

Japan's Re-militarization: An Analysis of Strategic Reasons and Implications

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Introduction

Japan, an East Asian nation, has a long military history of invasions, followed by victories and defeats. It is located in a region currently undergoing the most competitive arms race. The neighboring countries like North Korea, China, and Russia dominate the region through military might. Since we all know that “Security concerns in International Relations create security dilemmas,” Japan has adopted a new defense plan in 2022. This intention of the East Asian nation can be shortly termed “Re-militarization”. Rather than ensuring peace and security, the revised strategy will likely escalate future tensions. This commentary will focus on geopolitical issues and interests pertaining to the military revival of Japan, followed by recommendations.

Road to re-militarization: Pacifism fading away?

Nothing is static in this multiverse. Once a pacifist country, Japan is now on the verge of reviving its military on such a scale that no one imagined. Under Prime Minister Fumio Kishida’s leadership, on December 16, 2022, Japan aimed to double defense spending (totaling 6.8 trillion Yen/\$52 billion by this year) by 2028 and outlined the plan in its National Security Strategy (NSS).² This is Japan’s first strategy in ten years and the second ever in its history (the first was issued in 2013 under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe).³ The NSS states that the country needs to have the ability to “make effective counterstrikes in an opponent’s territory as a bare minimum self-defense measure.” Almost two third (over 60%) of the Japanese in the country have supported this new counterstrike capability.⁴

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² “Japan Unveils Record Defence Budget amid Regional Security Fears,” December 23, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/12/23/japan-unveils-record-defence-budget-amid-regional-security-fears>.

³ Takeshi Yuzawa, “Japan’s New Security Strategy: Changing National Identity?” East Asia Forum, March 20, 2014, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2014/03/20/japans-new-security-strategy-changing-national-identity/>.

⁴ nippon.com, “Over 60 Pct Say Japan Needs Counterstrike Capabilities: Jiji Poll,” June 16, 2022, <https://www.nippon.com/en/news/yjj2022061600753/>.



Source: <https://asiatimes.com/2022/12/japan-plans-to-remilitarize-at-lightning-speed/>

Japan referred to its new tactic as a "preventive attack," legitimizing it as a way to "fight the forces of an enemy trying to invade Japan" despite the constitution forbidding the use of force. After World War II, article 9(1) of Japan's 1947 Constitution, which went into effect on May 3, 1947, stated that the nation forbade war and the use of force to resolve international conflicts.

The beginning of post-World War II was Pacifist Japan's rise. Before that, Japan's military history was distinguished by a protracted era of feudal warfare, domestic peace, and an unbridled empire. For instance, Japan invaded, defeated and conquered its neighboring countries, whose results were the Sino-Japanese Wars (1895 and 1937), the Russo-Japanese War (1904), the Annexation of Korea (1910), the Invasion of Manchuria (1931), Pearl Harbor attack (1941), and so on. In response to the Pearl Harbor attack, the atomic bomb launched by the USA over the country made Japan surrender and become militarily handicapped. Despite having a strong defense force, Japan's Constitution, which was first drafted in 1945 under General Douglas MacArthur's guidance expressly rejects war and the use of military force.⁵ Now, Japan shows quite the opposite picture shifting from pacifism to re-militarization.

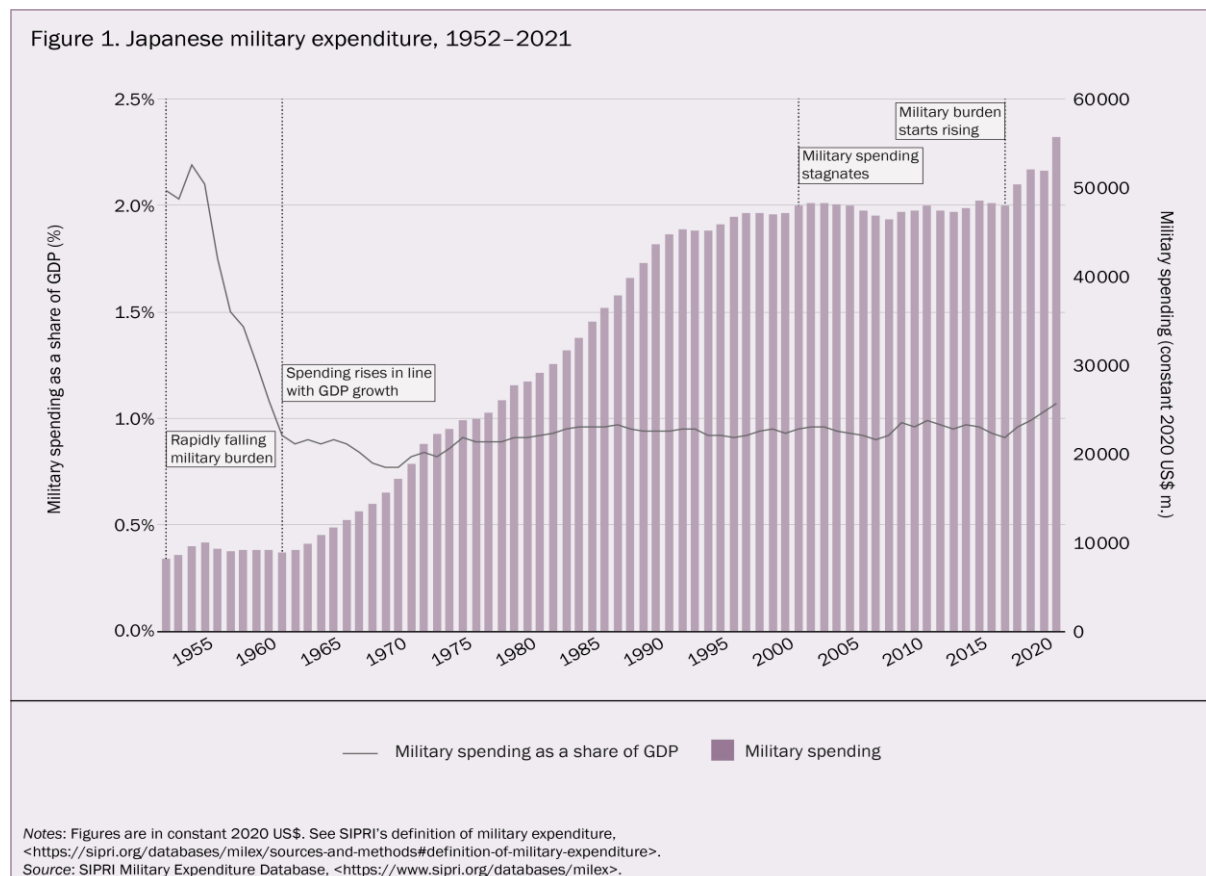
⁵ P. Allan Dionisopoulos, "The No-War Clause in the Japanese Constitution." *INDIANA LAW JOURNAL* 31, no. 4 (1956): 441.

Three key initiatives

The expansion of the military would be guided by three documents. The first is a new National Security Strategy that outlines the political, economic, technological, and military tools Tokyo would use to counter the threats posed against it. Second, a ten-year national defense strategy describes the military improvements needed for the SDF to function. The basic goals for carrying out the military plan are described in the third document, a five-year purchase plan. It is anticipated that \$314 billion will be invested during the initial phase, which starts this year and lasts through 2027.⁶

Background of eyeing double military spending

The Kishida administration's declaration that defense spending will reach 2% of GDP annually by 2027 has garnered media attention.⁷ Japan's military spending stayed at or below 1% of GDP from 1960 through 2020.



⁶ Takahashi Kosuke, "Japan's Major Turning Point on Defense Policy," December 17, 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/12/japans-major-turning-point-on-defense-policy/>.

⁷ Nikkei Asia, "Japan Set to Increase Defense Budget to 2% of GDP in 2027." Accessed March 4, 2023, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Japan-set-to-increase-defense-budget-to-2-of-GDP-in-2027>.

The decision to purchase and deploy new counterstrike capabilities, which would considerably boost Japan's ability to target enemy forces far beyond its boundaries, is the most radical break from the country's former security strategy. The NSS makes explicit reference to three potential opponents of Japan, for which the new plan is designed. Firstly, the counterstrike capability of the Japanese military is primarily aimed at China. It's mostly because of the building of three carrier navy by the Chinese army, which makes it the greatest strategic challenge. Secondly, amid the Russia-Ukraine war, the escalations of Russian military have been a great security concern. Finally, the year 2022 has been the busiest year for North Korea in terms of missile tests.⁸ Thus, the country becomes a graver, more imminent threat than before.

Analysis of the implications of Japan's new strategy

The United States, Canada and European countries have warmly welcomed Japan's improved defense capabilities. Even Japan's adversary South Korea, with whom it has had tight relations lately, is said to have welcomed counterstrike capacity as an aid to maintaining peace and stability in the region. On the contrary, China, North Korea and Russia have all harshly criticized Japan's "remilitarization".⁹

Strategic threats from China and its Justifications on the new NSS

China was identified as "the biggest strategic challenge" to Japan's efforts to maintain peace, safety, and stability for both itself and for the rest of the world in the new policy. China is quickly enhancing its military might, especially by increasing its missile, naval, and nuclear arsenals. The military danger posed by China to Japan has grown more serious in recent years. The Chinese People's Liberation Army's (PLA) regular military exercises in the waters and skies surrounding Taiwan are what best illustrate the threat.¹⁰ Most recently, despite staying closer to China's shore than Taiwan's, 19 Chinese J-10 fighters entered the southwest corner of the island's air defense identification zone, according to Taiwan's defense ministry.¹¹

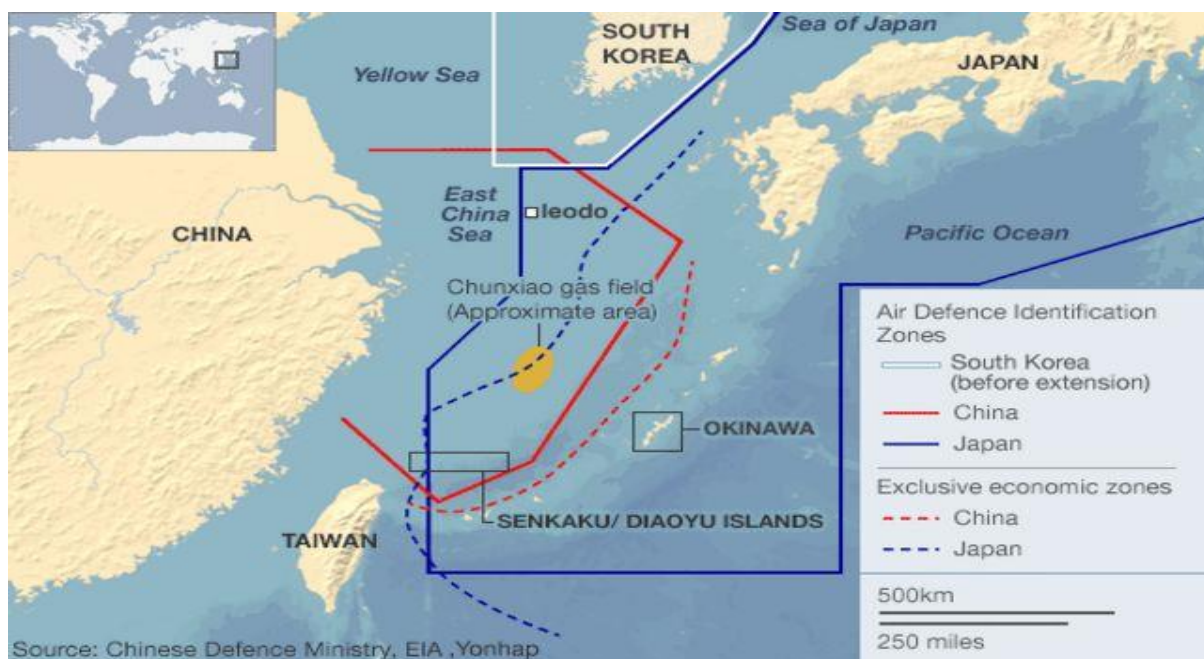
⁸ Daniel R. DePetris. "North Korea's Missile Activity: Japan's Response - 38 North: Informed Analysis of North Korea." 38 North, October 21, 2022. <https://www.38north.org/2022/10/north-koreas-missile-activity-japans-response/>.

⁹ Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, "Japan Revises Key Security Documents Heralding Dramatic Shift in Defence Policy." Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada. Accessed March 4, 2023. <https://www.asiapacific.ca/publication/japan-revises-key-security-documents-heralding-dramatic>.

¹⁰ Yao Chung-yuan, "Japan Taking China Threat Seriously - Taipei Times," January 3, 2023. <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/editorials/archives/2023/01/03/2003791880>.

¹¹ "Taiwan Says 19 Chinese Fighter Jets Entered Its Air Defence Zone | Conflict News | Al Jazeera," March 1, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/1/taiwan-says-19-chinese-fighter-jets-entered-air-defence-zone>.

The updated strategy would provide the Japan Self Defense Forces greater latitude in the use of force. It would also be justified to engage in joint combat with allies. The Japanese government has been considering security in the strait as seriously as it can, acting in accordance with former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's statement that, “a Taiwanese emergency is a Japanese emergency, and consequently an emergency for the Japan-US alliance”.¹² Moreover, Japan is concerned about rising Chinese military activities in the East China Sea and regular Chinese violations into the airspace and waterways surrounding the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islands.¹³



On the contrary, Wang Wenbin, a spokesman for the Chinese Foreign Ministry said: “Hyping up the so-called China threat to find an excuse for its military buildup is doomed to fail.”¹⁴

Russia-Ukraine war and the escalations of tensions

On February 24, 2022, the Russian invasion of Ukraine took place as Japan was beginning to draft its three national security documents.¹⁵ As a result, the conflict had a significant impact

¹² Ben Blanchard, “Former PM Abe Says Japan, U.S. Could Not Stand by If China Attacked Taiwan,” *Reuters*, December 1, 2021, sec. Asia Pacific. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/former-pm-abe-says-japan-us-could-not-stand-by-if-china-attacked-taiwan-2021-12-01/>.

¹³ ANI, “Chinese Intrusions in Senkaku Islands Aim to Provoke Japan,” *ThePrint* (blog), July 13, 2022, <https://theprint.in/world/chinese-intrusions-in-senkaku-islands-aim-to-provoke-japan/1037612/>.

¹⁴ “China Firmly Opposed to Japan’s Updated Defense Documents,” December 16, 2022, <https://english.kyodonews.net/news/2022/12/da2cb6187b61-china-wary-about-japan-defense-stance-budget-hike.html>.

¹⁵ Yuki Tatsumi, “How Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine Changed Japan’s Approach to National Security, Stimson Center,” *Stimson Center* (blog), February 16, 2023, <https://www.stimson.org/2023/how-russias-invasion-of-ukraine-changed-japans-approach-to-national-security/>.

on the policymakers in Tokyo who were involved in their formation. The invasion of Ukraine by Russia only made Tokyo's assessments of its own security situation worse.

Besides war, the South Kuril Islands¹⁶ (Northern Territories named by Japan) are the subject of ongoing conflicts between Japan and Russia. Similar to China, Russia has stepped up its military exercises near Japan and its neighboring waters in recent years. It has also stationed missile systems on the islands. Joint military drills have also been held by China and Russia,¹⁷ and their combat aircraft have flown inside Japan's air defense identification zone.¹⁸

The two Koreas on NSS

The new security strategy alarmed Japan's neighbors, especially the two Koreas, which were forcibly and illegally incorporated into Japan from 1915 to 1945, given Tokyo's history of war crimes during World War II.¹⁹

In 2022, North Korea fired over 90 missiles during its 37 missile tests, 66 of which were ballistic missiles.²⁰ The peace and security of Japan, the region, and the global community are threatened by the North Korea's actions, notably its frequent launching of ballistic missiles. Besides tension from these missile launches, Japan's repeated claims on the Dokdo islets are part of its new defense strategy, which has enraged South Korea once more.

According to the revised NSS, North Korea "poses a graver and more immediate threat to Japan's national security than ever before."²¹ North Korea's foreign ministry responded by denouncing Japan's decision to authorize counterstrike capabilities and announcing that it would take "actual action"²² to counter Tokyo's new security plan.

¹⁶ Ike Barrash, "Russia's Militarization of the Kuril Islands | New Perspectives on Asia | CSIS," September 27, 2022, <https://www.csis.org/blogs/new-perspectives-asia/russias-militarization-kuril-islands>.

¹⁷ Brad Lendon. "Russia and China Unite for Live-Fire Naval Exercises in Waters near Japan," CNN, December 20, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/12/19/asia/russia-china-naval-exercises-intl-hnk-ml/index.html>.

¹⁸ The Asahi Shimbun, "Chinese, Russian Warplanes Enter Japan's ADIZ during Exercise | The Asahi Shimbun: Breaking News, Japan News and Analysis," Accessed March 4, 2023, <https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/13060844>.

¹⁹ Aerin Lee, "Overview Of Japanese Colonial Rule In Korea | ACE," November 3, 2021, <https://ace-usa.org/blog/research/research-foreignpolicy/overview-of-japanese-colonial-rule-in-korea/>.

²⁰ Carlotta Dotto, Brad Lendon and Jessie Yeung, "North Korea's Record Year of Missile Testing Is Putting the World on Edge," CNN, December 27, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/12/26/asia/north-korea-missile-testing-year-end-intl-hnk/index.html>.

²¹ Yasuyo Sakata, "Japan's National Security Strategy & the Two Koreas • Stimson Center," Stimson Center (blog), February 21, 2023, <https://www.stimson.org/2023/japans-national-security-strategy-the-two-koreas/>.

²² Shreyas Reddy, "North Korea Threatens Japan over Its Move to Acquire Counterstrike Capabilities | NK News," NK News - North Korea News, December 20, 2022, <https://www.nknews.org/2022/12/north-korea-threatens-japan-over-its-move-to-acquire-counterstrike-capabilities/>.

US-Japan alliance bolstered

The new security documents from Japan have already received words of support from the United States. It will strengthen both the countries' alliance over the East Asian region. Tokyo's decision to acquire new capabilities "that strengthen regional deterrence," such as the counterstrike capability, is supported by the Pentagon, according to U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin.²³ He also noted that the updated documents showed "important alignment" between the two allies' vision and priorities as outlined in their security strategies.

US-Japan alliances and partnerships are their most valuable strategic assets, as President Biden explained in their own National Security Strategy, and Japan's new documents have a significant impact on the alliance's capacity to advance peace and defend the rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific region and globally.²⁴

Canada's geopolitical advantage from NSS

At the April 2019 Canada-Japan Summit, former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe discussed his "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" (FOIP) concept with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, however the Canadian response at the time was not very encouraging. Canada eventually unveiled its new "Indo-Pacific Strategy" on November 27, 2022,²⁵ marking a significant advancement in its foreign and security strategy to fight China's challenge to the global order. Hence, the National Security Strategy (NSS), which will direct Japan's foreign and defense policy, calls for increased security cooperation with Canada and like-minded countries nations and regions in order to create and grow a multilayered network of allies and partners and to increase deterrence.

The NSS and Maritime security cooperation

By stepping up marine surveillance to address threats in shipping lanes, conducting frequent bilateral drills and exercises with other nations, and making port calls abroad, Japan will advance multilateral maritime security cooperation. Activities to prevent piracy and acquire

²³ Jesse Johnson and Gabriel Dominguez, "U.S. Hails Japan's New Security Strategy as China Lashes out over Moves | The Japan Times," December 17, 2022, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2022/12/17/national/japan-security-documents-china-us-reaction/>.

²⁴ United States Department of State, "Welcoming Japan's New National Security Strategy, National Defense Strategy, and Defense Buildup Program," December 16, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/welcoming-japans-new-national-security-strategy-national-defense-strategy-and-defense-buildup-program/>.

²⁵ Kyoko Kuwahara, "Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy and Its Implications for Japan: Kyoko Kuwahara for Inside Policy," *Macdonald-Laurier Institute* (blog), January 4, 2023, <https://macdonaldlaurier.ca/canadas-indo-pacific-strategy-and-its-implications-for-japan-kyoko-kuwahara-for-inside-policy/>.

intelligence will also be carried out to guarantee the security of marine trade. Japan will actively use the Arctic Sea routes, ensure freedom of navigation (both aerial and maritime) in the South China sea (a region of overlapping claims by the East Asian countries) and other waters. Moreover, support the peaceful resolution of disputes based on international law and improve ties with those coastal states along the sea lanes.

Japan to broaden military relationships

With Japan, several nations have started collaborating on cutting-edge defense technologies. It is anticipated that the Japanese Self-Defense Force (SDF) will expand its military cooperation with regional allies like Vietnam, Australia, South Korea, India, and the Philippines. To preserve a free and open Indo-Pacific, nations like the U.S. and Canada have increased intelligence sharing cooperation with Japan. More regional competitiveness might also result from improved technical cooperation, such as the sharing of defense technologies. Japan has set aside a sizeable sum of money to buy Norwegian missiles in addition to the scheduled acquisition of American Tomahawk cruise missiles. Together with Italy and the UK, the nation also intends to develop a program for next-generation fighters.

Implications for Bangladesh

The geo-strategical location of Bangladesh attracts both regional and international community. The Bay of Bengal, which is at the south of the country connects to the Indian Ocean, which is an important route for trades, conducting joint military exercises, and so on. It is one of the checkpoints for China's Belt and Road Initiative. Not only this, but also USA's Indo Pacific Strategy gains an upper hand through this location. The East Asian countries are connected to Bangladesh through myriad ways. For instance, trade and investment, military relations, infrastructural development, educational programs, institutions and many more. Considering the massive revival of Japan's military, Bangladesh cannot be a part of any particular bloc. The reason is the country has its interests fulfilled by a number of countries, not just only one. For example, whatever military equipment Bangladesh has, most of them are bought from China, specifically the Main Battle Tanks (MBT), Machine Guns (MG), ammunitions.²⁶ Moreover, fighter aircrafts and two submarines have also been bought from China. Nevertheless, Russia

²⁶ "China Delivers 44 VT5 Light Tanks to Bangladesh in 2021 | Defense News March 2022 Global Security Army Industry | Defense Security Global News Industry Army Year 2022 | Archive News Year," March 22, 2022, https://www.armyrecognition.com/defense_news_march_2022_global_security_army_industry/china_delivers_44_vt5_light_tanks_to_bangladesh_in_2021.html.

shares a historical friendship with Bangladesh from the time of its liberation war. Delving deep into the military ties between both the countries, it is seen that Bangladesh purchased its defensive assets, mostly the MI series helicopters for the army, navy, and air force from Russia.²⁷ Besides these, Japan is a great ally of Bangladesh. Like China, Japan is increasingly investing in Bangladesh through infrastructural development by expanding airport, constructing bridges, roads, metro rails, tunnels, and more. Analyzing all the facilities Bangladesh is getting from the East Asian giants, it can be said that if a war breaks out due to increasing tensions in the region, Bangladesh will be at risk. That threat is not by involving in the war, but by facing the likely effects of the war. The prices of the assets which Bangladesh is importing from East Asia will soar, the exchange of manpower will be restricted, educational programs will be inhibited, infrastructural assistance might come to a standstill, and most importantly the country will be under tremendous pressure of backing a side in the anticipated war.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the international community must weigh the pros and cons of the Japanese government's moves toward remilitarization. A former aggressive, imperialistic nation battling for its right to regain regional supremacy on one side and a country long shielded by its former enemy on the other needed a chance to assert itself and defend itself against angers placed upon them. The problem in Japan is not going away anytime soon, and with constant harassment and baiting from its neighbors, tensions will likely escalate and might lead to wars. In order to ensure peace and security in East Asia, it is high time to control the bellicosity of the region's nations. If not solved at the earliest, then geo-political tensions will keep on rising up creating a disastrous impact both regionally and beyond.

Recommendations

- Tensions that are being perceived by Japan from its neighboring countries should be solved diplomatically by holding bi/tri/multi-lateral meetings.
- The East Asian countries should not involve in any conflict keeping in mind of its economic dominance or to maintaining the identity of "East Asian Miracle"

²⁷ Ekene Lionel, "Bangladesh Mi-171 Helicopters Finds New Mission in CAR," *Military Africa* (blog), June 30, 2020. <https://www.military.africa/2020/06/bangladesh-mi-171-helicopters-finds-new-mission-in-car/>.

- Four Asian Tigers (South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong) should play a significant role to avoid any regional conflicts in order to preserve the economic status.
- Considering the excessive trial of launching and firing missiles, countries like China and North Korea should minimize their military dominance.
- The United States being a superpower must reduce its tendency to provoke Japan to act against the regional threats.
- The Indo Pacific Strategy of the US should not act as a threat to other countries and must be aimed to preserve regional peace.
- International and regional organizations like UN, ASEAN, ASEAN+3 (China, Japan, Republic of Korea), APEC, EAS, QUAD, and others should come forward to mitigate politico-military tensions.
- The overlapping claims over the South China sea must be solved through revised maritime laws, which will satisfy each of the countries' interests.
- Japan has the sovereign right to build up its military, but it should not be aimed to any particular country.
- The Russia Ukraine war needs to be stopped as soon as possible, which has created a fatigue in the world and developed security concerns among neighboring nations.
- Bangladesh has to maneuver through all odds considering its interests. Once a conflict arises, and if it becomes difficult to connect with the East Asian countries, Bangladesh should be prepared to look for alternative opportunities. For example, the country should create institutions that produce automobiles, military assets like ammunitions and lethal weapons should be prepared by BMTF and other military bodies. About trade, Bangladesh should target the West and European markets to export its RMG (for instance) and preserve its economy. Also, for infrastructural development, the country should shift its dependence from regional investors to its own citizens' merits. It will help Bangladesh to avoid brain drain (native students shifting abroad for higher studies and never returning) and create more employment opportunities in the country.