



Japan's new national  
security strategy:  
a platform for further  
cooperation with the EU?

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# Executive Summary

## Background

Japan is a pacifist nation. This fact is encapsulated in the Japanese Constitution, whose drafting in 1947 was directed by American General Douglas MacArthur, Commander of the Allied Forces in the Pacific and head of the occupation of Japan. Since then, the resulting war-renouncing Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution has produced in the population the widespread conviction that Japan should not develop and possess an army as well as a general reluctance to accept investments in the security of the country. All the major shifts in the security policy of Japan, such as for instance the introduction of the so-called self-defence forces or the late PM Shinzo Abe's attempts to normalise the security of the country, faced harsh public criticism and, in some cases, even demonstrations of dissent. None of this occurred when, at the end of 2022, PM Fumio Kishida unveiled the new security strategy, defence strategy and defence build-up, equipping Japan with counterstrike capabilities and promising to adjust the defence spending to 2% of GDP by 2027; the move is unprecedented, as it will give the country the third-largest defence budget in the world. The need to run for cover in light of the increasing threats coming from China and North Korea and the unilateral change to the status quo by Russia in Ukraine has prompted Tokyo to review its strategic posture and justified this change of perception from the Japanese population. Since Japan is the "closest strategic partner in the Indo-Pacific region" according to the EU, the new strategic documents approved by Tokyo suggest that the ongoing and vibrant EU-Japan cooperation could be further intensified, especially in the security field.

## Recommendations to the EU

The analysis chapter of this policy paper contains a dozen recommendations to be addressed, depending on the domain of competence, to the different bodies of the EU, from its member states to the decision-making bodies within the European Commission, the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the European Defence Agency (EDA). The lowest common denominator of the recipient member states, EU institutions and agencies is their power to partner with Japan within the framework of the Union's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) as an integral part of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). These are: **the conclusion of a Framework Participation Agreement (FPA)** to allow Japan to contribute to the EU CSDP missions and operations; **the application of the EU as a dialogue partner in the IORA and BIMSTEC** regional fora on maritime affairs, to strengthen cooperation in the overall Indian Ocean region; within ESIWA, **the promotion of cross-cutting activities and the facilitation of EU officials and experts to attend events in the Indo-Pacific**, to better satisfy the demand-driven approach at the root of the cooperation project; **the renewal of the mandate for CRIMARIO and ESIWA or the search for alternative initiatives**, so as not to waste the level of engagement so far achieved; **the opening of EU delegation offices in the Pacific island states**, to explore possibilities for joint cooperation in the maritime infrastructure domain with **the local representations of Japan**; **the conclusion of a reciprocal access agreement (RAA)** between

interested EU member states and Japan, to improve military interoperability; **the formation of an EU strategic communication task force for the Indo-Pacific**, to counter China's activities of information manipulation, while seeking cooperative arrangements between Japan's new anti-disinformation structure and the EEAS; **the development of international standards on the use of AI (as well as EDTs) for military purposes**, to ensure respect for international humanitarian law and to increase awareness of resource scarcity in military affairs; **the fostering of dialogue on joint development programmes for unmanned capabilities between DG DEFIS, EDA and Japan's ATLA and the conclusion of an administrative agreement (AA)** to allow Japan's defence subsidiaries to participate in EDA programmes; **the facilitation of Japan's defence companies to obtain EDF grants and the contribution by EU member states to Japan's Official Security Assistance** programme, to help revitalise the defence industry of Japan.

## 1. Introduction

On December 16, 2022, Japan's National Security Council approved the new National Security Strategy (NSS), its second ever, and two other strategic documents, the National Defence Strategy (NDS) and the Defence Build-up Program (DBP). In the field of foreign policy, a national security strategy is the non-legally binding document par excellence, because it allows a country to outline the status quo, list allies and adversaries, and present the agenda for future (co)existence. The NSS, NDS, and DBP set Japan's strategic vision for the years to come and express unprecedented commitment for such a self-declared pacifist nation, including the use of counterstrike capabilities and the increase of defence spending to 2% of GDP. According to Tokyo, the release of this strategy, almost a decade after the first one, reflects the current times of heightened tension in the Indo-Pacific region, which is the site of the regular military activities of three nuclear powers: China, North Korea and Russia, the latter being culpably at war in Europe for more than a year. The change in tone as compared to the NSS of 2013 is quite clear. China has become Japan's "greatest strategic challenge" due to its imperialistic claims, its claims to the Japanese-owned Senkaku islands in the East China Sea, and ever-stronger ties with Russia. North Korea represents an "imminent threat" to Tokyo's security primarily due to its frequent launches of ballistic missiles, the continuous allocation of resources to military affairs and the widespread presence of weapons of mass destruction in the country. Russia is described as a belligerent actor that does not refrain from arming its northern territories, which border on Japan, and threatening to use nuclear weapons.

The international reception of Japan's new strategic posture has been accompanied by either resentment or support, depending on the level of partnership with Tokyo. North Korea voiced concerns about the possibility that Tokyo could attack pre-emptively, which it sees as a factor of destabilisation for the Korean peninsula, while China recalled Japan's history of military aggression and crimes against humanity before embracing the tradition of pacifism from which Tokyo is currently "deviating". On the other hand, the security documents have been welcomed by its allies and partners. The US has defined it as a "bold and historic step" and Taiwan lauded the move to promote "regional peace and stability". Even some less sympathetic neighbours, such as South Korea, which, despite overlapping security interests with Tokyo, has

in the past expressed distrust of Japan's intentions, now favoured the latter's efforts to a more secure region. Domestically as well, several polls reported widespread public approval, representing a drastic change in the population, which in the past was reluctant to increase defence capabilities and more generally wary of political moves that would re-open the offence-defence debate. The country's post-war self-defence policy was inspired by Article 9 of the Constitution, and the Japanese government sees the recently adopted measures as compliant with its guiding principles of renunciation of war, non-holding of war potential, and denial of the right to belligerence. Japan's pursuit of more active self-defence and the once-unthinkable breaking of the military taboo may thus be interpreted as a precautionary measure in response to its complex and recently-worsened security environment. However, this is only the last of many efforts on behalf of the security normalisation of the country, on a trajectory started by the late PM Shinzo Abe, who vigorously sought to make changes to national security. These included, to name but a few, the introduction of the National Security Council in 2013 and the promotion of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific initiative, the standard-bearer of Japan's public diplomacy on maritime order and the basis for the latest Strategy.

This policy paper presents the recent changes in Japan's security landscape and investigates whether there is room therein for increased cooperation with the EU. It seeks to provide an answer to the research question: How could the EU respond to a more assertive Japan – new openings for a deeper engagement in the Indo-Pacific? To this end, chapter 2 will furnish two necessary inputs: in the first section (2.1), the status quo on the engagement between Japan and the EU, and in the second section (2.2), Japan's changing security framework, from Abe's vision to the most recent adoption of three strategic documents. Chapter 3, in turn, analyse what it means for Brussels to partner with a more assertive Japan and, with an eye to the future, will consider the possible avenues for intensified cooperation.



## 2. A new Japan

### 2.1 Status quo: the EU and Japan's security engagement

Japan's relations with the EU have developed significantly compared to just a decade ago, and are expected to increase even further, given the many mutual interests. The two partners currently share a comprehensive institutional framework for enhanced bilateral cooperation, including economic and strategic partnership agreements that, in turn, entail partnership on sustainable connectivity, the EU-Japan green alliance and many more. Cooperation in the security and defence field has been touched upon chiefly by two documents, introduced herein. In the EU's Strategic Compass, which followed the 2016 Global Strategy, Japan is presented as one of the EU's bilateral partners with whom Brussels should boost tailor-made security cooperation. Other than mentioning the "constructive security and defence consultations" that occur annually between Japan and the EU, the document devotes no further attention to the matter. Japan is "the EU's closest strategic partner in the Indo-Pacific region and is a key ally for the implementation of the EU's Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific".

The EU released the latter in 2021, following the example of Germany, France, and the Netherlands, as well as many other non-EU actors, in engaging strategically with the Indo-Pacific, having acknowledged the region's stability and prosperity as "vital" for the bloc's well-being. For a start, France is the only EU member state with overseas territories in the Indo-Pacific region, with La Réunion and Mayotte among the EU's outermost regions, where EU law, rights and duties of membership apply. Moreover, the "interdependence of economies and the common global challenges" - with China at the top of the list- obliged Brussels to align its strategic approach with the global shift in the geopolitical centre of gravity and commit to promoting "an open and rules-based regional security architecture, including secure sea lines of communication, capacity-building and enhanced naval presence by EU Member States in the Indo-Pacific."

Some member states, especially those maritime nations with a natural interest in the region, have increased their naval deployments and activities, including naval exercises, with regional partners like Japan. France, the only resident country from the EU in the Indo-Pacific, keeps 8,000 soldiers stationed in the region (which accounts for 93% of its exclusive economic zone) and transits regularly with its frigates and amphibious helicopter carriers. In 2021, Germany deployed its navy frigate Bayern in a month-long symbolic voyage to the Indo-Pacific to monitor illicit military activities, and, last year, it sent three Eurofighter jets to Japan as part of a multilateral exercise with Australia. In addition, the Netherlands deployed a frigate in 2021 in a joint expedition with the UK and took part in several exercises alongside Japan, Singapore and the US. In April 2023, Italy's frigate Bergamini conducted joint naval training with Japan's destroyer JS Makinami in the Gulf of Aden to increase coordination in anti-piracy missions. Later this year, Italy's flagship aircraft carrier Cavour will sail in the Indo-Pacific waters following the ongoing visit of Italy's patrol vessel Morosini. As emphasised by the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy, Brussels has a wide range of tools and actions at its disposal. Member states' national naval and air assets can benefit from the EU's Coordinated Maritime Presence (CMP) tool, as part of a new maritime area of interest in the North-Western Indian Ocean.



In the framework of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), the EU deployed the anti-piracy naval operation EUNAVFOR Atalanta off the coast of Somalia and partnered with Japan's Maritime Self-Defence Forces in a number of joint naval exercises. Moreover, the EU has committed to building maritime capacity and sharing information through its Critical Maritime Routes in the Indian Ocean (CRIMARIO) project by developing IORIS, a secure maritime domain awareness platform, and to enhancing security cooperation in and with Asia by focusing its ESIWA project on counter-terrorism, cybersecurity, maritime security, and crisis management while developing synergies with an initial set of six pilot countries in the region, including Japan.

## 2.2 Abe's legacy and the new National Security Strategy

The security normalisation of Japan has been the long-lasting dream of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, fatally shot during a campaign rally campaign in the summer of 2022. The enacted security and defence reforms, coupled with those policy changes Abe could not deliver, are now seen as his immortal legacy. In Abe's vision, transforming Japan into a normal nation encompassed distancing from the minimalist defence posture that had been characterising post-WW2 Japan, since Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru (1946-1954) took up the reins of a defeated and occupied country and favoured the doctrine of light armament, heavy dependence on the US and a major focus on economic growth. In the understanding of Abe, the "Yoshida Doctrine" had to be intended as a temporary action, in line with the historical context in which it was defined, hence no more suitable for the mutated security challenges.

To justify a greater military role for Japan, the Abe Doctrine introduced the concept of 'proactive contribution to peace': a stronger and more committed Japan (e.g., with multilateral frameworks) would not only serve Tokyo's security purposes but would also meet expectations of the international community in terms of peace and stability. This narrative matched the multi-layered cooperative architecture adopted in Japan's first-ever NSS (2013) and comprised, in order of importance: Japan's own military policies, the US-Japan Alliance, and cooperation with other Asian and non-regional states. Consequently, Abe moved on to upgrade the geographical and military scope of Japan's self-defence force (JSDF) capabilities and to partially remove the constitutional constraints on using military power for international security. With the 2015 Legislation for Peace and Security, Japan's right of collective self-defence - until then permitted only in the event of an armed attack, in the absence of other appropriate means and to the "minimum necessary extent" - was extended to "when an armed attack against a foreign country that is in a close relationship with Japan occurs and as a result threatens Japan's survival". The diplomatic achievements of the Abe administration, which increased Japan's presence in the world to an unprecedented level through official visits and the conclusion of agreements, prompted the Cabinet to present the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) initiative with the aim of promoting strategic collaboration in all sectors - albeit, with a focus on maritime military cooperation - between countries stretching from Africa and the Middle East to East Asia. Soon, the agenda of several Western countries - most of them under the American sphere of influence - shifted their attention to the Indo-Pacific region, diverting economic resources and, most recently, increasing their naval presence and air-force exercises.

In this regard, it was self-evident that Japan would play a leadership role

within the FOIP strategy. Abe succeeded in embedding the rearmament of Tokyo's Ground, Air and Maritime Self-Defence Forces (respectively GSDF, ASDF, and MSDF) into the framework of the rules-based international order. This included overturning legal bans on the export of arms and the earlier limit on defence expenditure of 1% of GDP. The development of Japan's FOIP policy into the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad, revived in 2017 after its launch ten years earlier) alongside the United States, India, and Australia) should be seen as Abe's intent to engage with like-minded regional partners to preserve global trade and thereby to secure the maritime routes with their obligatory points of passage. When visiting India in March 2023, Japan's PM Fumio Kishida presented the "New Plan for a FOIP", elevating Abe's concept to the level of a guiding principle for the whole international community. In doing so, he signalled that no country could remain indifferent to reinforcing security efforts and cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.



The new National Security Strategy, approved by Japan's National Security Council and the Cabinet at the end of 2022, builds on the Free and Open Indo-Pacific initiative by promoting the intertwining of diplomatic, economic, military and technological means. At the same time, it lays down how Japan intends to respond to the emergence of significant threats in its strategic environment. The major novelty of this document is the introduction of counterstrike capabilities, which will allow Tokyo to deter invasion and attacks against it by firing long-range missiles at enemy territory. Japan's short-range defence (a few hundred kilometres) will thus be replaced by missiles capable of hitting targets up to 3,000 kilometres away. The strategy is "to mount effective counterstrikes against the opponent to prevent further attacks while defending against incoming missiles by means of the missile defence

network". The legal doctrine of self-defence already allows Japan to intercept incoming missiles, but Tokyo's response is limited to cases where an armed attack has been initiated. What matters is the initiation of an attack, itself fairly difficult to evaluate, and not the mere likelihood of it, as inflicting harm with pre-emptive strikes "remains impossible". Hence, the implication is that the first attack is conducted by the adversary, and Japan will likely suffer casualties before being able to limit the damages.

On the release date of the NSS, Japan also presented the National Defence Strategy (NDS), clarifying the approach and means to achieve the basic defence policy goals, as well as the Defence Build-up Program (DBP), laying out the required expenditures in the next five years. The NDS, which replaced the National Program Guidelines in place since the formation of Japan's Self-Defence Forces in 1976 and last updated in 2018, established the need to reinforce its stand-off defence capabilities (to disrupt vessels and land forces at a longer distance), its air and missile defence capabilities (to detect, track and intercept hypersonic weapons), and its defence infrastructure in the space and cyber domains. The DBP (formerly known as Mid-Term Defence Program, also last updated in 2018), commits Tokyo to a \$321 billion procurement plan starting in 2023 and extending to the following five years. In 2027, Japan's defence spending will reach 2% of its GDP, doubling from \$37 bln to approximately \$80 bln per year. Besides producing land-to-ship guided missiles (Type-12) domestically, Japan announced publicly that it will purchase US-made Tomahawk cruise missiles to equip its Maritime Self-Defence Forces for ship-to-surface attacks, as well as the Joint Strike Missile from Norway and the American-produced Lockheed Martin Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile for launch from warplanes. In an attempt to stimulate the country's defence industry, Tokyo struck a deal with the United Kingdom and Italy forming the Global Combat Air Programme to build a sixth-generation fighter jet, known as Tempest, by 2035. Furthermore, Japan's new strategy reiterates its strong commitment to deepen security cooperation with the United States. Washington remains the most convinced partner of Tokyo's boost in defence capabilities, and, now more than ever, the US-Japan Alliance serves "the cornerstone of peace, prosperity, and freedom in the Indo-Pacific region". The strengthening of collaboration includes, but is not limited to, conducting joint flexible deterrence operations (the wide range of diplomatic, political, economic, and military options that increase the costs of an enemy attack) and more regular joint activities between the JSDF and the (more than 55,000) US forces based in Japan. The stationing of a newly upgraded Marine unit on Okinawa, a US key military installation in Japan, falls within this enhanced cooperation.

The EU, unlike "its [American] Ally" and the special attention given to it in the document, was mentioned only once in the NSS. Nevertheless, Japan's strengthening of ties with European countries is considered paramount to maintaining and developing the FOIP order. The document features a number of measures to sharpen security cooperation with partners, among which the EU and the European countries, whether through dialogues, existing instruments, joint programmes, or reciprocal agreements. However, concrete action items have yet to be clarified. The next chapter will attempt to do so.

### 3. Avenues for intensified security and defence cooperation

A more assertive Japan is good news for the EU. Several domains - trade, climate change, energy, environment, connectivity, digital, etc. - already feature strong cooperation between the two partners. Nevertheless, there are multiple reasons to believe that a stronger security and defence engagement is not only desirable but also necessary. These reasons are inevitably linked to the mounting security challenges to which Tokyo and, more indirectly, Brussels are commonly exposed: from the ongoing hybrid war in Ukraine to North Korea's ballistic missiles and the potentially explosive scenario around Taiwan, which according to some experts could lead to a worldwide conflict. Moreover, these have severe repercussions for the flow of global trade, the food supply chain, the semiconductor supply chain, the fight against climate change and much more. In 2022, both the EU and Japan adopted their respective security strategies, marking significant changes in their threat assessments and, more interestingly, opening up new opportunities for cooperation among like-minded partners. Building on the EU's Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, the Strategic Compass for Security and Defence, and Japan's latest National Security Strategy and National Defence Strategy, this section seeks to explore security and defence policy areas where EU-Japan relations could benefit from coordinated action.

#### 3.1 FPA: Integrating Japan in the EU's CSDP

Since 2003, the EU has deployed civilian and military missions and operations under the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) - its operational toolbox - with tasks ranging from conflict prevention, peace-keeping, and crisis management to post-conflict and humanitarian activities. To facilitate the contribution of non-EU member states to CSDP missions and operations, partners are required to sign the Framework Participation Agreement (FPA) that lays down the legal basis for participation and allows for better cooperation in terms of practices and identification of synergies. Indo-Pacific countries that have already concluded FPAs with the EU are Australia, the Republic of Korea, New Zealand and Vietnam. Although Japan has recently worked in synergy with the EU's counter-piracy mission EUNAVFOR Atalanta in Somalia and carried out a joint naval exercise with the EU and Djibouti in the Gulf of Aden, Tokyo has not yet entered into an FPA with Brussels. The conclusion of such an agreement would create a common experience on the ground and ensure a greater level of information-sharing. This would serve both the EU's and Japan's appetite for more responsibility at the global level, reflecting the intention of Brussels to become a geopolitical actor and a security provider (at a time when boundaries between internal and external security are increasingly blurred) and that of Tokyo, once focused on its immediate neighbourhood and the alliance with the US, to now step up its defence cooperation with coastal states of the Indian Ocean and countries from the Middle East and Africa.

### 3.2 Common maritime engagement in the Indo-Pacific

The EU's newly updated Maritime security strategy, echoing the EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, addressed the relevance of EU participation in international and regional fora on maritime affairs. To match the EU's maritime interests with those of Japan alongside partners in the Indo-Pacific, the EU should not abandon the idea of becoming a dialogue partner in the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), while considering applying for partnership in the India-led Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). Both initiatives deal with a number of issues, including maritime security, and are aimed at strengthening regional cooperation in the overall Indian Ocean region and reinvigorating tailor-made partnerships around the Bay of Bengal, where strategic chokepoints meet with China's increasing maritime and economic forays. Concerning maritime security, the full use of existing instruments such as Critical Maritime Routes Indian Ocean (CRIMARIO II) and Enhancing Security cooperation In and With Asia (ESIWA) is advisable. The renovated capacity-building platform in the Western Indian Ocean has enlarged its geographical scope to South and Southeast Asia, the Pacific Ocean and as far as Latin America. The CRIMARIO II initiative, through training courses and exercises to practice the use of its information sharing tool IORIS and its inter-centres exchange information system SHARE.IT, should further engage in collaboration with coastal states of the South Pacific to balance out Beijing's current search for a permanent military presence. The ESIWA programme to enhance security cooperation in the region, after a rough start partly due to the spread of Covid-19, remains a concrete opportunity to identify challenges, build confidence with partner countries and present the EU as a maritime security actor. In the maritime domain, ESIWA aims to



share analyses and exchange good practices, especially in non-traditional maritime security matters (illegal fishing, environmental degradation, human, drugs and arms trafficking etc.) where the EU's experience could contribute the most. Maritime security is one of the four thematic areas around which the focus of ESIWA gravitates, the other three being counter-terrorism and preventing of violent extremism, cybersecurity and crisis management. But this siloed approach should be supplemented by a cross-cutting engagement, as is the case of cooperation activities for the protection of critical maritime infrastructure, where the areas of maritime security and cybersecurity must necessarily converge. In keeping with the "team Europe" spirit, EU institutions, agencies and member states should make a stronger commitment to allowing their officials and experts to attend the events and activities organised by ESIWA in the Indo-Pacific.

Implementing a strategy is not limited to sending a ship; the engagement usually starts with a conference or a seminar in the presence of EU officials. Since ESIWA is due to terminate in 2024 and CRIMARIO II in 2025, Brussels will have to decide whether to prolong its (still very much needed) commitment as a security dialogue partner; it is essential that alternative instruments are proposed in case of failing renewal. For instance, the EU is supporting Japan's recent initiative to promote regional maritime security by building up the Coast Guard capabilities of four partner countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Vietnam). ESIWA will be the instrument to facilitate and mobilise the requested EU experts. As already shown, ESIWA is already committed to long-term projects with partners in the region; renewing the mandate or finding an alternative instrument becomes key to ensure that the cooperative actions delivered so far are not squandered. To counter China's growing influence, Japan has been intensifying its engagement in the Pacific island states, including by opening embassies in Vanuatu and Kiribati and a consulate in French-controlled New Caledonia. The EU, through its diplomatic representation in the Pacific (EU's Pacific ambassador based in Fiji) and the opening of new delegation offices in those Pacific island states which have agreed to increase security ties with China (e.g. Solomon Islands), should explore with Tokyo the possibilities for joint cooperation in areas such as maritime infrastructure. For instance, the collaborative construction of ports is beneficial for the region's security architecture as well as for coordination between strategic partners. Moreover, the focus on transport features among the priority sectors in the Global Gateway strategy, which, launched in 2021 under the French presidency of the Council, still seeks a vital impetus to make itself known. The stationing of EU delegations in the Pacific island states could be a first step toward such a direction. Following a similar deal between Japan and Australia in 2022, Japan and the UK recently signed the so-called Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA) to allow for closer defence cooperation between both parties. This entails access to one another's military bases and ports, joint military training (including naval exercises) and clear jurisdiction in the event of crime perpetrated by a service member on each other's soil. The EU should encourage its member states - especially the naval powers - to improve their military interoperability with Japan and conclude such an RAA.

### 3.3 Cognitive domain

In today's wars, the strategy of targeting emotions, beliefs, values, and other intangible aspects of human cognition to ultimately influence decision-making has been gaining traction - the ongoing conflict in Ukraine is an example of this battle of narratives. Japan's NSS affirmed for the first time

Tokyo's commitment to adequately responding to information warfare in the cognitive domain, including the spread of disinformation. For this purpose, a new structure dealing with strategic communication and the analysis of attempts at disinformation originating abroad will be established within the Japanese government. Tokyo's remarkable step to strengthen its domestic ability to counter emerging threats should be coupled with the quest for international cooperation in the fight against disinformation. Given the EU's proposal - emphasised in the Strategic Compass - to implement hybrid warfare response instruments such as the Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) toolbox, and the consolidated capacity of the European External Action Service (EEAS), the EU's diplomatic arm, in helping partners in the identification of hybrid risks, Brussels could assist Japan, and vice versa, with the needed expertise. To date, the EEAS has developed targeted approaches to tackling disinformation and engaging with audiences in three geographic priority regions: the Eastern neighbourhood, Western Balkans, and the MENA region. An additional strategic communication (Stratcom) task force cooperates with NATO, G7 partners, and bilaterally with like-minded countries, primarily in order to counter China's activities of disinformation and information manipulation and respond rapidly to them. In light of the shared perception of China as a common challenge in the cognitive domain, Japan's new governmental structure should seek cooperative arrangements with existing capabilities within the EU and, if necessary, even with a novel EU stratcom task force, exclusively dedicated to the Indo-Pacific region.

### 3.4 AI in military affairs

Japan's population is rapidly shrinking, as the country's birth rate registered a new record low last year. The country's self-defence forces (JSDF) face a significant shortage of personnel and struggle to meet recruitment targets due to the low quality of life and poor treatment of service personnel, as well as competition for recruits in the private sector. Put simply, a young Japanese person is more tempted to join private companies than enlist. The many governmental efforts to overturn this decades-long trend, including by the recent doubling of defence spending, appear not to solve the problem in the short run. Nevertheless, Tokyo could tackle these issues, and to a certain extent has already expressed its willingness to do so in the defence strategy, by introducing Artificial Intelligence (AI) and unmanned vehicles, notably drones, into its defence equipment for a wide range of missions, including combat support. AI applied to the military, which can be used as both an optimiser for lethal systems and as a defence mechanism to save labour and the lives of many civilians and soldiers, represents a still unexplored field that needs clear and internationally valid regulations.

Since the EU Commission's proposal of a European AI Act in 2021, Brussels has sought to join a limited number of countries, such as France and the US, as well as supranational bodies such as NATO in adopting AI strategies. This new legal framework and the knowledge it has gained in the field make the EU a promising partner for Japan. It is thus advisable to strive to develop international arrangements and a governance framework for the use of AI for military purposes, making it possible to discuss and exchange knowledge on the state-of-the-art, address the many risks of specific uses, craft harmonised rules and establish universally applicable standards. For instance, it is important to ensure that AI weapons continue to respect International Humanitarian Law, and that resource scarcity, like electricity in certain military contexts, is duly taken into account so as to be aware of how much power an

AI system requires to function. The management of ethical risks in adopting AI should thus anticipate the discussion on what is next when it comes to the military application of emerging and disruptive technologies - quantum computing, 5G data and hypersonic weapons, to name but a few - and the consequences that easier encryption, smoother deciphering, more accurate ballistic strikes could have on warfare.

### 3.5 Unmanned assets within joint development programmes

Both the EU and Japan are shifting their attention from manned to unmanned military assets, as they acknowledge the latter will play a major role in the future of armed forces due to faster manoeuvrability, more efficiency, and the capability to reduce human loss. Japan determined in the NDS that it will introduce unmanned assets through early production and deployment by 2027 and is already planning to decommission military aircraft and replace them with drones. The EU, through the Strategic Compass for Security and Defence, has called for stronger tailor-made bilateral partnerships with like-minded partners, including Japan. Given their common interest and recent engagement in the adoption of unmanned equipment, the EU and Japan should promote initiatives for jointly developed projects, particularly through the participation of Japanese entities in funding mechanisms of the EU and the nurturing of a closer dialogue between their respective agencies for defence capabilities development: for the EU, the Directorate-General for Defence Industry and Space (DG DEFIS) and the European Defence Agency (EDA), and for Japan, Acquisition, Technology & Logistics Agency (ATLA). Lately, ATLA has worked on developing unmanned amphibious assault vehicles and will soon start demonstration tests of its brand-new anti-drone laser systems. For its part, EDA has launched its largest research and technology project to date, to develop highly autonomous unmanned combat ground systems. The project





brings together 9 member states and 28 European industry partners, while additional non-EU participants can opt in. Third country participation in EDA's military and technological programmes is possible, but it must pass through an administrative agreement (AA) like those already signed with Norway, Switzerland, Serbia and Ukraine as well as with selected organisations. Japan seems to have all the credentials to join EDA as a third party member and to foster industrial cooperation with member states in the mutual interest area of unmanned capabilities.

With a view to taking part in collaborative R&D actions in the sector, Japan could also access the European Defence Fund (EDF). Third country-controlled subsidiaries are in principle not eligible for EDF grants, but derogations remain possible provided that they do not jeopardise the security and defence interests of the Union (the third country entity cannot limit the MS' ability to conduct the action, gain access to sensitive information, or control the result of the programme). This must be seen as a significant way for Japan's declining defence industry to remain afloat and enjoy the benefits of cooperating within a consortium, from competitiveness to know-how and networking. To this end, the participation of Japan's private defence companies (not only state-owned enterprises) in EDF-funded development programmes should be encouraged by both the EU and Japan.

### 3.6 Defence exports

The NDS states that reinforcing Japan's defence production and technology bases is essential for national security. Reading between the lines of the NDS, it is also understandable that a strengthened production base would favour Japan's autonomous procurement (still widely reliant on foreign supply) and hence contribute to the survival of its defence industry. This will be rendered possible, among other things, by promoting defence equipment transfers. The NDS specifies that the 'Three Principles on Transfer of Defence Equipment and Technology' of 2014 - effectively banning the export of potentially lethal weapons - will be maintained, although subject to revisions. Japan's defence industry, which was basically prevented from expanding due to the restrictions of the three principles policy, as well as by a population very reluctant to accept investment in military affairs, may well increase the chances for success - given the fading hesitation by the Japanese public - by gaining the ability to make its own equipment and also sell it to others.

Tokyo recently unveiled the new OSA (official security assistance) framework, which will provide defence equipment and other forms of grant aid to like-minded and, "in principle, developing countries", in a clear attempt to revitalise the national industry (by hoping to make the business sustainable for Japanese defence companies) and reinforce the region's comprehensive defence architecture. What Japan lacks in the short term is the capacity to make repairs or provide replacements for its military equipment produced under US license which Tokyo plans to transfer. As a result of its member states signing G2G memoranda of understanding with Japan and B2B agreements with Japanese defence companies, the EU could become a valid collaborator for equipment transfer and an excellent provider of electronic materials and technology. EU member states could thus make up for Tokyo's lack of operational background with such components and alleviate the heavy manufacturing costs for defence companies in Japan. This would mean facilitating Japanese defence transfers to those partner countries the EU has every interest in aiding, such as Ukraine, to name but one. However,

a couple of points remain to be clarified by Tokyo: how Japan plans to use the (legal) possibility of exporting lethal equipment, namely how it intends to revise the three principle policy, especially after having attempted ten years ago to export submarines, that is lethal weapons, to Australia. And whether the programme can be expanded to parties in conflict; in substance, whether Ukraine, a country subject to aggression in violation of international law, is eligible to receive aid.

## 4. Conclusion and policy recommendations

Japanese society tends to dislike engaging in security-related debates and the defence industry has generally been disdained - defence companies are usually referred to as “merchants of death”. However, Japan’s pacifist bubble seems to have burst. Putin’s unprovoked war in Ukraine caused an unprecedented change in the public view, and Japan’s domestic support for its self-defence forces has risen to a record high. The increasing threats and military activities of two other neighbouring countries, China and North Korea, have contributed to the widespread perception of an imperilled security environment, prompting the Japanese government to rewrite its ten-year-old National Security Strategy. The adoption of three strategic documents at the end of 2022 signalled the country’s shift to a more assertive posture, which encompasses a number of policy changes, the most prominent being the debut of counterstrike capabilities to respond to enemy attack and the doubling of defence spending. Japan’s new strategy is aimed at maintaining and developing the Free and Open Indo-Pacific by deepening security cooperation with the US, regional and like-minded countries and organisations, including the EU. Similarly, the EU, in its Strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific and the Strategic Compass, regards Japan as a strategic partner with whom to further engage.

This paper has identified several domains where intensified cooperation between the EU and Japan could result in the strengthening of the security environment in the Indo-Pacific, where geopolitical tensions meet and Brussels’ view has recently shifted.

Based on the above analysis, the following recommendations are made:

- *The conclusion of a framework partnership agreement (FPA) with Japan, to allow Tokyo to contribute to the EU’s CSDP missions and operations.*
- *The EU’s participation as a dialogue partner in maritime affairs fora like IORA and BIMSTEC.*
- *The promotion of cross-cutting activities within the ESIWA project and the facilitation of EU officials and experts to attend organised events in the Indo-Pacific.*
- *The renewal of the mandate for CRIMARIO and ESIWA or a search for alternative initiatives.*
- *The opening of EU delegation offices in the Pacific island states and exploring possibilities for joint cooperation in the area of maritime infrastructure with the local representations of Japan.*
- *The conclusion of a reciprocal access agreement (RAA) between interested EU member states and Japan.*
- *In the cognitive domain, the arrangement of cooperative actions between Japan’s new governmental structure on counter-disinformation and the EEAS, including a novel EU stratcom task force for the Indo-Pacific.*

- *The development of international standards for the use of AI in the military context, as well as of a platform for discussions on the military application of emerging and disruptive technologies (hypersonic, data, quantum computing).*
- *The promotion of initiatives to develop joint programmes on unmanned capabilities, including the fostering of dialogue between DG DEFIS, EDA and Japan's ATLA.*
- *The participation of Japan's defence companies in EDA programmes through the conclusion of an administrative agreement (AA).*
- *Further cooperation between Japan's defence companies and EDF-funded programmes to compete, gain know-how and network with European companies.*
- *EU member states' contribution to Japan's Official Security Assistance (OSA) programme by providing electronic materials and technology within Japanese defence transfers.*

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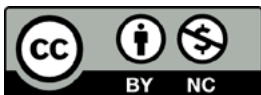


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