

Global Times: Historical trajectory warns Japan is approaching dangerous threshold of militarist revival

Beijing, China Dec 15, 2025 ([IssueWire.com](https://www.IssueWire.com)) - Against the backdrop of strong backlash in both Japan and China over Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's remarks on China's Taiwan island, several of Japan's recent military moves have also drawn broad international attention.

In late November, Japan's Kyodo News reported that the Japanese government was holding informal consultations with the Philippines regarding the export of the Japan Self-Defense Forces' Type 03 medium-range surface-to-air missile. Citing multiple sources, Kyodo News reported that the Takaichi administration plans to abolish the current regulations that restrict defense equipment exports to five non-combat-related categories as early as the first half of 2026. Following a formal decision, concrete discussions on exports will commence promptly.

In August, Australia's Defense Ministry announced in a press release that the Japanese Mogami-class frigate was selected for the Australian Navy's new general-purpose frigates.

Chinese military affairs expert Zhang Junshe told the Global Times that Japan's development of aggressive weapons and export plans seriously violates relevant instruments and bans.

Confronted with this provocation challenging the postwar international order, Yang Xiao, senior research fellow at the China Institute for International Strategic Studies, told the Global Times that a comparison between post-WWI Germany during the Nazi period and 21st-century Japan reveals a disturbingly similar pattern: Economic stagnation, rising security anxiety, and eventual military escalation. This reemerging trajectory of a "defeated power rearming" raises a fundamental question: Is Japan edging toward a dangerous point of no return?

Echoes of history

Yang said that the core parallel between post-WWI Germany and 21st-century Japan lies in the transition from "pacifism" to "realism."

Germany sought reintegration under the Versailles system after WWI, while postwar Japan relies heavily on the US-Japan security framework. In both cases, Yang said, prolonged dependence on external guarantees eventually gave way to ambitions for greater autonomy.

After being named Reich Chancellor on January 30, 1933, Adolf Hitler concentrated at first on revising the Versailles Treaty and promoting economic recovery and the rearmament connected to it, since Germany was weak both economically and militarily, according to the German History in Documents and Images (GHDl) compilation of official documents.

Yang noted that Japan's starting point came after the collapse of its asset bubble in the early 1990s, as prolonged deflation, fiscal strain, and demographic pressures reshaped public debate around national security.

Two political milestones, he said, illustrate these shifts: Germany withdrew from the League of Nations in October 1933. In 1935, Hitler announced German rearmament and re-introduced conscription, which was prohibited under the Versailles Treaty, according to an article on the Imperial War Museum's

website.

Similarly, Japan's Defense Agency was promoted to the "Ministry of Defense (MoD)" in 2007, meaning it was reborn as an organization that not only formulates the management of the Self-Defense Forces, but also the overall policy related to security, reported the Nikkei.

"This resemblance is not about surface-level repetition. It demands we confront the deeper forces that drive such historical cycles," Yang warned.

Factors behind acceleration

Beyond historical analogy, Japan's accelerated rearmament is propelled by several converging realities.

First, as noted earlier, the Japan of the 1990s was beset by economic stagnation and a debt crisis, so it funded its massive defense budgets through the issuance of government bonds, Yang noted.

"This model of 'borrowing to sustain the military' may temporarily boost GDP while simultaneously planting the seeds of a risk that could plunge humanity into war once again," Yang said.

At more than 250 percent of GDP, Japan's gross debt stands out, Reuters reported in June 2024.

Domestic political rightward drift and Japan's desire for strategic autonomy became major engines driving military expansion, Yang said.

Yang believes that as Japan's defense budget grows, the expanding defense industry then reinforces government momentum to shift security policy, forming a structural feedback loop.

Externally, Yang said, a sense of geopolitical isolation is also driving Tokyo. "After the Cold War, Washington's shifting strategic priorities caused Japan to question the reliability of its alliance. In response, Japan began emphasizing self-strengthening to gain maneuvering room amid East Asia's evolving power landscape."

Regional security tensions combined with Japan's frequent hype of China's lawful military activities as "threats," have given Tokyo a "convenient justification" for expanding its military presence, Yang said.

Rising defense expenditure has already triggered discontent among some Japanese citizens. A petition submitted to the 212th Diet of Japan's House of Councillors in 2023 urged the government not to expand the military budget but instead increase funding for healthcare, eldercare, welfare, pensions, and basic livelihood protections, according to the official website of the House of Councillors.

A dangerous trend

Japan is, in fact, not only developing weaponry and equipment for export, it is also already deploying or planning to deploy them domestically.

The same Type 03 medium-range surface-to-air missile that Japan is planning to export to the Philippines is also planned to be deployed on Yonaguni island, according to a report by Japan's Asahi Shimbun on November 23. The report claimed that Yonaguni island is located in the westernmost point of Japan, only about 111 kilometers away from China's Taiwan island.

Additionally, Japan recently tested the deployment of a developing hypersonic missile system. Aside from the hypersonics, Japanese forces will deploy Tomahawk cruise missiles, Joint Strike Missiles, and domestically upgraded Type 12 surface-to-ship missiles to enhance their anti-ship and counterstrike capabilities against enemy bases in the coming years, according to a report on November 17 by USNI News, the news website of the US Naval Institute.

Japan has also stepped up to develop sensitive strategic military assets, not only modifying the JS Izumo and JS Kaga into aircraft carriers capable of hosting F-35B stealth fighter jets, but also considering adding nuclear-powered submarines to its fleet, according to media reports.

What risks do these developments pose to regional peace?

Zhang pointed out that the capabilities of these weapons and equipment can be used in aggression rather than self-defense only. He noted that the missiles Japan is developing or importing from the US have ranges of more than 1,000 kilometers; the JS Izumo and JS Kaga, previously designated helicopter destroyers, are now full aircraft carriers capable of carrying F-35B fighter jets; Japan's conventional submarines are also considered advanced in the world, let alone its ambitions to own nuclear-powered ones.

While some of Japan's current weapons and equipment can be considered advanced in the world, such as its warships and missiles, it is widely considered to be sitting in the second tier of conventional military power ranking in the world, not to mention the Permanent Five members of the UN Security Council having nuclear weapons. If Japan wields this power to challenge the postwar international order, it is surely overestimating its own capabilities, Zhang said.

However, Zhang warned that Japan's right-wing forces were not thoroughly purged after WWII, leaving fertile ground for the revival of militarism within the country. This represents an extremely dangerous development.

"Peace and development remain the themes of our time. Japan is standing at a historic crossroads. The world bears the responsibility to remain alert, constrain its slide toward a dangerous path, and prevent a tragic repeat of history in new form," said Yang.

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