or force smaller companies to relinquish strategically important operations.⁶

A second key issue that remains on the table is constitutional revision, which Takaichi’s campaign pledges frame as necessary “so that it can respond to the demands of the times”. Continuing her mentor Abe’s longstanding ambition, Takaichi is a strong proponent of amendment, not least to formally recognize the Self-Defence Forces (SDF) as a national military. The core challenge posed by Article 9 of the constitution is balancing Japan’s renunciation of war with the practical need to deter threats and operate as a credible security actor in an increasingly dangerous regional environment. It also necessitates overcoming the tension between the *de facto* existence of a capable military force and the *de jure* constraint that prevents it from being acknowledged

⁶ Yoshida 2026a.

as a “normal” military.⁷ There is wide agreement that revision will be extremely difficult, as a two-thirds majority of all members in both houses of the Diet is needed, in addition to a majority vote in a nationwide referendum. Proponents nonetheless argue that Article 9 undermines the belief in the importance of a sound legal basis, given the widening gap between constitutional text and operational reality.⁸ Furthermore, the absence of a clear reference to the military forces complicates the exercise of civilian control: without a recognized military, there is no defined object for such control to govern.⁹

A third and increasingly sensitive debate concerns Japan’s Three Non-Nuclear Principles, which state that the country will not possess, produce, or permit nuclear weapons on its territory. The JIP has pushed for the early introduction of nuclear-powered submarines equipped with vertical launch systems, arguing that it is the only viable option to counter China’s expanding naval reach.¹⁰ The LDP, including Takaichi, has so far maintained a more cautious stance, repeatedly affirming that the Three Non-Nuclear Principles remain government policy, while leaving room for her Cabinet to authorize a temporary port call by a nuclear-armed US vessel in a national emergency.

Beyond Tokyo: Regional stakes in Japan’s evolving security course

Takaichi’s new policy package has implications for the security calculus of other major players in the region. First of all, for China, Takaichi’s agenda confirms a perceived trend it has long protested, namely the steady erosion of Japan’s post-war constraints and what Beijing has described as “neo-militarism”.

7 While Japan, like any other sovereign country, has the right of self-defence, the constitution stipulates that “land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained”.

8 Akiyama Masahiro and Kazumasa Oguro (eds.) (2025) *Ronten kaisetsu: Nihon no anzen hoshō. Bōei kiban no Kyōka to jizoku kanōsei wo kangaeru* [Analysis of Key Issues in Japan’s National Security: Considering the Strengthening of the Defence Foundation and the Sustainability of Defence Capabilities]. Nikkei Business Publications, February.

9 Tokuchi, Hideshi (2019) “Implications of Revision of Article 9 of the Constitution of Japan on the Defense Policy of Japan”. *Colum. J. Asian L.* 33: 84.

10 Yoshida, Kenji (2026b) “JIP submarine proposal tests Japan’s nuclear red lines”. *The Japan Times*, 9 July. <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2026/07/09/japan/politics/maehara-interview/>.

Tokyo’s economic security agenda is interpreted as the economic complement to military build-up. Japan’s relations with China, therefore, have been quite strained during Takaichi’s ten months in office. While officially promoting a “Mutually Beneficial Relationship Based on Common Strategic Interests”, Tokyo has strongly rebuked Beijing’s attempts to change the status quo by force or coercion in the East and South China Seas, alongside a series of military activities around Japan.

“For China, Takaichi’s agenda confirms a perceived trend it has long protested, namely the steady erosion of Japan’s post-war constraints and what Beijing has described as ‘neo-militarism’.”

Prime Minister Takaichi stated in November 2025 that Japan’s military could get involved if China were to take action against Taiwan (including through a naval blockade), which, for her, could constitute a situation threatening Japan’s survival. This threshold is a (self-imposed) necessary condition before Japan is legally permitted to use force. Her comment drew a very strong reaction from Beijing. China has sought to strengthen its presence near maritime boundaries in the East China Sea and the Japan-controlled Senkaku Islands through fishing vessels and coast guard activity.¹¹ Furthermore, Beijing has curbed Chinese tourism to Japan, halted imports of Japanese seafood, and restricted the export of rare-earth minerals, a market China dominates globally. Most recently, on 6 July 2026, China tested a nuclear-capable long-range missile launched from a submarine in the Pacific Ocean. The event marked China’s first publicly acknowledged submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) test into the Pacific. As tensions with Beijing have risen, the need for diplomacy and dialogue has become more pressing.

In terms of relations with the United States, Japan’s security ally in the region, Washington is

11 Bosack, Michael Macarthur (2026) “Japan-China relations have no off-ramp”. *The Japan Times*, 6 May. <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2026/05/06/japan/politics/china-japan-security-tensions/>.

likely to welcome Takaichi's agenda, particularly her support for Japan's ongoing increase in defence spending to 2% of GDP. The Takaichi administration's broader security and defence agenda promotes interoperability with US forces and the US industrial base, and supports the US concept of "integrated deterrence", which seeks to leverage international coalitions to counter threats collectively. The economic security agenda also aims to strengthen supply-chain resilience, especially in relation to critical minerals, an issue that Takaichi raised at the G7 summit in France in June 2026.

Other major players in the region stand to benefit as well: Japan's new policy strengthens security partnerships through defence transfer programmes with Australia, the Philippines and Indonesia, and offers Southeast Asian countries in particular alternative sources of defence equipment and capacity-building outside the US-China binary.

Transregional opportunities: Why this matters for Finland, Europe, and NATO

In June 2026, Finland unveiled its first-ever comprehensive Indo-Pacific policy,¹² aimed at strengthening relations with countries across the region in areas such as security, investment and trade, and technology. According to the policy document, Japan is a priority country for export promotion and a potential investor in Finland. Japan is also a key partner in the context of NATO cooperation with Indo-Pacific (IP4) countries, namely Australia, South Korea, Japan and New Zealand, especially to combat cyber and hybrid threats. Finland aims to deepen its relations with the IP4 through regular security policy discussions and partnerships between the EU and NATO. Furthermore, in the domain of technology and defence materiel, also important for Finland's own defence capabilities, Japan is seen as the most important partner, alongside South Korea. Finland and Japan are currently negotiating a treaty on the transfer of defence equipment and technology.

Japan, for its part, is actively looking for "like-minded" partners beyond the Indo-Pacific

to enhance its deterrence and response capabilities, while reinforcing its defence industrial and civilian technology base. Tokyo's pursuit of such partnerships reflects a desire both to balance an increasingly complex relationship with the US and to complement engagement in minilateral formats such as the Australia-UK-US partnership (AUKUS), the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), and trilaterals involving the US and a third country.

Finland has a defence attaché accredited to Japan, which signals existing institutional groundwork for deeper cooperation. This forms the basis for Finnish-Japanese defence industrial collaboration that could include dual-use technology, drone systems, subsea cable technology and Arctic infrastructure resilience. Tokyo's lifting of the ban on arms exports can facilitate joint production and defence equipment cooperation, including through joint hardware and software development with Nordic defence firms. Takaichi's campaign pledges also included a proposal to introduce an "Underground Shelter Installation Act" that "necessitates the creation of underground shelters when constructing major stations and large-scale buildings. These could also be usable as storage facilities etc. during peacetime".¹³ It is clear that Finland can offer expertise in this area.

At the EU level, Japan can deepen cooperation through the existing EU-Japan Security and Defence Partnership, including on defence industry dialogue, maritime security, and a forthcoming Security of Information Agreement (SIA). Japan's increased focus on economic security can also yield tangible outcomes through the Japan-EU Competitiveness Alliance, including in supply-chain resilience and the digital realm, encompassing Arctic connectivity and submarine cable projects.

Since the onset of Russia's aggression against Ukraine in 2022 and the ensuing stronger Russia-China linkages, Japan and NATO have increasingly come to see Indo-Pacific and transatlantic security as interconnected. Japan has also expressed a strong political will to be a substantive partner for Europe. In January 2025, Japan established a Diplomatic Mission to NATO, and practical cooperation with the Alliance is being developed in cyber defence, maritime

12 Vilén, Jari (2026) "Finland and the Indo-Pacific region: Policy outline for the Indo-Pacific region". Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland. 15 June. <https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/items/289c8e60-7802-4049-8deb-778ca9927ba6>.

13 Takaichi 2025.

security, and AI. Tokyo now brings a stronger industrial base to this partnership. The imperative to de-risk supply chains from China, screen inbound investment, and invest in critical technologies is shared by Japan and EU countries such as Finland, as reflected in Finland's Indo-Pacific Policy Paper. In terms of security, Finland, as both a NATO member and a country with solid bilateral ties to Japan, could serve as a bridge, facilitating Nordic-Japanese security dialogue, including through NATO channels. That said, the NATO-IP4 relationship is likely to remain a balance between ambition and restraint: cooperation will deepen selectively in practical areas, driven in part by the US focus on strategic competition with China in the Indo-Pacific, while Europe's cautious approach to the region will continue to limit deeper integration.¹⁴

“In terms of security, Finland, as both a NATO member and a country with solid bilateral ties to Japan, could serve as a bridge, facilitating Nordic-Japanese security dialogue, including through NATO channels.”

Finally, a more robust Japanese intelligence and secrecy framework, currently under construction, can promote a deeper level of communication with allies and NATO partners, including through NATO-Japan and EU-Japan intelligence cooperation. Japan's National Intelligence Council and new anti-espionage legislation create an opening for concluding classified information-sharing arrangements with NATO and EU member states, including Finland, on shared threats such as hybrid interference, cyber activity, and grey-zone coercion.

Conclusion and looking ahead

Prime Minister Takaichi's security and defence policy achievements in her first ten months in office have been substantial, marking a consolidation, rather than a rupture, of Japan's post-2013 realist turn during the Abe administration.¹⁵ Building on Shinzō Abe's legacy, she is revising Japan's three core security documents, expanding dual-use defence R&D and arms exports (including, for the first time, lethal equipment), strengthening intelligence structures through a new National Intelligence Council and anti-espionage law, and pursuing economic security measures to reduce dependence on China. Takaichi's security and defence agenda is likely to strengthen her position in the short term, given the right-of-centre coalition with the JIP and the strong political backing for the security reforms. What distinguishes this period from the Abe era is not the direction of policy but the political consensus now backing it.¹⁶

These moves carry direct implications for the Indo-Pacific security environment. China has reacted sharply to Takaichi's rhetoric regarding a potential crisis involving Taiwan and Japan's economic de-risking agenda. Washington, by contrast, stands to benefit from Japan's new policy that supports the US strategy of integrated deterrence and diversifies allied industrial capacity. Other regional partners, including Australia, the Philippines, and Indonesia, gain alternative defence-equipment sources outside the US-China binary, while Japan's outreach to quasi-allies such as the UK and Italy extends its security network beyond the Indo-Pacific.

For Finland, Europe, and NATO, Japan's trajectory opens concrete avenues for cooperation. Finland's own Indo-Pacific policy identifies Japan as a priority partner for trade, investment, and technology, with negotiations ongoing to conclude

14 Odgaard, Liselotte (2026) “NATO and the IP4: Caught between ambition and restraint”. *9DashLine*, Hudson Institute, 19 June. <https://www.hudson.org/defense-strategy/nato-ip4-caught-between-ambition-restraint-liselotte-odgaard>.

15 Cf. Gaens, Bart (2014) “Japan's New Security Policy: Breaking Away from the Post-War Regime?” *FIIA Briefing Paper 148*. Finnish Institute of International Affairs. <https://fiia.fi/en/publication/japans-new-security-policy>.

16 In terms of domestic politics, however, the planned reduction of parliamentary seats and the designation of a secondary capital, possibly Osaka, both of which were promised to coalition partner the JIP, are more contentious issues dividing the Japanese Diet. Cf. Gaens, Bart (2025) “With Sanae Takaichi, Japan gets its first female prime minister – What to expect?” *ICDS Commentary*, 27 October. <https://icds.ee/en/with-sanae-takaichi-japan-gets-its-first-ever-female-prime-minister-what-to-expect/>.

a defence equipment and technology transfer agreement. The lifting of Japan's arms export ban creates space for joint production with Nordic defence firms in areas such as drones, subsea cables, and Arctic infrastructure resilience. Broader EU–Japan and NATO–Japan frameworks position Finland to act as a bridge for deeper Nordic–Japanese security dialogue amid converging concerns over the Russia–China alignment and grey-zone coercion.

Looking ahead, several questions will shape whether Takaichi's agenda translates into lasting strategic change. Constitutional revision remains

the most uncertain element because, even with stronger political backing than under Abe, securing a two-thirds Diet majority and winning a national referendum is far from certain. Regionally, managing an increasingly volatile relationship with China will require Tokyo to balance deterrence with the stated need for continued diplomacy. Externally, Japan's growing defence–industrial ambitions depend on translating loosened export rules into actual co-production agreements, including with partners such as Finland. ■

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