TAL SHIAR DEFENSE INTELLIGENCE REPORT

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Key findings from Japan's Defense of Japan 2026 white paper

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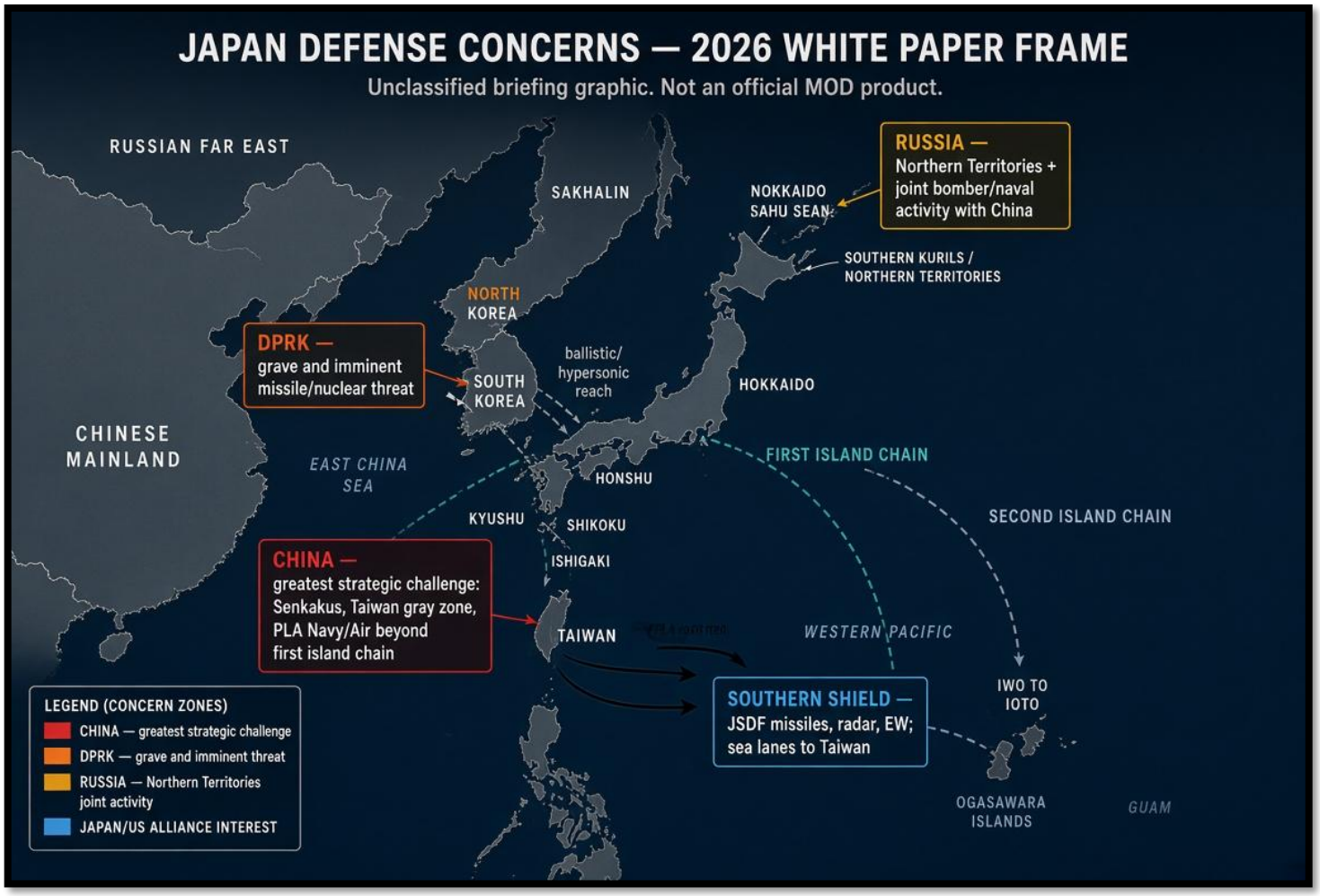
Japan assesses the postwar order as under its most serious challenge since 1945 and treats China as the unprecedented and greatest strategic challenge. It is accelerating a shift from the 2022 "three documents" toward new ways of warfare—mass uncrewed systems, AI-enabled C2, stand-off strike, space/cyber, and attrition-ready industry—while planning an early revision of the National Security Strategy, National Defense Strategy, and Defense Buildup Program by end-2026. Response is framed as overall national strength plus the U.S. alliance and a widening web of like-minded partners, not military force alone.

- **China is the main threat.** The paper says Beijing is expanding activity around Japan, including into the western Pacific near the Izu and Ogasawara islands. It is intensifying operations in the sea and airspace around Taiwan. It records 2025 radar-illumination incidents against JSDF aircraft, carrier activity east of Iwo To, and "growing concern" that China Coast Guard vessels could support a gray-zone blockade of Taiwan. Tokyo says the China challenge must be met with "overall national strength" plus allies.



- **North Korea and the Russia vector are worse, not stable.** Pyongyang is an even more grave and imminent threat due to nuclear and missile advances—including hypersonic systems that can reach Japan—and deeper military collaboration with Moscow. Russia is a "strong security concern" for post-Ukraine force growth, joint bomber and naval activity with China near Japan, and militarization of the Northern Territories. The paper treats the three as a linked set.

- **<u>The paper is a prelude to a harder strategy, not the strategy itself.</u>** A rewrite headquarters was stood up in October 2025. The FY2027 budget request of about 8.9 trillion yen ($55.6 billion), submitted 31 August, left roughly 160 items unpriced pending that rewrite. Officials expect the final figure to top 10 trillion yen. Japan already hit the 2 percent of GDP goal two years early. The next documents will set how far counterstrike, unmanned mass, and export policy go.



New Ways of Warfare, Industry, and the End-2026 Rewrite

The second so-what is force design. The white paper adds a first-time chapter on “new ways of warfare” drawn from Ukraine and from Chinese and North Korean programs. Tokyo wants cheap mass—attack drones from air, surface, and undersea—tied to standoff missiles and an AI command layer. It is renaming the Air Self-Defense Force the Aerospace Self-Defense Force in FY2026. It revised the Three Principles on Transfer of Defense Equipment in April 2026 to widen exports. The binding constraints are people, magazines, and factories, not slogans.

<u>Unmanned mass and AI are now programmed, not experimental.</u> MOD plans low-cost UAVs, USVs, and UUVs for the SHIELD littoral defense architecture by FY2027, plus attack drones used with long-range missiles. The FY2027 request seeks an integrated AI platform for targeting. Japan is also developing submarine-launched hypersonic missiles as part of a counterstrike. Ukraine is cited as proof that stockpiles and cheap attritable systems decide wars of duration.

The industrial base is now treated as a combat system. Production and technology were elevated from a chapter to a full Part. Approved "stable manufacturing" plans jumped to 164 in FY2025 from 36 two years earlier. The April 2026 export-rule revision abolished the old five-category limit. Australia selected the upgraded Mogami-class frigate; Tokyo and Canberra contracted the first three of 11 ships in April 2026. The paper warns that further contractor exit would shrink supply.

Alliance deepening and a personnel shortfall run in parallel. The paper keeps the U.S. alliance as the cornerstone and pushes multilaterals with Australia, the ROK, and the Philippines. Compensation is being rewritten for the first time since the SDF was founded, yet authorized strength remains underfilled. Unmanned systems are a hedge against a shrinking recruiting pool. Space Operations' strength has more than doubled. The Aerospace rename takes effect in FY2026.

Conclusion

Japan has stopped describing the 2022 buildup as sufficient. The 2026 white paper says the security environment moved faster than those documents assumed. China is the pacing challenge. North Korea is the acute missile-nuclear threat. Russia is the nearby collaborator that makes both worse. The policy response is an early rewrite of the three strategic documents, a high-low mix of standoff missiles and cheap drones, looser export rules, and a tighter U.S. and minilateral web. Watch three markers through December 2026: language on counterstrike and Taiwan in the new NSS/NDS; whether the FY2027 budget clears 10 trillion yen; and whether industry can mass-produce unmanned systems and munitions at the rate the paper implies. The paper is a judgment that time is short.

Program	White-paper role	FY2027 request (known)	Status / notes
Type-25 / upgraded Type-12 SSM family (ground, ship, air)	Core stand-off / counterstrike vs ships and landing forces	Ground Type-25 + equipment: **¥157.5B + item req.**; ship-launched Type-12: **¥56.2B (~$351M)**; air-launched Type-12: **¥34.5B**; F-2 mods (10 acft) **¥12.8B**	Ground variant standardized as Type-25; ship variant to enter service on refurbished *Teruzuki* in FY2027; air variant on upgraded F-2 at Hyakuri same year
Hypersonic guided missile + Type-25 HVGP (island-defense glide weapon)	Hard-to-intercept stand-off; HVGP for island defense	Hypersonic buy + ground kit: **¥167.3B + item req.**; hypersonic R&D: **¥14.2B + item req.**; HVGP + kit: **¥36.1B + item req.**	Mass production underway; new **underwater-launched hypersonic** is an unpriced item request (subs / UUVs)
SHIELD unmanned suite (UAVs / USVs / UUVs)	"New ways of warfare"; mass cheap attritable systems for littoral denial	Attack / multi-type UAVs and related: large share unpriced; prior-year SHIELD build was ~¥100–129B	10-type mix: modular UAV, three small attack UAVs, ship-launched and shipboard UAVs, anti-ship UAV, radar-site defense UAV, small USV/UUV. Target IOC **FY2027**
MQ-9B SeaGuardian	Long-endurance ISRT / targeting for stand-off and	**17 aircraft: ¥292.2B (~$1.83B) + item req.**	Largest single UAV line in the request; builds on earlier 4-aircraft lots

	Pacific sea-lane watch		
Foreign stand-off missiles (Tomahawk, JSM, JASSM)	Bridge until domestic production scales	JSM **¥18.0B**; JASSM **¥5.3B + item req.**; Tomahawk ship-fit **¥1.1B + item req.**	Up to **~400 Tomahawks** via FMS; FY2027 adds launch capability on *Kongo*, *Ashigara*, *Maya* (three more Aegis DDGs)
GCAP next-gen fighter + collaborative UCAVs	Future air superiority; unmanned teaming	GCAP: **¥234B (~$1.5B) + item req.**; collaborative UCAV R&D: **¥9.7B + item req.**	Japan–UK–Italy; UCAVs for deception/EW and autonomous teaming with the future fighter
Aegis System Equipped Vessels (ASEV)	IAMD / BMD backbone	Test/prep for two hulls under construction: **¥68.9B (~$431M) + item req.**	First ASEV delivery targeted FY2027, second FY2028; ~12,000-ton BMD ships
Submarine-launched cruise missile (domestic)	Survivable stand-off from Taigei-class	**¥16.3B**	Torpedo-tube launch; complements the new underwater hypersonic R&D line
F-35A / F-35B + *Izumo*-class STOVL mods	Air superiority and southwest flexibility	Continuing multi-year buys (FY2026 lot was 8× F-35A + 3× F-35B); *Izumo* mods finish **FY2027**, *Kaga* **FY2028**	White paper treats F-35 and carrier-capable F-35B as part of cross-domain / stand-off enablement
New FFM (upgraded Mogami) + Taigei-class SS	Sea control, escort, undersea advantage; export/co-production path	New FFM construction continues (Australia selected upgraded Mogami; 11-ship JP–AU program)	White paper highlights the Australia FFM deal as proof of the revised transfer principles
Low-cost stand-off missile (new)	High-low mix; complement expensive precision weapons	**Item request** (unpriced)	MOD cited air-launch from **C-2 transports** and named Anduril Barracuda as an example of the foreign interim option
CRADS + directed-energy / cheap interceptors	Cost-exchange vs mass drones	Development line (unpriced / mixed)	GSDF close-range system: missiles + autocannon + lasers; plus high-power laser/microwave research
Space SDA satellites / constellation	Targeting for stand-off; JASDF standup	Continuing; SDA satellite launch planned **FY2026**	Tied to renaming ASDF → Japan Aerospace Self-Defense Force



Tal Shiar was founded by Nadeem Iqbal, a national security expert who served over 16 years as an intelligence officer for the Department of Defense from 2006-2022. His career began as a counter-insurgency analyst on the Afghanistan-Pakistan Task Force (2006–2013), followed by 9 years as a military analyst in the Syria Branch (2013–2022). He deployed five times in support of combat operations (3× Afghanistan, 2× Iraq), including two rotations with Special Operations Forces focused on counter-terrorism missions in the CENTCOM theater. Additional roles included rotations to CIA Headquarters as the military analyst for the DNI Middle East Task Force and served as the Syria Country Director for Office of Secretary of Defense Policy (OSDP). He was recognized with Joint Civilian Commendation/Achievement Medals, the NATO Medal(x3), the Secretary of Defense GWOT Medal, DoD Expeditionary Award and the OSD Excellence Award.