

Japanese cabinet earmarks record 8.7 trillion yen for war

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At the end of December, the cabinet of Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba approved a new record-high military budget for 2025. It is the 13th consecutive year that Japan has increased military spending and is part of Japan's ongoing remilitarization, as Tokyo, alongside the United States, prepares to wage war against China and expand its involvement in the war against Russia.

Ishiba's cabinet approved the 8.7 trillion-yen (\$US55.3 billion) budget on December 27 which requires parliamentary approval by March. It is a 9.43 percent increase over last year's budget. It does not include additional spending on public works or research and development for military purposes that could raise actual military spending by more one trillion yen as was the case in 2024. The 2025 military budget is part of a larger 115 trillion-yen (\$US731 billion) national spending bill.

This year is the third in the five-year military build-up plan, totalling 43 trillion-yen (\$US273 billion), unveiled in December 2022 as part of Japan's revised National Security Strategy as well as its National Defense Strategy and Defense Buildup Program. Tokyo is doubling military spending to approximately two percent of GDP, in line with the target set by NATO. It would make Japan the third largest military spender in the world after the United States and China respectively.

Ishiba, a far-right war hawk and former defense minister, became prime minister in October. Like his predecessors Fumio Kishida and Yoshihide Suga, he is continuing the remilitarization agenda that sharply accelerated under Shinzo Abe throughout the 2010s. Tokyo has all but thrown out Article 9 of the constitution, which bans Japan from acquiring military weaponry and waging war overseas.

The Japanese government has never fully adhered to Article 9, chipping away at it almost as soon as the constitution went into effect in 1947. However, the ruling class paid lip service to it, conscious of the widespread anti-war sentiment in the working class and among youth. Now, however, Tokyo is openly acquiring offensive weaponry that would be capable of striking targets in China, Russia, or North Korea.

This includes 940 billion yen (\$US5.9 billion) for developing long-range missiles, a satellite constellation, and the deployment of Tomahawk cruise missiles. Tokyo inked a deal to purchase 400 Tomahawks from the United States last January. An additional 1.8 billion yen (\$US11.4 million) will be spent on equipment to launch Tomahawk missiles from Japan's Aegis naval destroyers.

Another 533 billion yen (\$US3.4 billion) will be spent on missile interceptors and mobile reconnaissance radars in Okinawa, which hosts approximately half of the 54,000 US troops stationed in Japan. The purpose is to prepare the region for a US-instigated war with China over Taiwan, a conflict in which Tokyo plans to take an active role.

The Ryukyu (or Nansei) Islands, which make up Okinawa Prefecture, have been increasingly militarized over the last several years with the deployment of missile batteries and military units. From these islands, Japan would funnel weapons into Taiwan as the US bogs China down in a war similar to the strategy employed against Russia in Ukraine. However, a war would undoubtedly expand to the Chinese mainland and throughout the Indo-Pacific as the US and Japan attempt to carve up China in pursuit of their imperialist interests.

Part of the budget also includes a focus on artificial intelligence (AI) and unmanned weaponry. Tokyo plans

to build three 4,800-ton multi-purpose compact destroyers, known as the New FFM (or Future Multi-Mission Frigate), totalling 314.8 billion yen (\$US2 billion). The ships require only 90 crew members through the use of AI and automated systems, or less than half that needed on older vessels. These ships are upgraded versions of the Mogami-class destroyer which carry long-range missiles as well as having stealth, anti-submarine, and mine warfare capabilities. The Defense Ministry plans to acquire 12 in total.

Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, which produces the warship, is competing with German company Thyssenkrupp Marine Systems to be selected by Australia to provide the upgraded Mogami to the Australian navy. In this regard, Tokyo is working to expand its participation as part of the anti-China AUKUS alliance that includes Australia, the United Kingdom and the US. While not a full member, Japan is cooperating under AUKUS Tier 2, which involves sharing advanced military technology.

This is just one aspect of the military cooperation between Tokyo and Canberra as part of the war preparations against China. In 2023, the two sides agreed to implement a Reciprocal Access Agreement that allows troops from one country to more easily enter the other. Japan is deploying fighter jets and marines to northern Australia on a rotational basis.

The burden for this record-high military spending falls on the Japanese working class and poor as economic conditions decline. In October, the International Monetary Fund estimated that the economy grew by just 0.3 percent for 2024 and will grow by only 1.1 percent this year. Real wages have fallen nearly every month for the past two and half years, including a 0.4 percent drop in October.

To pay for its militarist agenda, the government plans to impose a 4 percent surtax on corporate taxes, an increase big business will have no trouble avoiding through tax loopholes. The government will also increase taxes on heated tobacco products and cigarettes. The government intends to raise income taxes by at least 1 percent, but a final agreement has not been reached given the broad public opposition.

Speaking on this opposition, a former US-Japan alliance manager told the *Japan Times*, “At a time when the economy was an important factor in the Liberal Democratic Party’s trouncing in the most

recent election, it will be difficult for Ishiba to justify why Japan needs to pour money into, say, an arsenal of Tomahawk cruise missiles or a next-generation fighter jet.”

There is also broad opposition to war itself. The focus on AI in the budget is to address the fact that Japan’s military, formally known as the Self-Defense Forces (SDF), has struggled to recruit new troops. In 2023, the SDF barely reached half of its recruitment goal, bringing in 9,959 new troops across the Ground SDF, Maritime SDF, and Air SDF. The Defense Ministry had set a goal of 19,598. This trend is not new, but has been ongoing for years.

The Japanese ruling class blames this on the country’s declining population and low birthrate, which has steadily fallen since the 1970s. This is in no small part due to declining economic conditions that make getting married, having children, and raising families increasingly difficult. However, workers also have no interest in sending their children off to war.



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