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Japanese politics & policy

Japan sounds alarm over Russian and Chinese military co-operation

Tokyo releases defence white paper as it considers changing pacifist constitution



A Russian TU-95 bomber and Chinese H-6 bombers fly over the East China Sea in May. Japan called the exercise, which coincided with a visit by US president Joe Biden to Tokyo, 'unacceptable' © Joint Staff Office of the Defense Ministry of Japan/Reuters

Kana Inagaki in Tokyo YESTERDAY

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Japan has sounded the alarm over greater military co-operation between Russia and China in a defence white paper that warned an isolated Moscow could draw closer to Beijing in the wake of the war in Ukraine.

The white paper, which was approved by Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's cabinet on Friday, was released as the defence ministry prepared to ask for more money to address the threats posed by China, Russia and North Korea.

“For Russia, which is internationally isolated and has suffered losses in ground forces, the importance of political and military co-operation with China could increase,” the white paper said. It also highlighted the need to “monitor with concern” the activities of Russian armed forces.

China and Russia have conducted joint nuclear bomber exercises over the Sea of Japan each year since 2019. Japan was particularly alarmed in May when strategic bombers from both countries [carried out an “unacceptable” exercise](#) when US president Joe Biden was in Tokyo to attend a Quad summit.

The white paper was released as the government prepares for a review of the

country's national security strategy.

Following a [landslide election win](#) this month, the ruling coalition, along with two like-minded parties, have enough seats in both houses of the parliament to begin the process for a revision to Japan's pacifist constitution.

Kishida's Liberal Democratic party has urged [Japan](#) to boost its defence budget in line with Nato's commitment to spend 2 per cent of gross domestic product and consider first-strike capabilities against enemy bases. For the past 50 years, Japan has capped its defence spending at about 1 per cent of its GDP.

The white paper noted that Japan's security budget as a percentage of GDP was also lower than that of other G7 countries as well as Australia and South Korea.

Kishida is expected to face strong resistance from his party's fiscal hawks and Komeito, its coalition partner, to radically increase defence spending. But Russia's [invasion of Ukraine](#) has raised concerns that China could launch an attack on Taiwan, leading to a cautious shift in public sentiment in favour of more military expenditure.

In a chapter on Taiwan, the white paper highlighted China rising assertiveness and the growing gap in military capabilities between Beijing and Taipei.

"The possibility of increased military tensions between China and Taiwan cannot be denied," it said. "Stabilising the situation surrounding Taiwan is important for Japan's security and the stability of the international community."

In last year's white paper, Japan broke with years of precedent and [directly linked Taiwan's security](#) with its own with an explicit reference to the need for a greater "sense of crisis".