



## **DRIVERS BEHIND JAPAN'S DEFENSE BUDGET SURGE (2013-2023): THREAT PERCEPTIONS AND POLITICAL SUPPORT**

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### **Abstract**

Since 2013, Japan has increased its defense budget significantly and consistently annually. Recently in 2022 a decision was approved to increase the defense budget to the target of 2% of its GDP by 2027. Empirically from 2013 it amounted to ¥4.6 trillion which increased slowly until 2022 with the target starting to increase significantly to ¥8.7 trillion in 2025. The move was motivated by the perceived threat of China, North Korea, and Russia surpassing Japan's defense. This study analyzes the significant and consistent increase in defense budget from 2013 to 2023. The data was analyzed using the determinants that influence the allocation of the national defense budget by Triantama and Abdul (2023) with qualitative research methods. The results show that there is a high threat perception, strong military ambition, and civilian support that encourages Japan to continue to increase its defense budget until it reaches the target in 2027.

**Keywords:** civilian support, defense budget, Japan, military ambition, perception of threat

## **Inroduction**

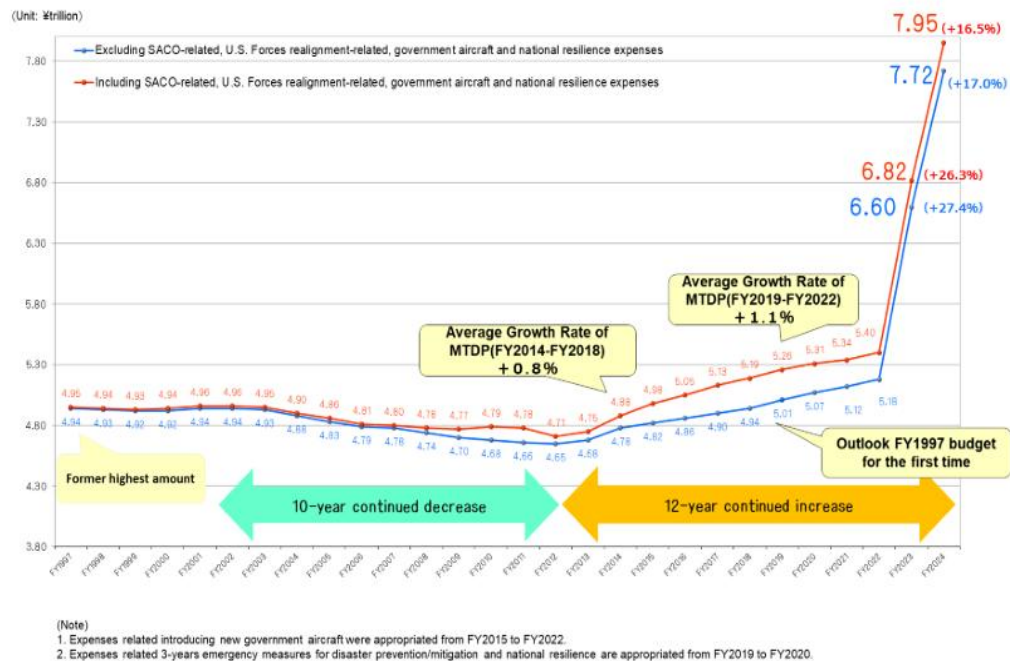
On December 16, 2022, Japan approved three documents, namely the National Security Strategy, National Defense Strategy, and Defense Buildup Program, which paved the way for the Japanese government to make changes to its security policy. This was due to Japan currently facing complex regional security challenges, which also prompted Japan to make significant changes, namely increasing its defense budget, which is targeted to reach 2% of its GDP in 2027 (Matsuda, 2023; The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2024). Issues related to regional security challenges faced by Japan are also explained in detail in the official report of the Japanese Ministry of Defense 2021-2024 White Paper, in which Japan consistently identifies three neighbouring countries, namely China, North Korea, and Russia, as part of its threat perception (Kihara, 2024; Kishi, 2021, 2022; Yasukazu, 2023).

Historically, this is not the first time the Japanese government has changed its national security policy. However, following World War II, Japan, which was under the control of the United States and its allies, established a new Japanese Constitution. One of its provisions is Article 9, which prohibits Japan from engaging in active military activities and does not recognize the right to wage war. Japan must prioritize peaceful methods, such as diplomacy, in resolving issues (Smith, 2019). However, during Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's administration from 2012 to 2020, he made significant changes to Japan's defense policy, such as changing military doctrine and significantly increasing Japan's defense budget. Additionally, there were changes such as making Japan's military role more active, strengthening its defense alliances with the United States and other countries, and encouraging Japan to move away from its pacifist nature with the ambition to amend Article 9. These measures were implemented by Prime Ministers Shinzo Abe and Fumio Kishida to prepare Japan by developing its military capabilities, considering the complex regional security challenges (Tomohiko, 2023).

Therefore, during Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's administration, the world's attention was drawn to the announcement of a new defense policy in which the Japanese government will increase its defense budget to ¥43 trillion, or approximately \$330 billion, by 2027 and raise defense spending to 2% of GDP. This is to address various military defense needs, from maintenance to the acquisition of new weapons such as ships and

missiles. Through this enhanced capability, Japan aims to strengthen its deterrence and self-defense capabilities (Murakami, 2023; Roark, 2024).

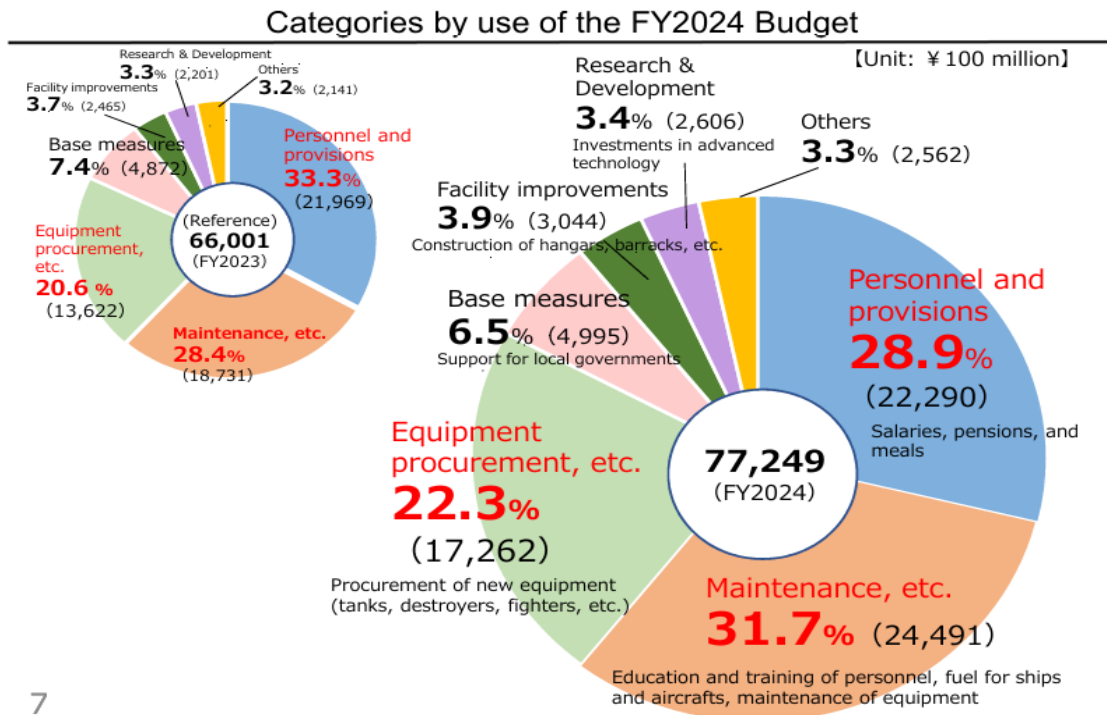
**Figure 1 – Increase in Japan's defense budget**  
(Reference) Change in expenditure (Initial Budget)



Source: Ministry of Defense Japan (2023).

The above data is an official report from the Japanese Ministry of Defense, which proposes a 16.5% and 17% increase in Japan's total defense budget expenditure in 2024, following a 26.3% and 27.4% increase in 2023. This increase is due to proposals from the Japanese Ministry of Defense and the decision by Prime Minister Fumio Kishida to continue the legacy of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's ambition to strengthen Japan's military defense capabilities and capacity. Additionally, this increase is driven by Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's goal to reach 2% of Japan's GDP by 2027 (Ministry of Defense Japan, 2023).

**Figure 2 – Categories of Japanese Defense Budget Expenditures**



Source: Ministry of Defense Japan (2023).

The data above is an official report from the Japanese Ministry of Defense explaining the distribution of its defense budget after proposing an increase in the defense budget. It is known that Japan allocates majority of its budget to the maintenance of existing military weapons, amounting to 31.7%. Additionally, 22.3% of the budget is allocated for the acquisition of weapons and procurement of equipment for all branches of the Japanese military. This indicates that the proposed increase in Japan's defense budget aims to strengthen its defense capabilities (Ministry of Defense Japan, 2023).

Japan's current position cannot be separated from the desire of the Japanese government, from the regime of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to Fumio Kishida, to increase its military defense capacity and capabilities. This is based on the perception of threats from China, North Korea, and Russia, as outlined in the Japanese Ministry of Defense White Paper and other national security documents. These three countries are known to have engaged in several military activities that are deemed a threat to Japan's security and concerns about armed conflict (Smith, 2019, 2022).

Based on the author's observations, there is still a lack of research that specifically discusses the significant and consistent increase in Japan's defense budget. It is known

that most of the available research only discusses changes in Japan's defense posture. Therefore, this study will focus on discussing the reasons behind Japan's defense budget surge from 2013 to 2023. The author also uses the determinants that influence how a country allocates its defense budget as a theoretical framework to provide a novelty in this study (Triantama & Abdul, 2023). These determinants consist of two factors as variables that the author believes can help analyze and answer the research question: Why does the Japanese government consistently increase its defense budget significantly every year?.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Perception of Threat***

In this category, it is generally described that Japan is increasing its defense budget due to considerations of the threats currently faced by Japan. The threats influencing Japan's defense budget increase are described in existing research, including Roark (2024), who argues that the main reason the Japanese government decided to increase its defense budget was the release of an official report from the Japanese Ministry of Defense stating that China, North Korea, and Russia are the main real threats to Japan (Roark, 2024). Then, Prabowo (2023) and Eyfells (2010) stated that the Security Dilemma became a factor in Japan's remilitarization due to China's military activities on the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, which are currently still disputed by Japan and China. This dilemma is also caused by the Japanese government's challenge to amend Article 9 which would enable the Japan Self-Defense Force (JSDF) to respond directly to threats, but the article prevents Japan from achieving its goal (Eyfells, 2010; Prabowo, 2023). In addition, Grønning (2014) argues that the Japanese government has changed its military priorities, demonstrating Japan's balancing strategy toward China. This move is due to Japan's perception of China's aggressive behaviour in the maritime military sphere (Grønning, 2014). Therefore, it can be concluded that Japan's perception of threats to its neighbouring countries has influenced changes in Japan's defense posture.

### ***Defense Policy***

Previous studies have also discussed the defense policies implemented by the Japanese government to address potential threats in the region. Liff (2015) and Hughes (2024) argue that the changes and reforms to defense policy carried out by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe include the establishment of new institutions to support Japan's defense, the formulation of the U.S.-Japan Defense Cooperation Guidelines, and the enactment of the 2015 Security Law. Later, during the tenure of Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, three documents were enacted to support the development of Japan's defense capabilities and strengthen Japan's defense alliance with the United States, which could accelerate the process of transforming Japan's military from its previously passive defensive stance to a more active one (Hughes, 2024; Liff, 2015). These studies conclude that the Japanese government has sought to revise its defense policy, which could pave the way for Japan to increase its defense budget, acquire new weapons, enhance defense cooperation with other countries, and shift its defense strategy to a more proactive stance than before.

### ***National Interest***

Research related to Japan increasing its defense budget and other defense policies is also discussed by Baldauff (2024). This book explains that the Japanese government has a national interest in strengthening its national security and ways to achieve this through enhancing Japan's strategic partnerships. In this book, Japan is viewed as having a crucial and robust alliance with the United States, but alliances with other countries are also important, such as India, Australia, Europe, and Southeast Asia. Additionally, to maximize its deterrence capabilities, Japan is also making changes to its defense policies to achieve Japan's national interests (Baldauff, 2024).

According to Mearsheimer (2001), international politics is an anarchic world in which countries are always seeking power for their national interests. For a country to survive in international politics, it must be able to use or build power to survive (Mearsheimer, 2001). In addition, Mearsheimer also emphasizes that countries must be able to secure themselves by acting aggressively due to the anarchic structure of the international system. This is because there is no centralized authority or hegemon, countries inevitably possess offensive military capabilities, and countries are never

certain of each other's intentions (Mearsheimer, 2001). Mearsheimer's thinking correlates with that of Burke (2012), who argues that because the international political system is anarchic, the only way for a country to survive is to increase its military capacity. This is so that countries that feel threatened by the military power of other countries can defend themselves (Devetak et al., 2012).

### *Argumentative Papers*

Finally, these studies present research on the development of Japan's defense posture, Japan's defense readiness, and the development of Japan's defense strategy discussed by Heginbotham et al. (2023), Grønning (2018), Hinata-Yamaguchi (2018), and Matsuda (2023). There is also research on the dilemma of Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution discussed by Oktreza et al. (2024). It can be concluded that Japan's perspective on the global situation has prompted the Japanese government to rethink its defense and security. Japan has taken various steps and made changes to prepare itself for adequate defense without relying too heavily on its alliances. However, Japan still faces the dilemma of Article 9 of the Constitution and has sought to amend the article due to the threats it faces (Grønning, 2018; Heginbotham et al., 2023; Hinata-Yamaguchi, 2018; Matsuda, 2023; Oktreza et al., 2024).

Based on previous studies, it can be concluded that Japan's decision to increase its defense budget was due to the perceived threats posed by China, North Korea, and Russia. These threats prompted Japan to revise various defense policies, particularly the discourse on amending Article 9, which implies that Japan will become more proactive than its previous passive stance. Furthermore, it is known that, according to data from the Japanese Ministry of Defense, there has been a significant and consistent request for an increase in the defense budget since 2013, supported by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. In 2023, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida also announced an increase in the defense budget with a target expenditure of 2% of GDP by 2027 (Murakami, 2023). Thus, this study, using determinants that discuss the allocation of the state defense budget, can explain the shortcomings that have not been discussed in previous studies.



## Methodology

### *Analytical Framework*

Research on a country's defense budget has been extensively studied, as evidenced by the abundance of literature on the subject. Such research typically focuses on countries that are empirically involved in numerous conflicts, face high potential threats, and have active militaries. Countries such as the United States, Pakistan, Israel, and China are examples where research has focused on their defense budgets. Therefore, the author has compiled several sources of literature discussing a country's defense budget and summarized them into several determinants used as a framework for answering the research question.

The determinants that discuss defense budget allocation are variables, namely Strategic Factors and Political Factors. These determinants explain how countries allocate their defense budgets and what the driving factors are. In the first Strategic Factor, there is the perception of threat. If a country faces a high perception of threat, it will have a high defense budget to deal with it. Second, there is the country's military ambition. If the country's military has ambitions to carry out military operations or to possess strong weaponry, then the country will have a high defense budget. Finally, there is also a political factor that can influence the allocation of the defense budget. This is because this variable includes the democratic political system implemented by the country. In a democratic system, public support becomes the driving force or legitimacy for the government in allocating the country's defense budget.

Based on Anwar & Rafique (2012), Shiffer (2007), Richter (2016), and Hauenstein et al. (2021), countries allocate their defense budgets based on their perception of threats. Thus, if the perception of threat is high, the state, as a rational actor, will allocate a high defense budget to strengthen its national security. For example, countries such as Pakistan and Israel, which have a long history of armed conflict with their neighbors, show a high correlation between the perception of threat and the allocation of defense budgets to address that threat. In their paper, Hauenstein et al. (2021) also argue that countries with democratic systems tend to have low defense budget allocations. However, Hauenstein et al. argue that democratic countries can also have high defense budget allocations when



faced with high external threats (Anwar & Rafique, 2012; Hauenstein et al., 2021; Richter, 2016; Shiffer, 2007).

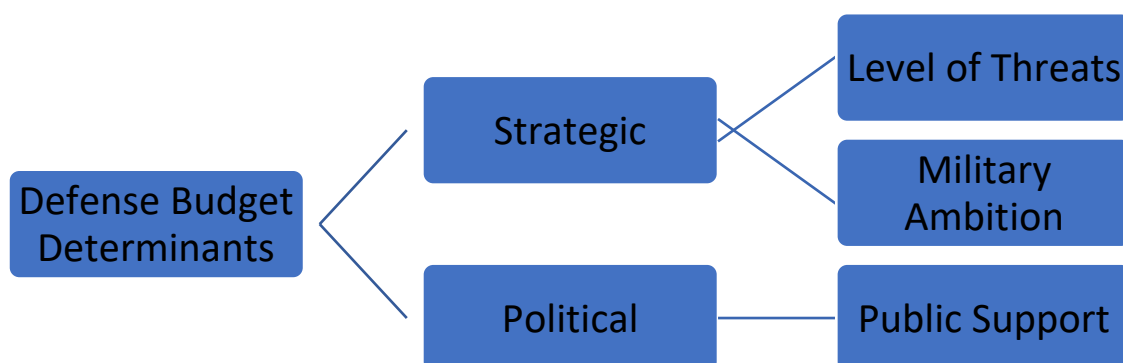
The second indicator in Strategic Factors is the military ambition of the country. According to Friedman & Logan (2012) and Liff (2015), a country's military ambition can influence the allocation of its defense budget, as seen from its military activities outside its borders. Active military activities outside its borders require a high budget, thereby driving the need for a high defense budget to accommodate them. Friedman & Logan (2012) explain this correlation using the United States as an example, where during President Obama's administration, there was an interest in increasing military ambitions in Asia while simultaneously maintaining the deployment of U.S. troops in Europe and the Middle East. Furthermore, Liff (2015) explains the correlation with Japan, where during Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's administration, significant and radical military changes were implemented, as he sought to make the JSDF more active in conducting military activities beyond Japan's borders. This demonstrates a positive correlation between military ambitions and defense budget allocations (Friedman & Logan, 2012; Liff, 2015).

Political factors also play a major role in influencing the allocation of a country's defense budget. This factor includes indicators of a democratic political system as the country's political system. According to Sprout & Sprout (1986), Demarest (2017), and Eichenberg & Stoll (2003), there is a dilemma for governments in allocating their defense budgets. This is because democratic political systems uphold the principle that power lies in the hands of the people, leading to a tendency for certain groups in society to urge the government to prioritize economic development and public welfare (Demarest, 2017; Eichenberg & Stoll, 2003; Sprout & Sprout, 1968).

Furthermore, in this democratic political system, public perception is a factor that influences the government's policy-making process. Based on Ostrom & Marra (1986) and Page et al. (1987), public perception is an important component in democratic life, especially when discussing the state's defense budget policy. Therefore, when the government issues a policy, there will be public perception of that policy, and the public will determine whether the policy is permissible or legitimate for the government to implement (Ostrom & Marra, 1986; Page et al., 1987).

The conclusion from this framework is that Strategic Factors and Political Factors are determinants that can influence a country's defense budget allocation. These factors have been previously studied in existing literature, and the author summarizes them to address the research questions posed. Within Strategic Factors, there are perceptions of threats and a nation's military ambitions that influence how it allocates its defense budget. Within Political Factors, there is the democratic political system that it adopts. This democratic political system serves as a driving force and source of legitimacy for the government to enhance its defense capabilities (Triantama & Abdul, 2023). The author uses these determinants by applying them through the collection of literature and data obtained by the author. In Strategic Factors for threat perception, it is known that Japan has a high perception of threat, and this is stated in various official government reports such as the Japanese Ministry of Defense's white paper and other documents that name China, North Korea, and Russia as threats to Japan. Furthermore, regarding military ambitions, it is known that Japan currently has a defense budget that continues to increase, with a target of 2% of its GDP by 2027, much of which is utilized for the acquisition of new weaponry such as long-range missiles and military ships for Japan's defense. This is outlined in the Japanese Ministry of Defense's report on its budget proposal and its allocation. Furthermore, in the Political Factors section, there is an official survey result from Nikkei indicating public support for defense development, including an increase in Japan's defense budget.

**Figure 3 – Illustration of the analytical framework**



Source: Compiled by the author based on Triantama & Abdul (2023).

### ***Research Method***

In this study, the approach used is a qualitative method with a case study approach based on the book “Research Methods in Politics and International Relations” by Lamont (2015). Qualitative methods are methods that use data collection and analysis strategies for non-numeric data. Through this method, we can understand the world around us, and in international relations, this method can be used to understand the meaning and processes that shape international politics. Based on this book, the application of qualitative methods in international relations is through a case study approach (Lamont, 2015).

This study uses primary and secondary data to meet its research needs. According to Lamont (2015), primary data is data written by individuals who have direct access to the information they convey. Meanwhile, secondary data is a source that analyzes or uses primary sources as references, therefore secondary data complements the research needs (Lamont, 2015). In relation to this, the author read official documents and reports from the Japanese government, particularly from the Ministry of Defense, which published white papers and documents from the NSS, NDS, and DBP, which were the main sources. The author also utilized official statements from Japanese government officials regarding the issues discussed. In addition, sources such as media reports, books, and journal articles were also used to supplement the relevant information in this study. The author used internet-based literature review techniques to obtain the data.

### ***Data Collection***

The process of data collection in this research is through document analysis where the author seeks the relevant documents such as official documents, reports, and literatures from the Government of Japan specifically Japan’s Ministry of Defense. The official documents and reports from Ministry of Defense such as the yearly published Defense of Japan White Books from 2021 to 2023, as a source to find and analyse Japan’s current defense standing and development to its international security, especially Japan’s defense budget developments. The author also looked at publications such as the National Security Strategy, Defense Buildup Program, and National Defense Strategy to analyse Japan’s latest defense policies. The author also looked at relevant scientific books and journals that have researched about Japan’s defense reforms, policies, and developments

and Japan's defense budget surge and its utilizations. The author also follows the latest developments of Japan's defense policies surrounding its defense budget through news articles.

### ***Data Analysis***

The author conducted the data analysis in this qualitative research through descriptive analysis. According to "Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods" by Taylor et al (2016), the process of data analysis starts with a process of inductive reasoning, thinking, and theorizing, the process then continues with analysing existing data that has been gathered to be coded to identify relevant themes and concepts to gain a deeper understanding and refine its interpretations. After analysing the data to keep track of emerging themes and ideas and refining the author's understanding of this research matter, the final process is drawing conclusions of the author's findings (Taylor et al., 2016). During this process of analysing the data, the author also uses process-tracing where the author analyses to uncover the causal behind such events such as Japan's defense budget surge and the author also uses content analysis to discover the narratives inside the data collected in order to be coded and then find the correlation of patterns with the defense budget determinants as an analytical framework (Lamont, 2015).

### **Discussion: Japan's Perception of Threats**

As explained earlier in the conceptual framework chapter, the author uses an analytical framework in the form of Strategic Factors with indicators of Threat Perception and Military Ambition. In Threat Perception, it is known that a country will allocate its defense budget ratio in accordance with the threat perception it faces. Therefore, if the threat perception is high, the country will allocate a high defense budget as a form of defense against that threat perception, which could potentially become a threat (Anwar & Rafique, 2012; Hauenstein et al., 2021; Richter, 2016; Shiffer, 2007). Next, the author will explain Japan's perception of threats.

According to Mearsheimer's offensive realism where security is scarce due to an anarchic world and countries are always seeking power for their national interests. Which then give rise to assumptions such as no hegemon or centralized authority to guarantee the limits on behaviour of states, countries inevitably possess offensive military

capabilities which is capable to be used against other states, and countries are never certain of each other's intentions. This also drives countries to strive for their survival especially their territorial integrity and countries are rational actors which means they will consider immediate and long-term consequences of their actions and think about their survivability (Mearsheimer, 2001; Steinsson, 2014). This is also supported by Burke (2012) which argues that the only way for a country to survive is by increasing its military capacity for the purpose of defending themselves (Devetak et al., 2012). Thus, through Japan's perception of threats where Japan feels that its security is scarce due to surrounded by China, North Korea, and Russia which have offensive military capabilities that can threaten Japan's territorial integrity and their recent activities and intentions which also concerns Japan. Therefore, Japan has no choice but to increase its defense budget significantly and consistently to strive for Japan's survivability.

In understanding Japan's perception of threats, this can be seen from the publication of the White Paper by the Japanese Ministry of Defense, which explains what threats Japan faces and who they come from. In the Japanese Ministry of Defense's White Paper (2023), it is stated in the chapter on the regional security environment around Japan that there is a perception of threats from China, North Korea, and Russia. This is because, over the past decade, Japan has observed that these three countries have been increasing their military activities and capabilities in the regions surrounding Japan. As a result, the White Paper of the Ministry of Defense states that this situation is cause for concern and has prompted the Japanese government to place greater emphasis on enhancing its defense capabilities (Yasukazu, 2023).

Japan's first perceived threat is China, which Japan views as attempting to forcibly change the status quo in the East China Sea with its current military activities and developments. Additionally, Japan and China have been in dispute over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands since 2012 to the present. This demonstrates how China poses a threat to Japan due to its military activities and military intrusions into Japan's sovereign territory. Furthermore, the White Paper explains that China's military activities and developments are supported by a significant increase in its defense budget, and it is known that China is enhancing its military capabilities through the modernization of its naval, air force, and nuclear and missile capabilities (Yasukazu, 2023).

Furthermore, Japan also perceives North Korea as a significant threat. This is because North Korea has recently launched several missile tests and even ICBMs that flew over the Sea of Japan, serving as a warning sign for Japan's national security. North Korea is also known to have begun actively demonstrating its military strength, and this has been publicly declared to the world that North Korea will continue to enhance its military capabilities, particularly its missile and nuclear weapons of mass destruction. Japan, as one of the countries geographically close to North Korea, feels a high perception of threat from North Korea because North Korea refuses to halt the development of its military capabilities and instead intends to continue developing even stronger weaponry than before. This has prompted the Japanese government to remain vigilant and monitor all forms of North Korean military activities while simultaneously enhancing Japan's defense capabilities to anticipate threats from North Korea (Yasukazu, 2023).

Based on the Japanese Ministry of Defense White Paper, Russia is also listed as part of Japan's high threat perception. This is because Russia is known to have high military activity, with Russia modernizing various types of military equipment, including its nuclear capabilities, and strengthening its armaments on the northern border of Japan and Chishima Island. Additionally, Japan's concerns about Russia, which contribute to its high threat perception, stem from Russia's military aggression against Ukraine in 2022. In the White Paper, Russia's military aggression against Ukraine serves as a warning to Japan, as Japan also shares a border with Russia in its northern region. Furthermore, Japan views Russia's deepening coordination with China through increased joint activities as a cause for concern (Yasukazu, 2023).

Japan's perception of threats to these three countries is also formulated and clarified in a government document called the NSS (National Security Strategy of Japan). This document was first published by an agency called the National Security Council and approved by a Cabinet decision in 2013. It also aims to assess the global situation, especially in East Asia and the Indo-Pacific region, in relation to security issues for the Japanese government. According to the NSS, the Indo-Pacific region is currently facing security challenges, namely the activities of China, North Korea, and Russia in the field of security (National Security Strategy, 2022).

Regarding China's activities in the field of security, Japan views China's nationalism as a threat, prompting Japan to abandon its passive stance and policies. Japan

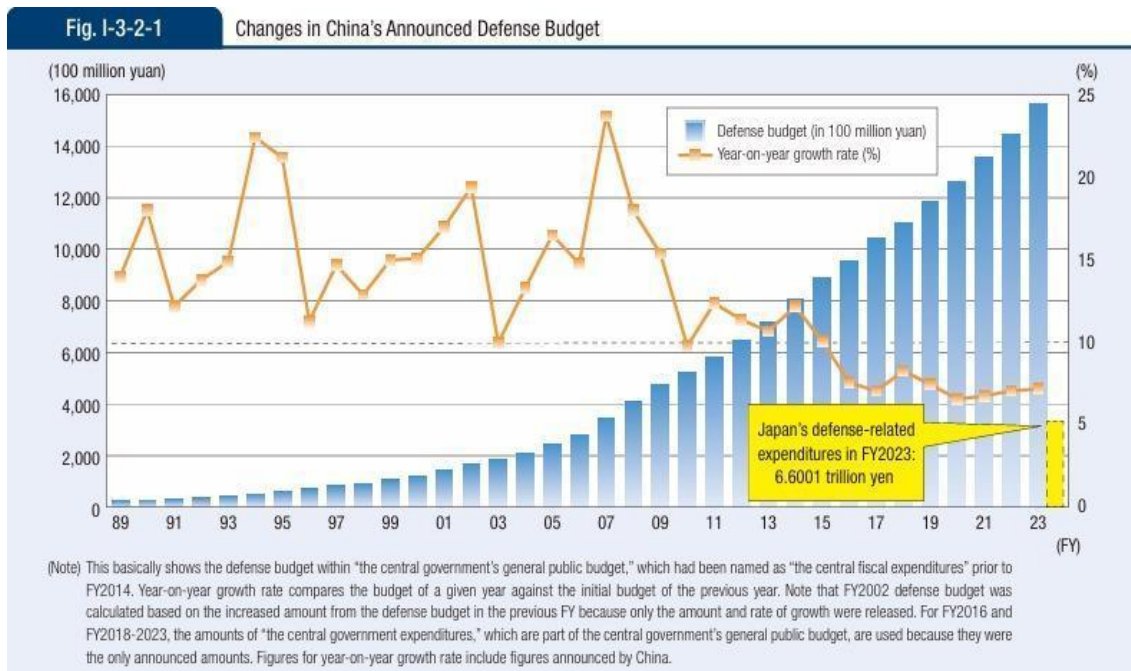
notes that China has set a national goal of restoring China to its former glory, which is being realized through the rapid development of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to world-class standards. As a result, China has significantly and consistently increased its defense budget and expenditures, supported by the rapid strengthening of its military capabilities, particularly its nuclear weapons and missile capabilities (Basu, 2022; National Security Strategy, 2022).

Japan is also paying attention to China's military activities toward Taiwan. What worries Japan about China is China's statement that it will not hesitate to use military force in its policy of reunifying Taiwan. This statement has heightened Japan's perception of the threat from China, especially since, while China has been increasing its military activities in the waters and airspace around Taiwan, it has also launched ballistic missiles that have landed in waters near Japan. This has become a concern for Japan in the Indo-Pacific region. As a result, Japan, along with its ally the United States, has sought to support Taiwan as a deterrent against China's aggressiveness. This is also supported by a statement from Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, who said that Japan always pays attention to the security situation in Taiwan. Fumio Kishida also referred to what happened between Russia and Ukraine, saying that there is a possibility of the next battlefield being in East Asia if China's aggression continues. Additionally, the Taiwan issue is also addressed in the 2021 White Paper of the Japanese Ministry of Defense, which states that stability in Taiwan is crucial for Japan's national security. This has become one of the bases for Japan's perception of the threat from China, leading to an increase in its defense budget for 2021 (Kishi, 2021; National Security Strategy, 2022; Sacks, 2022).

Therefore, Japan continues to view China's military activities and external stance as a threat to Japan's national security and sovereignty. China's actions pose a strategic challenge to the Indo-Pacific and East Asia regions and a threat to Japan's peace. Japan believes that to uphold the international order based on the rule of law, it must respond to threats from China with its comprehensive national strength and cooperate with its allies (National Security Strategy, 2022).



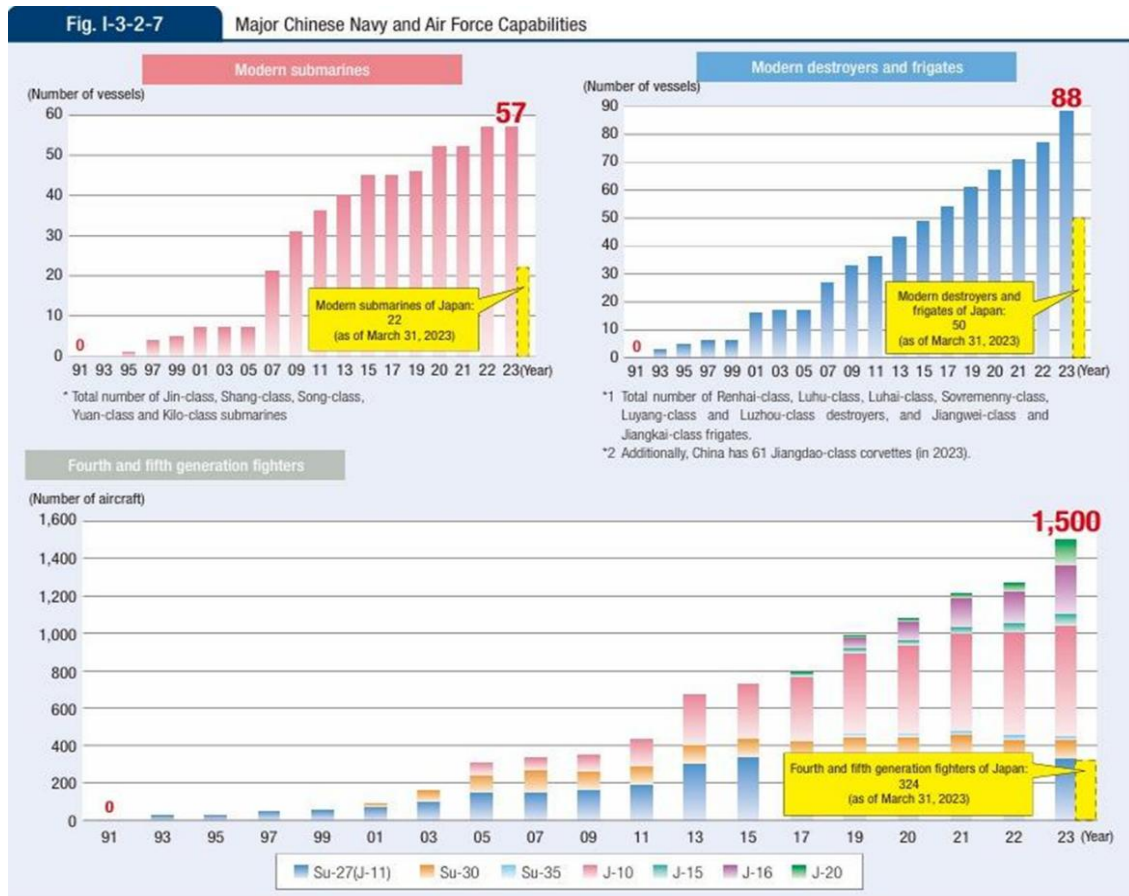
**Figure 4 – Comparison of Japan’s Defense Budget with China’s**



Source: Yasukazu (2023).

The data above shows a comparison between Japan's and China's defense budgets. It is known that China underwent military reforms by modernizing its weapons and developing new weapons. As a result, China has a high defense budget to achieve these military reforms. According to Japan's Defense White Paper, China has modernized and developed its military branches from the Army to the Air Force and even leveraged technologies like AI by integrating land, sea, air, space, and cyber domains. Meanwhile, Japan's defense budget for 2023 has only increased by around 5% compared to China's nearly 25%, highlighting the disparity in defense budgets aimed at strengthening their defenses. Japan also feels increasingly threatened by the continued increase in China's defense budget, as China has strengthened the capabilities of all its military branches (Yasukazu, 2023).

**Figure 5 – Comparison of the Capabilities of the Japanese Air Force and Navy with those of China**



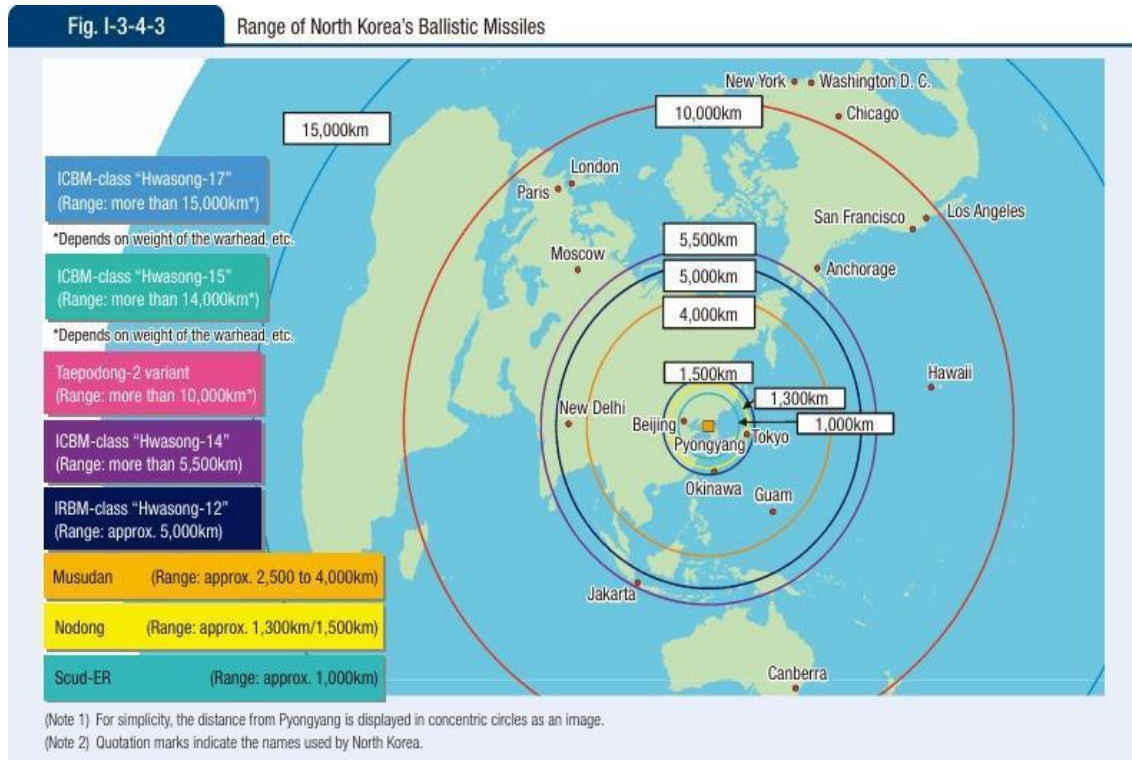
Source: Yasukazu (2023).

The data above shows a comparison of the military capabilities of the Japanese and Chinese navies and air forces. China has 57 modern submarines compared to Japan's 22, and China also has 88 modern destroyers and frigates compared to Japan's 50 warships. Furthermore, China has 1,500 fourth- and fifth-generation fighter jets, while Japan only has 324 fighter jets. This correlates with the previous data, as China has a significantly higher defense budget than Japan, enabling it to develop and increase its military arsenal. Japan, recognizing the gap in military strength between itself and China, is driven to continue increasing its defense budget to achieve a strong military capability (Yasukazu, 2023).

Furthermore, in the NSS document, Japan states that North Korea is part of its threat perception. This is because North Korea possesses weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and ICBMs and IRBMs, and the capabilities and range of these weapons are of concern to Japan due to the geographical proximity between Japan and North Korea. It is known

that North Korea has recently launched its ballistic missiles at an unprecedented frequency, while North Korea continues to enhance its capabilities (National Security Strategy, 2022).

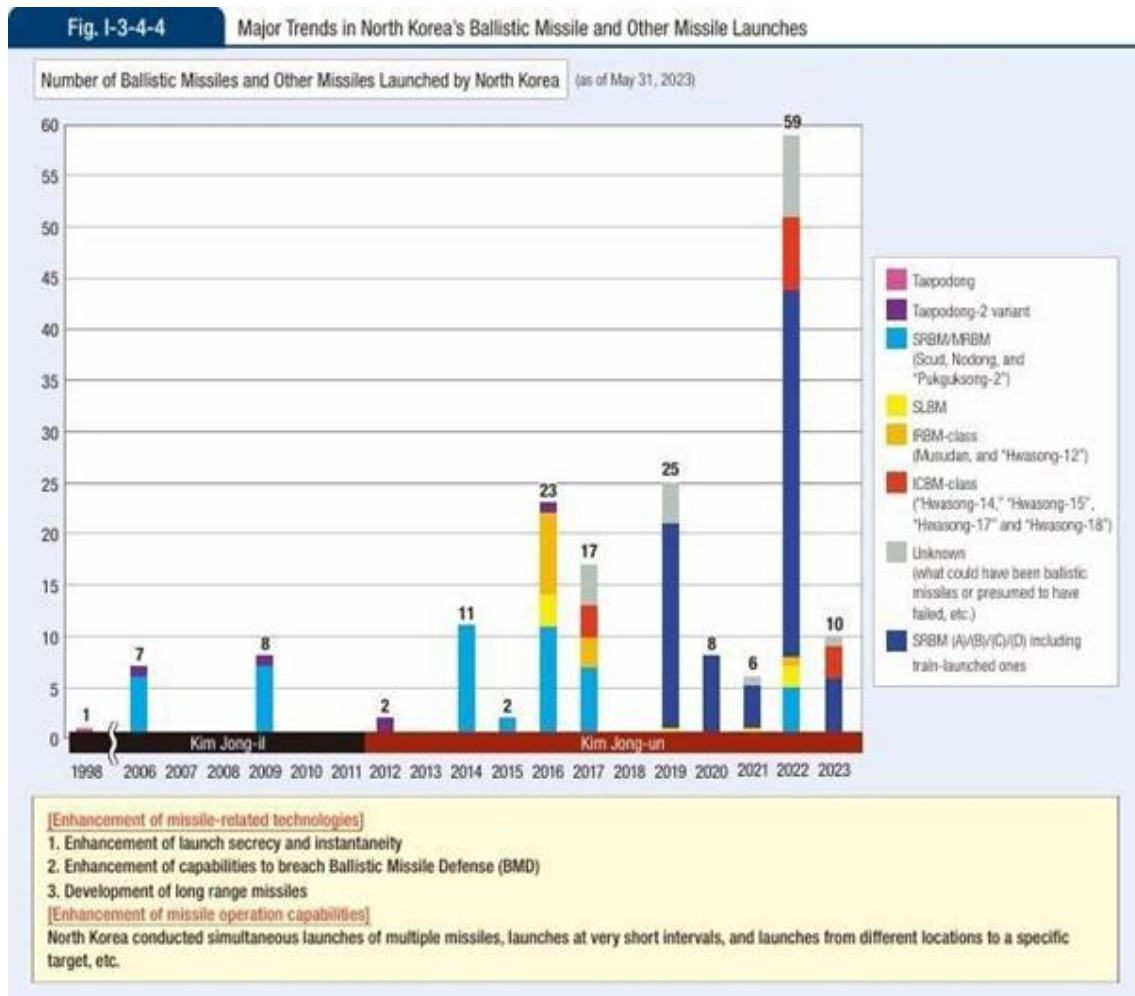
**Figure 6 – North Korea's Ballistic Missile Range**



Source: Yasukazu (2023).

The data above shows the capabilities of North Korea's missiles. It is known that North Korea has ICBM and IRBM class missiles. These missiles were developed by the North Korean missile forces, and they have ballistic missiles ranging from short to long distances. Based on the data above, Japan is geographically very close to North Korea, so almost all types of North Korean ballistic missiles are capable of being launched throughout Japan. This poses a significant threat to Japan, as North Korea consistently enhances its ballistic missile capabilities, which could potentially destroy Japan (Yasukazu, 2023).

Figure 7 – Trends in North Korea's Ballistic Missile Launches



Source: Yasukazu (2023).

The data above shows the trend in the number of ballistic missiles launched by North Korea from the reign of Kim Jong-il to Kim Jong-un, revealing that Kim Jong-un's reign has seen the highest number of missiles launches. The types of missiles launched in consistently high numbers are SRBM (A) (B) (C) (D) missiles with a range capability of 400–750 km. However, missiles such as IRBM and ICBM are also launched consistently, and these missiles have the capability to reach the entire territory of Japan (Yasukazu, 2023).

Finally, another country that Japan perceives as a threat is Russia, where Japan is monitoring Russia's military developments in the Sea of Okhotsk, which borders Japan's Northern Territories. According to Japan's 2023 Defense White Paper and the 2022 National Security Strategy (NSS) report, Japan notes that Russia will continue to strengthen its defense capabilities in the Okhotsk Sea, which is a strategic operational

area for nuclear submarines. Japan views the strengthening of military capabilities, particularly nuclear weapons, as a serious security issue (National Security Strategy, 2022; Yasukazu, 2023). Japan is also concerned about military exercises conducted by the Russian and Chinese air forces and navies, as these exercises are taking place close to Japanese territory. In addition, Japan believes that Russia could potentially assist China and North Korea if either of them were to start a regional conflict in East Asia. This is because it is known that military activities and cooperation between Russia, China, and North Korea have been increasing recently. Furthermore, Japan is also concerned that Russia's military aggression against Ukraine has shaken the international order, making it a potential trigger for conflict in the East Asian region, especially given the strategic coordination between Russia and China and Russia's military technological support for North Korea (Brown, 2024; National Security Strategy, 2022).

### ***Japan's Military Ambitions***

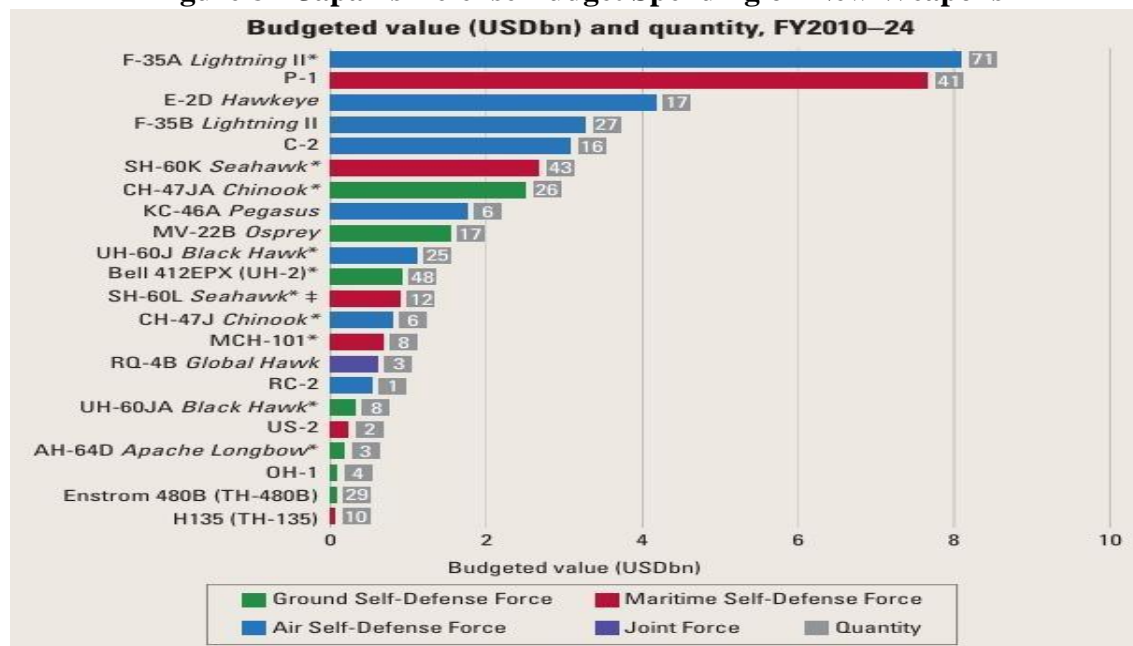
In Strategic Factors, there is a second indicator, namely Military Ambition. This indicator shows that countries with high military ambition will also have high defense budgets. Military ambition can refer to a country's ambition to launch military operations outside its borders or even a country's military ambition to strengthen its defense capabilities and capacity. Such ambition may be driven by a perception of high threats, prompting the state, as a rational actor seeking self-protection, to increase its defense budget (Friedman & Logan, 2012; Liff, 2015).

Japan's military ambitions can be seen in how it has increased its defense budget. According to reports from the Japanese Ministry of Defense from 2013 to the present and from the Defense Buildup Program, Japan has increased its defense budget to strengthen its defense capabilities and capacity, involving all branches of its military, from the Army to the Air Force. The Japanese government has been driven to increase its defense budget due to the perception of an escalating threat, as assessed by its officials, particularly the Prime Minister of Japan. This is supported by statements from Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and even Prime Minister Ishiba, who have noted that Japan is currently facing the most severe and complex security environment since the end of World War II (Kosuke, 2024c; Ministry of Defense Japan, 2023; Smith, 2022).



Through this increase in the defense budget, the Japanese Ministry of Defense will strengthen seven pillars of defense with the aim of drastically strengthening Japan's defense capabilities, namely: first, the capability to defend itself; second, comprehensive air and missile capabilities; third, unmanned asset defense capabilities; fourth, inter-service operation capabilities; fifth, command and control functions and intelligence-related functions; sixth, manoeuvre and deployment capabilities, and seventh, the sustainability and resilience of Japan's defense capabilities (Kosuke, 2024c; Ministry of Defense Japan, 2023). These pillars are realized through mass production of long-range missiles and enhancing the capabilities of the Air Force so that it can respond to diverse and complex air threats such as missiles from neighbouring countries. The Japanese military will also increase the use of unmanned aircraft and integrate the space, cyberspace, and electromagnetic domains to strengthen the capabilities of the Japanese military's dimensions (Kosuke, 2024b; Ministry of Defense Japan, 2023).

**Figure 8 – Japan's Defense Budget Spending on New Weapons**



Source: The International Institute for Strategic Studies (2024).

Then, based on data from The Military Balance in 2024 by The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), it is known that Japan's defense capability development efforts also involve the procurement of various new weapons for Japan's military needs while prioritizing research and development for Japanese military weapons

made locally (The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2024). The data above shows the use of Japan's defense budget from 2010 to 2024; it is known that Japan spent a lot of its defense budget on the military needs of the Air Force and Navy such as fighter aircraft and warships. Based on this data, it can be concluded that the Japanese Ministry of Defense's efforts to fill the shortcomings of its defense capabilities and capacities, especially in the Air and Sea Forces, whose strength ratio is far different from China, North Korea, and Russia (The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2024).

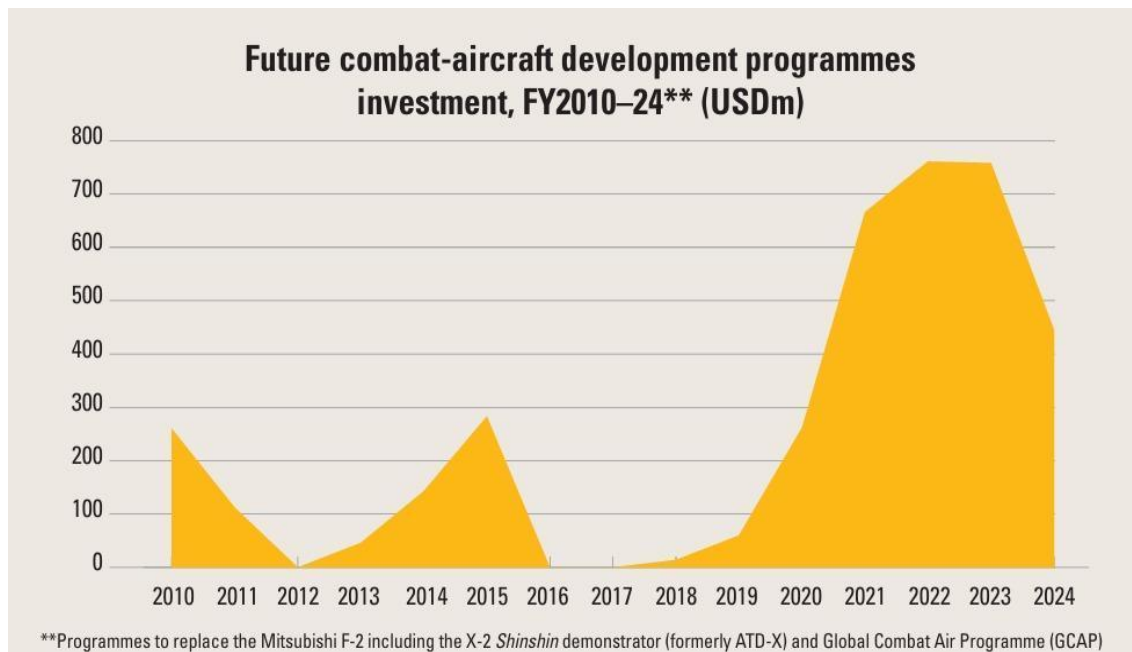
Japan also has a goal of focusing on developing weapons locally, which is shown in the Japanese Government's investment with strategic Japanese companies. In May 2023, the Japanese Ministry of Defense signed a series of contracts with Mitsubishi Heavy Industries in the development of anti-ship and submarine-launched missiles. It is known that the Japanese Ministry of Defense has provided funds of 378.1 billion yen or about \$2.86 billion to achieve this request from Mitsubishi Heavy Industries. The move, according to the Japanese government, is an effort to respond to the increasing military threats from China, North Korea, and Russia. The Japanese Government's efforts are also part of the Defense Buildup Program, which since the end of December 2022 was passed to become a document to improve and strengthen Japan's defense capabilities and capacity. Through the program, the Japanese Ministry of Defense also has a target with a period of five years until 2028 that Japan has achieved the defense forces needed to anticipate the threat of invasion from the three countries (Kosuke, 2023b; Ministry of Defense Japan, 2022; The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2024).

Additionally, Japan also has extensive defense alliances, so Japan is also strengthening its alliance relationships as a form of its military ambitions as well. Japan's main alliance is the United States where during the reign of Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, he has enacted various agreements and talks to continue to strengthen Japan's defense capabilities and capacity. Japan also utilizes its alliances to cooperate with each other in creating new weapons, for example Japan's agreement with the UK and Italy called the Global Combat Air Program where the three countries work together to create a new generation of fighter aircraft. In addition, Japan also strengthened its defense alliance relationship with the United States where it not only allowed the temporary placement of US military aircraft at one of Japan's air bases. However, Japan is also buying missiles from the United States to strengthen Japan's defense (The International



Institute for Strategic Studies, 2024). Therefore, Japan continues to strengthen its relationship with its defense alliance as a form of deterrence against threats to Japan.

**Figure 9 – Fighter Development Program Investment**



Source: The International Institute for Strategic Studies (2024).

The data above shows Japan's fighter development program in the future; it can be seen from 2018 to the present investment in fighter development is increasing. This step shows the Japanese Government's desire to bring its Air Force to be stronger considering that in those years reports of threats to Japan from China, North Korea, and Russia continued to increase (The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2024).

Japan's military ambition is also not spared from its Navy because Japan as an archipelago, the Japanese Navy has currently achieved the target of increasing the number of their submarines. From 2010 to 2022 it has reached from 16 to 22 submarines to strengthen the capabilities of its Navy, then from the Japanese Ministry of Defense is also modernizing its submarine models until 2029 it is targeted that the entire submarine fleet has the latest technology (Satomi, 2024). Additionally, the Japanese Navy is also currently equipping its warships with AEGIS systems and integrating their operational capabilities with the Air Force as well to strengthen Japan's defense as part of the Defense Buildup Program since 2022 (Ministry of Defense Japan, 2023).

Regarding military ambition, it can be seen from the country's desire to carry out Expeditionary Mission, in the sense of the country's desire to have a high-power projection capability beyond its borders. Therefore, Japan based on the Defense Buildup Program report states a program to achieve the target level of defense capability that must be achieved in the Japanese military dimensions. In the Navy, Japan has ambitions to conduct overseas deployments with the aim of enhancing security cooperation with other countries and securing maritime traffic to maintain stable economic activity. So, to achieve these targets, Japan modified Izumo-type ships to be able to carry light warplanes. Through the new defense budget, the Ministry of Defense has requested about ¥1.8 billion or \$12.4 million to continue modifying the Izumo-type ships JS Izumo and JS Kaga to be able to carry F-35b fighters and operate in the Pacific Ocean. This also aims to strengthen Japan's deterrence against the Chinese military (Kosuke, 2024a, 2024b; Ministry of Defense Japan, 2023).

Japan is also using its latest defense budget to purchase long-range missiles from the United States. The purchase of these weapons is to strengthen the capabilities and capacity of its Air Force and Japan is currently purchasing US-made Tomahawk missiles. Japan has been trying to accelerate its defense upgrades to strengthen itself against the potential threats of China, North Korea, and Russia, so Japan is using its latest defense budget and has been approved by the Cabinet to allocate ¥940 billion or \$6 billion to increase the number of long-range missiles. One of them is the Tomahawk from the United States, the long-range missile will also be installed on Japanese Destroyer ships to demonstrate Japan's increased defense power in the Navy and Air Force (Yamaguchi, 2024).

It can be concluded that in the determinant of Military Ambition, Japan has high ambitions because Japan has finished modifying one of its warships to be able to operate in the Pacific Ocean and be able to carry fighter aircraft as well. Japan is also spending a very large budget on modifications to other types of ships so that they can achieve targets based on the Defense Buildup Program, namely being able to deploy beyond borders and protect maritime traffic. In addition, Japan also spent ¥940 billion on long-range missiles as a form of deterrence against potential threats. This is the largest expenditure considering the Cabinet has approved an increase of ¥8.7 trillion by 2025 which is a 9.4% increase from the previous year (The Yomiuri Shimbun, 2024).

### *Political Factor: Civilian Support*

In the determinants that affect the national defense budget, there is a Political Factor variable that also has an important role in how the state allocates its defense budget. In this factor, the indicator is a country with a democratic political system because in this system where the public has an important role in making government policy decisions. Based on Ostrom & Marra (1986) and Page et al (1987), this political system has a factor of public perception of government policy, especially related to defense policy. This public perception is an important component because if the government issues a policy, there will be a public perception of the policy and the public determines whether the policy is allowed or legitimized to be implemented (Ostrom & Marra, 1986; Page et al., 1987). So, civilian support is an important factor for the Japanese government to increase its defense budget.

According to a journal article reports on China's aggressiveness towards Japan over the East China Sea dispute, shows that events from 2010 started to involve the military frequently. It also shows that over time since 2010 until 2015, military equipment from coast guard ships to destroyer ships to submarine and fighter jets has been deployed by both China and Japan, this escalation until August 2015 where China conducted a large-scale training on air and sea which involved 100 ships, numbers of aircraft, and 100 missiles is a significant development on China being aggressive towards Japan. This has brought attention to the Japanese government which then Prime Minister Shinzo Abe starts to propose on increasing Japan's defense budget to develop Japan's military capability. This also aligns with when North Korea launches its nuclear tests around the same year. Since then, China continues with its aggressive behavior in East China Sea with increasing and developing its offensive military capabilities and North Korea also does not stop its nuclear program. According to data by Nippon.com based on Japan's Ministry of Defense, Japan's defense budget has started to risen in 2015 until it peaked in 2024 (Nippon.com, 2024; Puspitasari, 2015; Yasukazu, 2023).

On the case of Japan with a significant and consistent increase in the defense budget coupled with high military ambitions. In fact, there is also civilian support for the policy, as reported by Nikkei (Nihon Keizai Shimbun) who conducted opinion polls on this policy, it was seen that from 2018 those who supported an increase in the defense budget

were at 19% while 58% wanted the defense budget to remain the same. However, the opinion poll from Nikkei in 2022 shows a significant change where 55% of Japanese people support the policy of increasing the defense budget while 33% reject the policy (Liang & Nan, 2023; Michito, 2023).

Significant changes in civil support in 2022 paralleled with the end of 2022, when Prime Minister Fumio Kishida authorized the establishment of three new documents: the National Security Strategy (NSS), the National Defense Strategy (NDS), and the Defense Buildup Program (DBP). The civilian support finally legitimized the Japanese Government and Ministry of Defense's move to significantly and consistently increase the budget by 2% of its GDP by 2027. It is also because in those years, Japan's threat perception towards China, North Korea, and Russia also increased. China has made statements to take back Taiwan and will use coercive means, if necessary, North Korea has successfully developed and launched ballistic missiles that can reach all of Japan's sovereign territory, and Russia is known to be strengthening its defense cooperation with China and the presence of their nuclear arsenal in northern Japan (Liang & Nan, 2023; Michito, 2023).

This increase in civilian support is also shown from a poll conducted by the government in 2023, where it is found that there is a record high showing the public awareness is interested in Japan's severe security environment and supporting its defence force capabilities. The results from the poll shows a reflection on public opinion towards Japan facing China's growing aggression in East China Sea and South China Sea, North Korea's nuclear development program, and Russia ongoing aggression against Ukraine. The poll shows that around 53% says that the current state of JSDF is fine, while 41.5% says that it needs to be reinforced. Furthermore, when asked about the role of JSDF, the poll shows that 88.3% of respondents expected JSDF role in disaster-relief dispatch. Meanwhile, 78.3% answered JSDF role in ensuring the security of the country such as responding to attacks on islands. When asked about Japan's defense issues, the respondents answered 68.9% on North Korea nuclear weapons development, 61.3% on China's military modernization and activities around Japan, and 52.1% on Russia's aggression towards Ukraine. In addition, the poll also shows that considering the current world situation, will Japan be involved in a war or become involved in a war and 86.2% of the respondents answered yes, on the other hand 12.8% say no. This government poll

in 2023 shows that public opinion is very aware with Japan's current security environment (Kosuke, 2023a).

## Conclusion

This study found that the increase in Japan's defense budget was caused by three things based on the theory of the determinants of state defense budget allocation. These three things are Threat Perception, Japan has a high threat perception towards China, North Korea, and Russia and is motivated by their military activities which are considered potential threats to Japan's security. Then, Military Ambition where Japan has strong ambitions and is shown by significant changes to the Japanese military to become capable of high-power projection. Finally, Civilian Support where it is known that the Japanese government has strong civilian support for the policy of increasing its defense budget. Therefore, it is a form of legitimacy for the Japanese government to continue increasing its defense budget until 2027. So that these three things are the cause of Japan increasing its defense budget significantly and consistently every year.

Japan's defense budget surge underscores the necessity for recalibrated policy responses both domestically and regionally. For Japan, this trajectory demands careful balancing between enhancing deterrence capabilities and maintaining constitutional and normative constraints on military power. At the regional level, neighboring states and multilateral institutions should prioritize inclusive dialogue and cooperative security initiatives to prevent an arms race and to channel Japan's enhanced defense posture toward collective stability rather than heightened rivalry.

Future research should further investigate the broader economic consequences of Japan's rising defense budget, particularly its impact on the country's fiscal sustainability and industrial development. Such studies could examine how increased military spending interacts with Japan's long-standing economic challenges, including public debt and demographic pressures, while also assessing its potential to stimulate domestic defense industries and related technological innovation. By analyzing these dynamics, future research can provide a more comprehensive understanding of whether Japan's defense expansion strengthens national resilience or creates new structural vulnerabilities in its financial and industrial landscape.

## Declaration of Interest

The author declares there is no conflict of interest in this research.

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