



MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR
DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES

मनोहर पर्रिकर रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

JAPAN

Digest

April 2026

- Japan revises arms transfer guidelines
- Diplomatic Bluebook downgrades importance of China
- Japan-France Summit Meeting



Japan revises arms transfer guidelines

Fulfilling one of her key campaign promises, Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi [instituted](#) a revised version of the Three Principles on Defence Equipment Transfers on 21 April. The move was widely [reported](#) as a symbol of a decisive break away from Japan's staunchly pacifist, defence-oriented approach.

First declared in 1967, amended in 1976 and enacted as a policy guideline in 2014, the Three Principles restricted Japan's role in the transfer of arms by banning exports to countries in conflict or potentially in conflict, permitting exports to other countries only under the strictest scrutiny and ensuring stringent oversight regarding end use. Lethal equipment which could be inherently aggressive in nature was in principle excluded, and sales restricted to five categories: rescue, surveillance, transport, minesweeping and warning (with some exceptions with regard to weapons systems Japan manufactured under licence for the United States).

Under the new guidelines, the three basic principles have been significantly reinterpreted in order to allow for in-principle sale of lethal, aggressive weapons systems. The five-category rule has been abolished, and in its place a two-part distinction has been put into place. Japan will now classify its arms exports as either

'non-arms' (non-lethal or defensive equipment such as flak jackets and mine detection equipment) or 'arms' (lethal equipment such as fighter jets and naval vessels). While the first category of systems are expected to be covered by the existing rules with no restrictions, the latter category will now be theoretically available to countries with whom Japan has defence technology cooperation agreements in place (17 including India). In order to qualify, a country has to be strategically vital to Japan's security and uninvolved in any (potential) conflict.

As per the new guidelines, each sale will be decided on a case-by-case basis by the National Security Council headed by the Prime Minister. The Diet is expected to be 'informed' of the sale, though it is unclear whether it will have a veto on the decision of the NSC. Once the sale is approved, Japan intends to pursue stringent end user agreements and oversight mechanisms, with the potential appointment of observers or investigators to prevent uses of the weapons systems in ways contrary to the preferences of the Japanese government. Such oversight may be waived in certain cases, mostly pertaining to the US' defence of the Japanese homeland. It is as yet not clear how the determination will be made, nor whether countries without defence cooperation agreements would also be considered.

Diplomatic Bluebook downgrades importance of China

Japan's latest Diplomatic Bluebook, [released](#) on 10 April, drew attention due to the significant downgrade in nomenclature used to refer to China, with which it has been engaged in a long-running diplomatic spat. The report, which was approved by the Cabinet on the same day, refers to China as an 'important neighbouring country', rather than 'one of the most important bilateral relations' as in the 2025 edition.

The Bluebook states that China has engaged in 'one-sided criticism and coercion' against Japan after Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's statement in the Diet in November 2025 that a Taiwan contingency could qualify as a 'survival-threatening situation' under Japanese law, which could trigger the potential deployment of Japanese Self-Defence Forces. It cited instances of China's 'coercion' as well. On the other hand, it maintained that Japan remained open to dialogue with China. The Bluebook, currently only available in Japanese, is expected to be released in its English version in the autumn of this year.

Japan-France Summit Meeting

French President Emmanuel Macron [visited](#) Tokyo on 1 April for a bilateral summit meeting. During the 140-minute meeting, the two leaders converged on the inseparability of Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific security, with Prime Minister Sanae

Takaichi emphasising the importance of France as an 'Exceptional Partner' that shares both values and stakes in the Indo-Pacific region. Macron assured Takaichi of his full cooperation as Chair of the G-7 grouping.

The two leaders then reviewed the state of ties, welcoming the holding of a 2+2 Meeting between the foreign and defence ministers of both countries as well as a joint committee meeting on science and technology cooperation. They concurred on expanding collaborative ties in the fields of AI and nuclear technology. The French side promised its full cooperation in ensuring the success of the next AI Summit to be held in Japan, while both sides welcomed the formation of a working group to come up with commemorative events for the 170th anniversary of diplomatic ties between the two countries in 2028. They expressed concern over the use of export controls and other methods of economic coercion.

The meeting concluded with both leaders reviewing the regional situation. They agreed to work together in the Indo-Pacific vis-à-vis China and North Korea, urged the swift de-escalation of tensions in West Asia and the restoration of safe navigation in the Strait of Hormuz and decided to collaborate closely on assisting Ukraine. A joint statement, along with statements on nuclear, AI and global health cooperation, was released in French after the meeting.