



NEW GLOBAL
PARTNERSHIP OF
UKRAINE



Ukraine X Japan

RESPONSE TO GLOBAL TENSIONS



INTERNATIONAL
RENAISSANCE
FOUNDATION

Tetiana Potapova

UKRAINE – JAPAN: RESPONSE TO GLOBAL TENSIONS

© Foreign Policy Council “Ukrainian Prism”, 2025

The publication is prepared within the project the “Global Partnerships: Expert Diplomacy 2.0”. This publication was compiled with the support of the International Renaissance Foundation. Its content is the exclusive responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily reflect the views of the International Renaissance Foundation.

UKRAINE – JAPAN: RESPONSE TO GLOBAL TENSIONS

SUMMARY

Since 2022, Japan has transitioned from a traditionally reactive stance to a proactive “security actor” role, driven by the realisation that Russia’s invasion of Ukraine undermines the global international order. This shift was institutionalised in the 2022 National Security Strategy and National Defence Strategy. To navigate the complex landscape of multiple threats outlined in the documents, Tokyo employs a dual-track diplomacy: a security-focused Japan-US-South Korea trilateral, marked by the 2023 Camp David agreements and Freedom Edge exercises, and an economically driven Japan-China-South Korea framework intended to manage trade dependencies, reinforce alternative cooperation spheres, and prevent escalation. These cooperation frameworks allow Tokyo to diversify risks and maximise autonomy while remaining firmly anchored in its alliance with the United States.

The analysis focuses on Japan’s trilateral frameworks and Russian influence, as these are the lenses through which Tokyo now considers its support for Kyiv, which is defined by investment across normative, military, and economic dimensions. Normatively, the “Ukraine today, East Asia tomorrow” doctrine links European stability to the Indo-Pacific, positioning support for Kyiv as a defence of territorial integrity principles relevant to Taiwan, as well as the Northern Territories and Senkaku Islands disputes. Militarily, Japan’s defence establishment is actively studying drone warfare and hybrid tactics to inform its own transformation. Economically, the relationship is transitioning from ad hoc aid to a long-term public-private framework, exemplified by the signing of 56 agreements in February 2024 and another 29 MOUs in August 2025, focusing on infrastructure technology and green energy.

However, Japan’s continued engagement faces significant threats from converged Sino-Russian information warfare, which utilises platforms like X and outlets like Sputnik Japan to circulate populist narratives. These campaigns exploit domestic political tensions that can make long-term support for Kyiv politically painful.

To mitigate these risks, Ukraine must move beyond the “aid model” towards a narrative of mutual strategic investment, particularly through platforms like JUPITeR. It is also preferable to develop counter-disinformation capabilities specifically tailored to the Japanese environment and establish contingency strategies for scenarios where regional instability or shifting trilateral dynamics might contract Tokyo’s bandwidth for extra-regional engagement.

Content

INTRODUCTION	4
STRATEGIC GEOMETRY: JAPAN BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES, CHINA, AND SOUTH KOREA	6
Japan – the United States – Republic of Korea	7
Japan – China – Republic of Korea	9
The Two Triangles	12
BETWEEN NEUTRALITY AND NARRATIVE: RUSSIAN INFLUENCE IN JAPAN'S INFORMATION SPACE	13
Sources of Disinformation	13
Risks and Limitations	16
TODAY'S UKRAINE, TOMORROW'S ASIA: WHAT UKRAINE REPRESENTS FOR JAPAN'S GLOBAL ROLE	18
CONCLUSION	22

INTRODUCTION

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine served as a catalyst that fundamentally reshaped Tokyo's threat perception, accelerating security policy reforms that had been debated for decades and legitimising a more assertive regional posture. Since 2023, Japan has marked a clear departure from its traditionally reactive foreign policy rooted in post-war constitutional pacifism. Under Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's administration, Japan published a series of transformative strategic documents that collectively identify Russia's invasion of Ukraine as a turning point undermining the very principles of the international order. These documents redefined Japan's security environment with unprecedented clarity by positioning China as the "greatest strategic challenge", North Korea as a "grave and imminent threat", and Russia as a "strong security concern".

Domestically, Japan navigates a perennial debate between ideological "hawks and doves" within its political establishment, where conservative factions push for constitutional revision to remove Article 9's constraints on military action¹, while opposition parties and segments of civil society resist what they perceive as dangerous militarisation. This domestic tension has been further complicated by the rise of right-wing populism, which has been significantly amplified by Russian and Chinese disinformation campaigns targeting Japanese social media platforms. Moreover, recent statements by high-ranking politicians, including Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi, regarding the threats posed by the invasion of Taiwan, amplify the effects of information warfare, revealing possible backlashes in bilateral and trilateral cooperation with China. On the other hand, normalisation of relations with South Korea, despite the deep-seated historical grievances, presents a window of opportunity that Tokyo can utilise to balance both security and economic policies in the Indo-Pacific.

Japan's simultaneous participation in two distinct trilateral frameworks: the security-focused Japan-US-South Korea configuration and the economically driven Japan-China-South Korea arrangement, is essential for comprehending Tokyo's broader strategic calculus and its implications for regional stability. With this approach often being mischaracterised as simple hedging, it accurately represents a strategy of maximising autonomy while managing unavoidable dependencies. For Ukraine, Japan's success in maintaining this delicate balance directly impacts Tokyo's capacity to sustain long-term support for Kyiv, as domestic political pressures amplified by foreign disinformation campaigns exploit any perception that Japan's international commitments come at the expense of regional economic stability or alliance reliability.

¹ The Constitution of Japan, Office of the Prime Minister of Japan, 03.11.1946, https://japan.kantei.go.jp/constitution_and_government_of_japan/constitution_e.html

In the midst of geopolitical turbulence, Ukraine's collaboration with Japan remains significant and continues to evolve despite geographical distance, serving multiple strategic functions for Tokyo. Beyond the frequently cited "Ukraine today, Asia tomorrow" narrative, Japan's support for Ukraine represents a direct investment in the principle of territorial integrity, which has relevance to Tokyo's own unresolved disputes over the Northern Territories² with Russia and the Senkaku Islands with China. Japan's security establishment, including the Ministry of Defence and its National Institute for Defence Studies, has systematically studied the Russo-Ukrainian War as a real-time laboratory for modern warfare, drawing lessons on drone warfare, cyber operations, hybrid tactics, and the effectiveness of Western sanctions regimes. This analytical imperative drove the passage of Japan's landmark Active Cyber Defence Law³ in May 2025, legislation that grants Tokyo unprecedented authority to conduct offensive cyber operations, which would have been constitutionally and politically inconceivable before witnessing Russia's multi-domain assault on Ukraine.

Analysing the ways Japan navigates the complex geopolitical landscape by balancing security imperatives with economic interdependence, managing historical tensions, countering information warfare, and maintaining public support for controversial defence reforms offers critical insights into the broader stability of the Indo-Pacific region, while understanding the Japanese foreign policy dynamic that may enable Ukrainian policymakers to anticipate the potential volume and direction of Japanese support and to develop proactive counter-strategies.

² Northern Territories, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/russia/territory/>

³ Ōsawa Jun, New Legislation Signals Japan's Shift to "Active" Cyber Defense, 7.08.2025, Nippon, <https://www.nippon.com/en/in-depth/d01147/>

STRATEGIC GEOMETRY: JAPAN BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES, CHINA, AND SOUTH KOREA

The post-2022 period in Japan has been largely characterised by a shift towards a more proactive rather than reactive foreign policy stance. With this, the majority of policies and newly positioned strategic documents have been released under the administration of Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, outlining perspectives for a more active involvement in the issues of the Indo-Pacific region. The National Security Strategy (NSS)⁴, the National Defence Strategy (NDS)⁵, and the Defence Build-up Program (DBP) were the first documents published on December 16, 2022. All of these, including the subsequent publications of the Diplomatic Blue Books⁶ and Defence White Papers⁷, identify Russia's invasion of Ukraine as a turning point that undermines the very principles of the international order, thereby compelling Japan to assume the role of an active security actor. Specifically, the 2022 NSS and NDS formally redefined the regional threat environment with unprecedented clarity: China is now designated as the "greatest strategic challenge" Japan has ever faced, replacing previous, softer language. North Korea is classified as a "grave and imminent threat" due to its rapid missile advancements. Meanwhile, Russia, previously a partner for negotiation, is now labelled a "strong security concern", with its actions in Ukraine viewed not as a distant European conflict but as a dangerous precedent that could trigger a similar "unilateral change to the status quo by force" in East Asia – a recurring narrative of the Defence White Papers.

This new strategic posture requires a revised architecture for regional engagement, demanding Japan actively manage its critical and often conflicting relationships with key regional actors, specifically the United States, China, and South Korea. This deliberate management of multiple partnerships is the foundation of its modern diplomatic approach.

As the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic started to diminish and economic activity increased, alongside heightened security concerns, cooperation among neighbouring states has received a significant impetus. While this research primarily focuses on the Japanese perspective on engagement in various cooperation formats, this new era of trilateralism would not have been possible without the significant political capital

⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, National Security Strategy (NSS), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 05.04.2023, https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page1we_000081.html

⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, National Defense Strategy, Defense Buildup Program, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 05.12.2023, https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page1we_000082.html

⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Diplomatic Bluebook, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 14.11.2025, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/index.html>

⁷ Japan Ministry of Defense, DEFENSE OF JAPAN (Annual White Paper), Japan Ministry of Defense, 12.07.2024, https://www.mod.go.jp/en/publ/w_paper/index.html

expended by both Japanese and South Korean (ROK) leaders to improve bilateral ties.⁸ The Yoon administration in Seoul, in particular, took a major political risk by seeking to resolve the long-standing dispute over compensation for Korean wartime forced labour victims during Japan's colonial rule.⁹ This risk was compounded by deep-seated public resentment stemming from the belief that the 1965 normalisation treaty failed to acknowledge the illegality of the colonial occupation or provide justice for individual victims of brutality, such as those mobilised for forced labour and sexual slavery ("comfort women"). In March 2023, President Yoon proposed a "third-party reimbursement" plan to compensate victims through a public foundation rather than Japanese corporate funds.¹⁰ This move faced severe domestic backlash for being "humiliating,"¹¹ but was the decisive factor in normalising relations. This overture, reciprocated by Tokyo, led to the resumption of "shuttle diplomacy" between the two leaders and created the necessary political space for the US to broker the Camp David agreements on August 18, 2023, that created one of the two relevant cooperative configurations for Japan.

This milestone consolidated the first of two distinct strategic triangles that now define Japan's regional engagement: the security-focused Japan-United States-Republic of Korea trilateral and the economically-driven Japan-China-Republic of Korea trilateral. These two formats represent the dual nature of Tokyo's foreign policy, which balances deterrence against security threats through the US alliance, while maintaining engagement with China to maintain economic stability. For Ukraine, understanding the nature and dynamics of these regional configurations is crucial from a long-term perspective, as Japan's success in managing regional complexities is inextricably linked to its capacity to remain a proactive international actor beyond the Indo-Pacific, as well as to sustain economic, normative, and military support for Kyiv.

Japan – the United States – Republic of Korea

The long-standing economic and security ties between Japan and the United States, dating back to 1951, have taken a new turn with cooperation at the Camp David Summit in August 2023, paving the way for the consolidation of trilateral cooperation between Japan, the US, and the Republic of Korea. While bilateral Japan-US security ties, as well as ROK-US cooperation, have been well established and remain strong, the direct

⁸ Victor Cha, Christopher B. Johnstone, Ellen Kim, and Nicholas Szechenyi, The Camp David U.S.-Japan-Korea Trilateral Summit: An Exchange among CSIS Japan and Korea Chairs, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 23.08.2023, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/camp-david-us-japan-korea-trilateral-summit-exchange-among-csis-japan-and-korea-chairs>

⁹ Brian Kim, Korea and Japan Clash Over History and Law, Lawfare, 16.08.2019, <https://www.lawfaremedia.org/article/korea-and-japan-clash-over-history-and-law>

¹⁰ Tom Le, Hanah Park, and Hina Tanabe, Japan-South Korea deal on forced labour leaves many questions unresolved, East Asia Forum, 25.04.2023, <https://eastasiaforum.org/2023/04/25/a-forced-deal-for-forced-laborers-or-regional-security/>

¹¹ Jung Min-ho, Yoon faces strong political backlash after Tokyo summit, The Korea Times, 19.03.2023, <https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/southkorea/politics/20230319/yoons-faces-strong-political-backlash-after-tokyo-summit>

connection of Japan and South Korea on this matter presents a major shift and a continuation of the moving-forward diplomatic track established by the Yoon and Kishida administrations.

The resulting “Spirit of Camp David”¹² joint statement and the “Camp David Principles”¹³ established a multi-layered structure for cooperation, creating what some have described as a de facto trilateral military alliance, with the key commitments being:¹⁴

- agreement to hold annual summits between the leaders, as well as regular meetings with foreign ministers, defence ministers, and national security advisors;
- a pledge to consult swiftly in response to common threats, creating a political commitment and a hotline to coordinate responses during a crisis. While not a legally binding defence pact like NATO's Article 5, it establishes a powerful norm of collective action;
- establishment of a formal body to coordinate and implement the shared commitments made at the summit, ensuring follow-through and bureaucratic momentum.

Additional actions taken over the coming period included the creation of “Freedom Edge”, an annual multi-domain military exercise; an operational mechanism to share in real-time among the three countries the North Korean missile warning data; and a foundation for intelligence cooperation for the bilateral General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) between Japan and South Korea.

With the active and rapid transformation of established agreements into action, this newly enforced format of cooperation, first and foremost driven by growing security concerns in the Indo-Pacific region, raises two major issues. Firstly, according to the 2022 National Security Strategy¹, Pyongyang's military activities are now viewed as a “grave and imminent threat to Japan's national security than ever before”. This heightened sense of urgency is due to North Korea's rapid advancements in its nuclear and ballistic missile programs and active military cooperation with Russia. While North Korea remains the most immediate and publicly stated justification for this trilateral cooperation, its strategic scope has deliberately expanded. Therefore, secondly, as the 2022 NSS identifies, China is considered to be an “unprecedented and the greatest strategic challenge”. This assessment is based on Beijing's opaque and rapid military modernisation, persistent attempts to unilaterally alter the status quo

¹² The White House, The Spirit of Camp David: Joint Statement of Japan, the Republic of Korea, and the United States, The White House, 18.08.2023, <https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/08/18/the-spirit-of-camp-david-joint-statement-of-japan-the-republic-of-korea-and-the-united-states/>

¹³ U.S. Mission Korea, Camp David Principles, U.S. Embassy & Consulate in the Republic of Korea, 19.08.2023, <https://kr.usembassy.gov/081923-camp-david-principles/>

¹⁴ Jenny Town and Yuki Tatsumi, Takeaways from the Camp David Summit, Stimson Center, 25.08.2023, <https://www.stimson.org/2023/takeaways-from-the-camp-david-summit/>

by force in the East and South China Seas, its escalating pressure on Taiwan, and its deepening strategic alignment with Russia.

Over the next years, the practical manifestation of these strategic documents and agreements is seen as the institutionalisation of the Japan-US-Republic of Korea security pillar. The first milestone was reached in December 2023 with the full activation of a real-time missile-warning data-sharing system¹⁵, which transitioned the three nations from ad hoc information exchanges to a continuous 24/7 technical integration for detecting and assessing North Korean ballistic threats. Later, in June 2024, this initiative was reinforced by the execution of the Freedom Edge¹⁶ – the first trilateral multi-domain exercise covering maritime, air, and cyber warfare, which successfully simulated high-end interoperability across the Indo-Pacific. By September 2025, the partnership persisted, with the third iteration of Freedom Edge, which focused on anti-submarine warfare and ballistic missile defence, as reaffirmed in the September 2025 Joint Statement¹⁷. For further advancements in the three-way cooperation, in November 2024, the leaders officially launched the Trilateral Secretariat¹⁸, which provides a permanent bureaucratic foundation for coordinating long-term policy and military commitments aiming to ensure the aforementioned gains endure beyond domestic political cycles.

Japan – China – Republic of Korea

The discourse around the trilateral format of cooperation between the PRC, ROK, and Japan has gained ever more relevance since the Ninth Trilateral Summit held in Seoul in May 2024, following a four-and-a-half-year hiatus. The Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) officially framed this resumption as a “revitalisation” of the trilateral process.¹⁹ In official press conferences, Foreign Minister Kamikawa Yoko²⁰ and Foreign Press Secretary Kobayashi Maki²¹ emphasised the shared “great

¹⁵ U.S. Department of Defense, United States-Japan-Republic of Korea Trilateral Ministerial Joint Press Statement, U.S. Department of Defense, 19.12.2023, <https://www.war.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3621235/united-states-japan-republic-of-korea-trilateral-ministerial-joint-press-statem/>

¹⁶ Indo-Pacific Command Public Affairs, TRILATERAL STATEMENT, First Execution of Multi-Domain Japan – ROK – U.S. Exercise FREEDOM EDGE, Commander, U.S. 7th Fleet, 27.06.2024, <https://www.c7f.navy.mil/Media/News/Display/Article/3819064/trilateral-statement-first-execution-of-multi-domain-japan-rok-us-exercise-free/>

¹⁷ U.S. Department of State, Joint Statement from the Trilateral Meeting of the United States of America, Japan, and the Republic of Korea in New York City, United States Department of State, 22.09.2025, <https://www.state.gov/releases/2025/09/joint-statement-from-the-trilateral-meeting-of-the-united-states-of-america-japan-and-the-republic-of-korea-in-new-york-city/>

¹⁸ The White House, Joint Statement of Japan, the Republic of Korea, and the United States, The White House, 15.11.2024, <https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2024/11/15/joint-statement-of-japan-the-republic-of-korea-and-the-united-states/>

¹⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, The Ninth Japan-China-ROK Trilateral Summit, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 27.05.2024, https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/rp/pageite_000001_00376.html

²⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Press Conference by Foreign Minister Hayashi Yoshimasa, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 26.09.2023, https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/kaiken/kaiken22e_000119.html

²¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Press Conference by Foreign Press Secretary KOBAYASHI Maki, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 08.05.2024, https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/kaiken/kaikenwe_000001_00065.html

responsibility for regional peace and prosperity” of the three nations, justifying the importance of resuming this high-level dialogue.

This diplomatic revitalisation stems from the “Strategic Mutually Beneficial Relationship” framework, first established in 2008²², which was reaffirmed during the November 2023 meeting between Prime Minister Kishida and President Xi Jinping in San Francisco²³. However, far from undermining cooperation with the US, Japan’s engagement with China aligns with the broader G7 consensus of “de-risking, not decoupling,” as introduced in the G7 Hiroshima Leaders’ Communiqué²⁴ to distinguish between targeted security-related matters and broader commercial stability specifically. Nonetheless, driven by the idea of the common good, this revitalisation does come with many strings attached in the context of the underlying connections and tensions among actors.

While the US has been and remains a major partner of Japan overall, specifically from a security standpoint, China leads in trade cooperation, accounting for around 22% of Japan’s imports²⁵ – more than twice the share of the United States. At the same time, China is the second largest importer of Japanese goods, trailing the US by only 3%. Additionally, according to JETRO’s “Invest Japan Report 2024”, in 2023, China was the 7th largest source of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) flow into Japan, valued at 178.9 billion yen (approx. USD 1.24 billion), featuring a 103.8% year-on-year increase.²⁶ The ROK was the 8th largest source, with 128.0 billion yen, a 13.3% increase. Considering South Korea’s position among Japan’s top five trading partners, the notion of trilateral collaboration on economic matters features a highly rational progression, given the extent of the existing economic interdependence. Yet, the timing of the revival of the trilateral format, as much as the specific areas of the planned cooperation, highlights a few other dimensions of these engagements.

The G7 summit in Hiroshima took place amid Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, which Japan’s 2024 Diplomatic Bluebook²⁷, published shortly before the summit, identified as a major international challenge impacting global stability. At the same time, the US has been actively implementing strict export controls and investment bans on Chinese tech. As some Western media framed the summit primarily through the lens of immediate geopolitical tensions, treating its revival mainly as a reactive move is a

²² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, Joint Declaration of the Ninth Japan-China-ROK Trilateral Summit, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, 27.05.2024, https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/zy/gb/202405/t20240531_11367190.html

²³ The State Council of the People’s Republic of China, Chinese Premier Li Qiang meets with Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, The State Council of the People’s Republic of China, 17.11.2023, https://english.www.gov.cn/news/202311/17/content_WS655715dec6d0868f4e8e1591.html

²⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Joint Statement on a 10-Year Vision for Trilateral IP Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 27.05.2024, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100506878.pdf>

²⁵ Santander Trade, Japan: Foreign trade in figures, Santander Trade, 19.12.2025, <https://santandertrade.com/en/portal/analyse-markets/japan/foreign-trade-in-figures>

²⁶ Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO), Trends in Inward FDI to Japan by Country/Region, JETRO Invest Japan Report 2024, 2024, https://www.jetro.go.jp/en/invest/investment_environment/jire/report2024/ch2/sec2.html

²⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Diplomatic Bluebook 2024, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2024, https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/2024/en_html/index.html

rather myopic interpretation.²⁸ The summit's timing, coinciding with the 25th anniversary of the trilateral cooperation framework²⁹ (trilateral dialogue traces its origins to 1999, when the leaders of the three nations held their first informal breakfast meeting on the side-lines of the ASEAN Plus Three (10+3) Summit in the Philippines), was heavily emphasised in the Joint Declaration³⁰ and, as declared, served a specific diplomatic purpose of portraying the long hiatus as a temporary anomaly, primarily caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and political frictions, thus presenting the summit as a necessary and welcome return to an established diplomatic tradition.

Notably, the summit's agenda was carefully constructed to focus on "less political issues" where common ground could be found, deliberately avoiding contentious topics like Taiwan or freedom of navigation.³¹ The Joint Declaration identified six priority areas for cooperation: people-to-people and cultural exchanges, sustainable development, including climate change response, economic cooperation and trade, public health and ageing society challenges, science, technology, and digital transformation, and disaster relief and safety.³²

Seemingly underscoring an integrationist perspective on cooperation with China, a counter-narrative push can be found in the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry of Japan "White Paper on International Economy and Trade 2025".³³ The policy response outlined the need to "secure autonomy and indispensability" by strengthening supply chain resilience and "preventing excessive dependence on specific countries or regions". Thus, this trilateral serves as a functional platform to maintain the relationship and address non-traditional security issues such as regional public health and demographic decline, thereby preventing economic friction from escalating into a zero-sum conflict that would disrupt global supply chains. By increasing cooperation within the Japan-China-ROK framework, Japan is not seeking to deepen its dependency on China but rather to manage it. On the other end of the trilateral, Japan and South Korea, sharing a similar "sense of vulnerability", collaborate to achieve this "autonomy and indispensability" in critical technology sectors. Therefore, by aligning their supply chain policies, they aim to build a collective

²⁸ See for example: Motoko Rich and Choe Sang-Hun, At Meeting, Leaders of China, Japan and South Korea Try to Dial Down Tensions, The New York Times, 27.05.2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/05/27/world/asia/china-japan-korea-trilateral.html>
Bill Hayton, Landmark summit brings little progress on regional security in Northeast Asia, Chatham House, 30.05.2024, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2024/05/landmark-summit-brings-little-progress-regional-security-northeast-asia>

²⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Overview of Japan-China-ROK Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau, 04.2025, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100782208.pdf>

³⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea, Joint Declaration of the Ninth Japan-China-ROK Trilateral Summit, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea, 27.05.2024, https://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/brd/m_5674/view.do?seq=321010

³¹ Yun Sun, Yuki Tatsumi, and Jenny Town, Takeaways from the China-Japan-South Korea Trilateral Summit, Stimson Center, 31.05.2024, <https://www.stimson.org/2024/takeaways-from-the-china-japan-south-korea-trilateral-summit/>

³² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea, Joint Declaration of the Ninth Japan-China-ROK Trilateral Summit, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea, 27.05.2024, https://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/brd/m_5674/view.do?seq=321010

³³ Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry of Japan, Second Japan-ROK-U.S. Commerce and Industry Ministerial Meeting Held, Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, 27.06.2025, https://www.meti.go.jp/english/press/2025/0627_001.html

technological shield that reduces their shared susceptibility to Chinese economic coercion while maintaining the stable, non-strategic trade that both their economies require to function.

The Two Triangles

Both of these trilateral cooperation formats, specifically from Japan's perspective, are interpreted through a balance of counter-narratives regarding security and economic dimensions.

The Japan-China-ROK triangle is for economic and functional management of regional stability, supply chain interdependence, and shared demographic and environmental challenges. The Japan-US-ROK triangle is for security and strategic alignment. The government's view is that it should participate in both. It uses the Japan-US-ROK forum to coordinate its "economic security" policy and the Japan-China-ROK forum to manage the economic fallout and maintain the "mutually beneficial" non-strategic trade that its economy depends on.

Given the rising tension in the Indo-Pacific, the Japan-US-ROK trilateral aligns with a prominent "quasi-alliance" model developed by Dr Victor D. Cha³⁴, which he defines as "one in which two states remain unallied [Japan and ROK] but share a third party [the United States] as a common ally". Japan and South Korea feel vulnerable. This shared sense of vulnerability, which intensified particularly after 2022, forces them to put aside their differences and cooperate more closely on security issues to compensate for the unreliable US backing. Despite being relatively old, this concept encompasses Japan-ROK cooperation, which uniquely addresses both security and socioeconomic dimensions in comparison to cooperation with any other actors in the region aside from the US.

As Tokyo navigates a complex geopolitical landscape by managing a dual-track diplomacy that separates, as much as possible, the logic of security from the logic of economics, this approach is often mischaracterised as simple "hedging". However, a more accurate description of Japan's strategy is a posture that is firmly anchored in the US alliance but uses a nuanced geometry of partnerships to diversify risk and maximise autonomy in both security and socioeconomic spheres.

³⁴ Victor D. Cha, Abandonment, Entrapment, and Neoclassical Realism in Asia: The United States, Japan, and Korea, *International Studies Quarterly*, 2000, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3013998>

BETWEEN NEUTRALITY AND NARRATIVE: RUSSIAN INFLUENCE IN JAPAN'S INFORMATION SPACE

In contrast to other prominent actors in the Indo-Pacific region, Japan's connection to Russia has not evolved in any meaningful direction since 2022, with the relationship characterised by an extremely low level of official contacts and widespread grassroots populism from Russia's side. In February 2022, Japan's Prime Minister Abe's policy foundations, under which bilateral trade reached a record USD 34.8 billion in 2013 and remained robust throughout the decade³⁵, were shattered. As Japan sanctioned hundreds of Russian entities and individuals, froze the assets of the Russian Central Bank and President Putin's private assets, revoked Russia's most-favoured-nation trade status, and committed to phasing out imports of Russian coal and oil, the country was officially designated an "unfriendly".³⁶ Russia suspended negotiations on the peace treaty and the Northern Territories dispute, and bilateral relations have plummeted to their lowest point in decades.

In the 2023³⁷ and 2024³⁸ defence White Papers, Russia was identified as "a major security threat", and the 2024 White Paper warned of a potential "serious situation similar to Russia's aggression against Ukraine" that could arise in the Indo-Pacific region, particularly in East Asia. With Russia consistently positioned in the official documents among the three growing threats alongside North Korea and China, the European war theatre with Russia's multi-vector information warfare has gained a strategic place within Japan's White Papers since 2022.

Sources of Disinformation

Remaining fully operational, the Russian Embassy in Tokyo, alongside regional Consulates General of the Russian Federation across Japan, is a primary disseminator of disinformation targeted at the Japanese audience.³⁹ Russia's media propaganda service, Sputnik Japan – the Japanese-language service -- also remains active⁴⁰. The

³⁵ Gilbert Rozman, ed., Japan-Russia Relations: Implications for the U.S.-Japan Alliance, Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA, 2016, https://spfusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Sasakawa_Japan-Russia.pdf

³⁶ The Government of Japan, Japan's Two Big Decisions in Foreign and Security Policy, Kizuna, 20.02.2023, https://www.japan.go.jp/kizuna/2023/02/decisions_in_foreign_and_security_policy.html

³⁷ Ministry of Defense of Japan, Defense of Japan 2023 Digest, Ministry of Defense of Japan, 2023, https://www.mod.go.jp/en/publ/w_paper/wp2023/DOJ2023_Digest_EN.pdf

³⁸ Ministry of Defense of Japan, Defense of Japan 2024 Digest, Ministry of Defense of Japan, 2024, https://www.mod.go.jp/j/press/wp/wp2024/pdf/DOJ2024_Digest_EN.pdf

³⁹ Olena Kalashnikova and Fabian Schäfer, Russian State-controlled Propaganda and its Proxies: Pro-Russian Political Actors in Japan, The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus, 05.04.2024, <https://apjif.org/2024/3/schafer-kalashnikova>

⁴⁰ Mainichi Shimbun, Japan-China-ROK Foreign Ministers' Meeting Held in Tokyo, Mainichi Shimbun, 16.07.2025, <https://mainichi.jp/articles/20250716/k00/00m/030/342000c>

third pillar of Russian information warfare in Japan is a network of “domestic proxies” – “willing” political actors (e.g. Muneo Suzuki⁴¹) and “unwitting” amplifiers (e.g. Kazuhiro Haraguchi⁴²) who legitimise and launder Russian narratives within the Japanese political discourse.

One of the most popular social media platforms in Japan, X (formerly Twitter), serves as the most prominent medium for Russia’s Embassy⁴³ propaganda dissemination. The rationale behind using X is to bypass regular media censorship. When the Embassy account tweets fake news, such as the claim that the Bucha massacre was a “fabrication” – it is more likely to be picked up by mainstream Japanese media as a “diplomatic act”, thus laundering disinformation into the legitimate public discourse.⁴⁴

While the Embassy’s X account serves as a primary disseminator, Russian state-run media Sputnik acts as a narrative arsenal for domestic proxies. Since the start of 2022, and with a documented drastic increase in 2024-2025, Sputnik and other official entities have “drastically increased” their output of Japanese-language content.⁴⁵

With X’s continuous position among the top three most popular social media platforms in Japan⁴⁶, a dense ecosystem of pro-Russian and broadly Japanese-language anti-Western X accounts, which are mostly independent bloggers and translators rather than direct Russian assets, systematically internalises and amplifies Kremlin narratives into Japan’s online space. Based on the extensive study of the “Foreign narratives proliferate among Japanese communities”, this network is anchored by high-reach influencers such as Himuro and Poppin Coco, who utilise “matome” sites (まとめ, translates to “summary” or “collection”, refers to a Japanese genre of curation or aggregation websites that compile content from anonymous message boards) to bypass traditional media filters and domesticate conspiratorial content.

The central figure in this pro-Russia ecosystem is a politician, Kazuhiro Haraguchi, identified as arguably the most important user in the entire network, who gives political legitimacy to narratives claiming that “NATO’s eastward expansion led to Russia’s war” and that “Japan is behind a neo-Nazi regime”. These actors are also supported by systematic translators such as Tamahoi and ShortShort News, who utilise AI-driven tools such as Whisper and DeepL to rapidly subtitle foreign propaganda, including

⁴¹ James D.J. Brown, Suzuki Muneo’s Russia Gambit, The Postil Magazine, 01.12.2023, <https://thepostil.com/suzuki-muneo-s-russia-gambit/>

⁴² Digital Forensic Research Lab and Julia Janicki, Foreign narratives proliferate among Japanese X communities, DFRLab, 18.12.2024, <https://dfrlab.org/2024/12/18/foreign-narratives-proliferate-among-japanese-x-communities/>

⁴³ Kalashnikova O, Schäfer F, Russian State-Controlled Propaganda, and its Proxies: Pro-Russian Political Actors in Japan, Asia-Pacific Journal, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1557466024029073>

⁴⁴ Jessica Brandt, Maiko Ichihara, Nuurrianti Jalli, Puma Shen, and Aim Sinpeng, Impact of Disinformation on Democracy in Asia, Brookings Institution, 16.12.2022, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/FP_20221216_democracy_asia_disinformation.pdf

⁴⁵ The Yomiuri Shimbun, Russian state media, diplomatic offices drastically increase Japanese-language content as Kremlin wages information war, Asia News Network, 09.10.2025, <https://asianews.network/russian-state-media-diplomatic-offices-drastically-increase-japanese-language-content-as-kremlin-wages-information-war/>

⁴⁶ JapanBuzz, Top Social Media in Japan – Updated 2025, JapanBuzz, 14.05.2025, <https://www.japanbuzz.info/social-media-in-japan/>

even some specific disinformation. For example, Russia-aligned accounts are estimated to be responsible for approximately 32% of negative engagement on controversial topics, such as the 2025 parliamentary elections. By framing the US-Japan alliance as a liability and characterising support for Ukraine as incompatible with domestic disaster relief, this milieu effectively bridges online disinformation with offline mobilisation, fuelling a “public opinion paradox” designed to make Tokyo’s long-term commitment to Kyiv as politically painful as possible.

The Japanese government assesses Russian “information warfare” as a deliberate campaign to divide public opinion with the specific goal of “getting Japan to reduce the aid” to Ukraine.⁴⁷ The core narratives for public dissemination are:

- **Anti-Aid / Japan first.** Posts explicitly state that Japan should “stop providing ODA (Official Development Assistance)”.⁴⁸ Sputnik has also pushed stories implying impropriety at Japan's International Cooperation Agency (JICA), fabricating a link to alleged (and also fabricated) corruption at USAID;⁴⁹
- **Whataboutism / False Neutrality.** “The war was caused by NATO expansion”⁵⁰; “Kyiv regime refuses to end the conflict by peaceful means”;⁵¹
- **Alliance-Fraying.** “Japan is a puppet of the United States”; “The US-Japan alliance is a liability” (a narrative heavily deployed in the Okinawa case).³⁹

The last narrative is specifically designed to undermine the US-Japan alliance. Okinawa Island, which comprises less than 1% of Japan's landmass, hosts approximately 75% of the US military bases in the country.⁵² This legacy of World War II and the subsequent US occupation has fostered decades of deep-seated local opposition. These grievances are being fuelled by a continuous stream of incidents, including crimes committed by US personnel, noise/light pollution, and environmental damage. However, the case of Okinawa-related disinformation is the primary theatre for converged Sino-Russian hybrid warfare against Japan, with the PRC being a primary source constructing the culturally specific narratives⁵³ and Russia amplifying them.

⁴⁷ The Yomiuri Shimbun, Gov't on Alert over Increased Russian Disinformation; Posts Aim to Divide Public Opinion on Aid to Ukraine, The Japan News, 08.10.2025, <https://japannews.yomiuri.co.jp/politics/defense-security/20251008-285336/>

⁴⁸ Example: Sputnik Japan, JICAを「日本版USAID」と呼びODA停止を求める声も 日本の海外支援をめぐる議論, Sputnik Japan, 09.04.2025, <https://sputniknews.jp/20250409/jicaoda1500-19749869.html>

Sputnik Japan, NHKと日本政府とUSAID、ウクライナメディアを三位一体で支援, Sputnik Japan, 12.02.2025, <https://sputniknews.jp/20250212/nhkusaaid-19572030.html>

⁴⁹ Sputnik Japan, NHKと日本政府とUSAID、ウクライナメディアを三位一体で支援, Sputnik Japan, 12.02.2025, <https://sputniknews.jp/20250212/nhkusaaid-19572030.html>

⁵⁰ Example: Sputnik Japan, ウクライナ紛争を引き起こしたのはNATOのオーブンドア政策＝米大統領, Sputnik Japan, 14.02.2025, <https://sputniknews.jp/20250214/nato-19576415.html>

⁵¹ Example: Sputnik Japan, キエフ政権をも含め、ウクライナに対話の構えあり ロシアはシグナルを感知＝プーチン大統領, Sputnik Japan, 18.12.2025, <https://sputniknews.jp/20251218/19782041.html>

⁵² Minori Takahashi and Ulrik Pram Gad, Okinawa and Thule US military bases: To dialogue or not to dialogue, DIIS Policy Brief, 25.08.2025, <https://www.diis.dk/en/research/okinawa-and-thule-us-military-bases>

⁵³ Maiko Ichihara, China's 'Malinformation' Comes for Okinawa, The Diplomat, 20.03.2025, <https://thediplomat.com/2025/03/chinas-malinformation-comes-for-okinawa/>

Another relevant tool for the Japanese context is giving the propaganda a “respectable” domestic voice. The former Prime Minister Yoshirō Mori, who has repeatedly and publicly undermined Japan's G7-aligned policy, is one of them. In November 2022, he stated at a political event, “I don't quite understand why only President Putin is criticised,” adding that “Mr Zelenskyy has made many Ukrainian people suffer”. In January 2023, he warned the Kishida government against its “big effort to support Ukraine”, stating, “It is unthinkable that Russia would lose the war”.⁵⁴ Another notable example is the former Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama, who has a long history of pro-Kremlin actions. In 2015, he visited occupied Crimea and declared the Russian annexation constitutional. He has explicitly argued that Japan should recognise Russia's annexation of Crimea as a necessary step toward resolving the Northern Territories dispute.⁵⁵

With Russian media influence having been present over the past few years, little has been done from the Japanese side to directly target the dissemination of misinformation. The most recent case that shook the media space due to the lack of decisive action was interference in the 2025 Japanese parliamentary election. One of the scandals centred on a Sanseitō candidate (running on a populist “Japanese First” platform) giving an interview to Sputnik. Sputnik identified Sanseitō as a sympathetic voice, and a Sanseitō candidate saw Sputnik as a viable platform, demonstrating a clear convergence of interests.

The second scandal during the July 2025 House of Councillors election campaign occurred when analysts from the Japan Institute of Law and Information Systems identified Russian automated bots posting disinformation and distorting election-related information.⁵⁶ A subsequent analysis of online discourse revealed that Russia-aligned accounts were responsible for approximately 32% of negative replies and quote posts on specific controversial topics, demonstrating a significant and measurable impact on the information environment.

Risks and Limitations

Russian propaganda has created a public opinion paradox in Japan. On the one hand, Russia has lost the battle for hearts and minds. Public opinion polls since 2022 show a critical maximum of Russophobic sentiment. The public is not pro-Russian and is pro-sanctions (with approximately 40% explicitly wanting to maintain or strengthen

⁵⁴ Geoff Berkeley, Former Tokyo 2020 President Mori facing criticism for suggesting he “doesn't really understand” why Russia is being slammed, Inside the Games, 26.01.2023, <https://www.insidethegames.biz/articles/1132954/ex-tokyo-2020-president-support-russia>

⁵⁵ VideoNews.com, Former PM Hatoyama Explains Real Intent of Crimea Visit, VideoNews.com, 22.04.2015, <https://www.videonews.com/press-club/150422-hatoyama>

⁵⁶ Ichihara Maiko, Japan's Fight Against Authoritarian Disinformation, nippon.com, 24.11.2025, <https://www.nippon.com/en/in-depth/d01170/>

them) and largely supportive of aiding Ukraine.⁵⁷ On the other hand, Russia's actions in spreading doubt exhibit a level of success. This puts public enthusiasm at risk in a longer perspective, placing the costly pro-Ukraine policy against the populist Sputnik narrative of "why is our money going to Ukraine?".

Another growing concern is the proliferation of bot accounts and the development of LLM (Large Language Model). Recognising that the future of information consumption will be increasingly mediated by AI, some experts claim that Moscow has moved beyond targeting human audiences to targeting the algorithms that inform them (LLM grooming).⁵⁸

By fuelling populist arguments, Russia's operations make supporting Ukraine as politically painful as possible for the Japanese government. This creates a strategic vulnerability that Russia, and its key partner China, can and will continue to exploit.

For Ukraine, being often at the centre of Russia's propaganda narratives, the risks are rather asymmetric. While it is unlikely to generate a genuinely pro-Moscow constituency, it can still affect the depth, unity, and longevity of support by reframing Ukraine policy as a burden rather than an investment in security. Over time, such rhetoric can erode the political space for additional macro-financial packages and reconstruction loans, as well as security cooperation, pushing Tokyo towards a more minimalist, risk-averse approach.

⁵⁷ Ukrinform, Japan's Support for Ukraine: Strengthening Sanctions Against Russia and Continued Economic Aid, Ukrinform, 14.10.2025, <https://www.ukrinform.jp/rubric-defense/3970592-ri-benno-duiukuraina-jing-ji-zhi-yuan-ji-xudui-lu-zhi-caino-qiang-huage-qiangga-zhi-chi.html>

⁵⁸ Maxim Alyukov, Mykola Makhortykh, Alexandr Voronovici, and Maryna Sydorova, Is Russia really 'grooming' Western AI?, Al Jazeera, 08.07.2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2025/7/8/is-russia-really-grooming-western>

TODAY'S UKRAINE, TOMORROW'S ASIA: WHAT UKRAINE REPRESENTS FOR JAPAN'S GLOBAL ROLE

In official statements, Japanese leadership has been consistent in arguing that Russia's aggression is not a localised event. At the G7 summit in Hiroshima, Prime Minister Kishida declared⁵⁹ that the invasion is not a matter for Europe alone, but a challenge to the rules and principles of the international community as a whole and an event that truly marks the end of the post-Cold War era. Famously, Kishida linked the reality directly to the "severe security environment that Japan confronts, stating it was this linkage that gave him a strong sense of crisis that Ukraine may be the East Asia of tomorrow."⁶⁰ This doctrine has been institutionalised and later repeated by Japan's new Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba in October 2024, who, in his first policy speech, warned, "Many people fear that today's Ukraine could be tomorrow's East Asia".⁶¹

Since 2022, all the yearly Diplomatic Bluebooks and Defence White Papers have included clear statements on Japan's understanding of the impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on the global order and what meaning Japan gives to the conflict in parallel to the context of the Indo-Pacific region. The latest 2024 Diplomatic Bluebook states that Russia's aggression shakes the very foundation of the existing international order⁶², and the Defence of Japan 2025 warns that "the possibility cannot be precluded that a similar serious situation may arise in the future in the Indo-Pacific region, especially in East Asia".⁶³

A Ukraine-Taiwan comparative narrative is the single most important strategic utility Ukraine provides to Japan. On the domestic side, this narrative successfully unlocked public support for policies that were previously politically controversial, such as the decision to double the defence budget to 2% of GDP (by 2027)⁶⁴ and to acquire counter-strike capabilities, such as long-range missiles. For decades, Japan has been attempting to move forward from its purely pacifist stance, and Russia's invasion, becoming a rude wake-up call, prompted and legitimised the shift towards more "hawkish" policies.

⁵⁹ Fumio Kishida, Joint Press Conference by Prime Minister Kishida and President Zelenskyy of Ukraine, Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, 21.03.2023, https://japan.kantei.go.jp/101_kishida/statement/202303/00018.html

⁶⁰ Fumio Kishida, Press Conference by Prime Minister Kishida regarding the Japan-Ukraine Summit Meeting and Other Events, Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, 24.02.2023, https://japan.kantei.go.jp/101_kishida/statement/202302/00008.html

⁶¹ Shigeru Ishiba, The First Policy Speech by Prime Minister Ishiba Shigeru to the 214th Session of the Diet, KIZUNA, 04.10.2024, https://www.japan.go.jp/kizuna/2024/11/the_first_policy_speech_by_ishiba.html

⁶² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Chapter 1: International Situation and Japan's Diplomacy in 2023, Diplomatic Bluebook 2024, 2024, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100690596.pdf>

⁶³ Ministry of Defense of Japan, Defense of Japan 2025, Ministry of Defense, 2025, https://www.mod.go.jp/en/publ/w_paper/index.html

⁶⁴ Fumio Kishida, Press Conference by Prime Minister Kishida regarding the National Security Strategy and Other Documents, Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, 16.12.2022, https://japan.kantei.go.jp/101_kishida/statement/202212/00006.html

While the Taiwanese context is one of the most well-articulated, it is not the only driver of Tokyo's proactive support for Kyiv. The commitment is rooted in the territorial and regional context, specifically the **unresolved Northern Territories dispute with Russia** and the increasing volatility around the Senkaku Islands from the Chinese side. The invasion of Ukraine effectively broke down the decade-long Abe-Putin era of engagement. Thus, the normative aspect of the support for Ukraine is also largely seen as a direct investment in the principle of territorial integrity. If Russia's unilateral change of the status quo in Europe remains unpunished, it sets a dangerous precedent for Moscow's permanent militarisation of the Four Northern Islands and Beijing's incursions into Japanese territorial waters. Another territorial aspect is about **Beijing's systematic activity in the grey zone around the Senkaku Islands**, with Chinese Coast Guard vessels maintaining a presence in the contiguous zone for a record 355 days in 2024⁶⁵ – an escalation that Tokyo directly correlates with the erosion of the rules-based order seen in the European theatre.

Despite being rarely discussed and underconceptualised beyond this idea of translating the Ukrainian context into a regional Taiwanese position, further active cooperation and support for Ukraine would not have been possible without other tangible utility dimensions. For instance, Japan's Ministry of Defence and its official think tank, the National Institute for Defence Studies (NIDS), are not just passive observers of the war; they are actively studying it to derive specific, actionable lessons. A key 2025 volume titled "War with New and Old Characteristics: Lessons from the Russo-Ukrainian War and Prospects for the US-China Confrontation" confirms the direct analytical line drawn from the conflict in Europe to a practical "Taiwan Contingency".⁶⁶ A 2025 JMOD-linked analysis also provides a clear definition of the new approach to warfare that Russia has demonstrated: large-scale missile attacks, hybrid warfare, utilisation of the space, cyber, and electromagnetic domains and asymmetric attacks.⁶⁷

Japan is also drawing lessons from the "unprecedented scale" and effectiveness of **Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) in Ukraine**, which have been proven to act as force multipliers while minimising human losses.⁶⁸ "Uncrewed systems" were explicitly identified in Japan's revised National Defence Strategy (NDS) as one of the seven key areas for bolstering the Self-Defence Forces, and the 2025 defence budget allocates over 111 billion Yen (approx. USD 703 million) for unmanned capabilities (from the record 8.7 trillion Yen (approx. USD 55.1 billion) total budget).

⁶⁵ Prashanth Parameswaran, China Sets Record for Activity Near Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in 2024, The Diplomat, 02.01.2025, <https://thediplomat.com/2025/01/china-sets-record-for-activity-near-senkaku-diaoyu-islands-in-2024/>

⁶⁶ Shigeo Kikuchi and Yasuyuki Sugiura (Eds.), War with New and Old Characteristics: Lessons from the Russo-Ukrainian War and Prospects for the U.S.-China Confrontation, NIDS Perspectives, 07.08.2025, <https://www.nids.mod.go.jp/english/publication/perspectives/e2025.html>

⁶⁷ Tetsuro Fujimoto, Strengthening Japan's Defense in Response to Russia's Aggression Against Ukraine: A Study from the Perspective of Integrated Air and Missile Defense Capabilities, Brookings Institution, 24.03.2025, <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/FP-20250324-japan-sdf-fujimoto.pdf>

⁶⁸ Gabriel Dominguez, Taking a page from Ukraine war, SDF carves out growing role for drones, The Japan Times, 05.01.2025, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2025/01/05/japan/japan-sdf-drones-focus/>

In May 2025, Japan's National Parliament passed the landmark **Active Cyber Defence Law**.⁶⁹ This is another prominent example of Japan learning from Russia's hybrid warfare in Ukraine and implementing innovative policies. For 70 years, Japan's Constitution⁷⁰ and cultural pacifism had strictly limited intelligence capabilities and any form of offensive military action. This law shatters that taboo. It grants the Japanese government, for the first time, statutory authority to intercept foreign internet traffic traversing domestic infrastructure and, crucially, to conduct active (i.e., offensive) cyber measures to neutralise threats before they can do significant damage. This law, described as a turning point for the US-Japan alliance, was politically impossible before 2022.⁷¹

On the other side of cooperation, over the past two years, Japan's **economic commitment** to Ukraine has transitioned from ad hoc humanitarian aid to an institutionalised and long-term public-private framework. The Japan-Ukraine Conference for Promotion of Economic Growth and Reconstruction, hosted in Tokyo in February 2024, brought together over 130 firms, and was co-hosted by the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry (METI) and the Japan External Trade Organisation (JETRO). The event concluded with the signing of 56 agreements.⁷² A follow-up forum in August 2025 resulted in the signing of 29 additional cooperation documents. They covered everything from AI road-scanning to remote-controlled heavy machinery and were underwritten by Japan's export credit agency (NEXI). As parliamentary Vice-Minister Kato Akiyoshi of METI stated that "the government and the private sector will work together in providing support ... as a uniquely Japanese form of contribution".⁷³

Another beneficial mechanism for Japanese businesses is the **Japan-Ukraine Platform on Infrastructure Technology (JUPITeR)**, which facilitates direct meetings between Ukrainian government officials and Japanese businesses to coordinate on specific infrastructure technology needs.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Adam Dobell and Grace O'Neill, Japan's New Active Cyber Defense Law: A Strategic Evolution in National Cybersecurity, Center for Cybersecurity Policy and Law, 05.06.2025, <https://www.centerforcybersecuritypolicy.org/insights-and-research/japans-new-active-cyber-defense-law-a-strategic-evolution-in-national-cybersecurity>

⁷⁰ The Constitution of Japan, Office of the Prime Minister of Japan, 03.11.1946, https://japan.kantei.go.jp/constitution_and_government_of_japan/constitution_e.html

⁷¹ Koichiro Komiyama, Norms in New Technological Domains: What's Next for Japan and the United States in Cyberspace, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 17.06.2025, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/norms-new-technological-domains-whats-next-japan-and-united-states-cyberspace>

⁷² Yuko Nakano, Japan's Leadership Role on Ukraine, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 22.02.2024, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/japans-leadership-role-ukraine>

⁷³ Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), Japan-Ukraine Economic Reconstruction Promotion Forum Held, METI, 06.08.2025, https://www.meti.go.jp/english/press/2025/0806_001.html

⁷⁴ Ministry for Development of Communities and Territories of Ukraine, Japanese business supports Ukraine's recovery: meeting within the framework of the JUPITeR platform, Ministry for Development of Communities and Territories of Ukraine, 03.07.2025, <https://mindev.gov.ua/en/news/yaponskyi-biznes-pidtrymuie-vidnovlennia-ukrainy-zustrich-v-ramkakh-platfomy-jupiter>

Currently, Japan benefits from its support and cooperation with Ukraine in three aspects: normative, military, and economic.

- Ukraine serves as the “crucible for transregional cooperation”, which justifies Japan's emergence as a proactive actor and grants it the public authority to lead efforts in reforming its own governance.
- Ukraine is a real-time “laboratory” providing data for Japan's own defence transformations, such as motivating the 111 billion-yen (approx. USD 703 million) investment in drones and passing the Active Cyber Defence Law.
- In the longer term, Ukraine is a huge market and a relevant showcase for Japanese high technology, particularly in the green energy, digital, and agricultural sectors.

Accounting for the extensive financial support, the Japan-Ukraine relationship is no longer one of mere charity but of a profound, multi-domain strategic interdependence that is heading toward a long-term, institutionalised economic and security partnership, solidified by agreements on information security and a growing network of private-sector MOUs.

CONCLUSION

Japan's post-2022 transformation from a reactive to a proactive security actor, driven significantly by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, has created a unique window of opportunity for deepening Ukraine-Japan relations that extends far beyond traditional donor-recipient dynamics. Japan's engagement with Ukraine operates across three interconnected dimensions: normative (Ukraine as a test case for the rules-based international order and territorial integrity principles directly relevant to Japan's own disputes), military-analytical (Ukraine as a real-time laboratory for modern warfare informing Japan's defence reforms, from drone acquisition to cyber capabilities), and economic (Ukraine as an emerging market for Japanese technology and a showcase for public-private reconstruction partnerships).

Japan has successfully institutionalised security cooperation with the United States and South Korea through mechanisms like the Freedom Edge exercises, real-time missile warning systems, and the permanent Trilateral Secretariat, while simultaneously maintaining functional economic dialogue with China to manage supply chain dependencies and prevent escalation. However, this sophisticated balancing act faces significant pressure from converged Sino-Russian information warfare operations that exploit Japan's information space through platforms like X, state media outlets such as Sputnik Japan, and domestic proxies ranging from willing political actors to unwitting amplifiers. These challenges contribute to the potential of the Ukraine-Japan strategic dialogue.

Therefore, Japan's continued support to Ukraine is not guaranteed by goodwill alone but depends on Tokyo's ability to navigate domestic political pressures, maintain its complex regional balancing act, and counter foreign disinformation narratives. Furthermore, Japan's capacity to sustain long-term support for Ukraine is inextricably linked to the stability of its regional security architecture. If the Japan-US-ROK trilateral weakens due to domestic political changes in any of the three countries, or if Japan's economic interdependence with China deepens to the point where Beijing can credibly threaten economic coercion over Taiwan-related issues, Tokyo's bandwidth for proactive engagement beyond the Indo-Pacific will inevitably contract.

As a matter of time-relevant countermeasures, Ukraine should develop a counter-disinformation capability specifically tailored to the Japanese information environment. The risk lies in the long-term persistence of Russian disinformation, which eventually starts to infiltrate the practical political domain, gradually pushing Japan towards a more risk-averse stance regarding future financial aid packages. Ukraine must also consistently continue both the narrative and practical transition of its relationship with Japan away from the aid model towards a narrative of mutual

strategic investment in shared security principles, particularly in infrastructure technology (such as the JUPITeR platform) and supply chain resilience.

In the long run, drawing from the current domestic political rhetoric in Japan, as well as the overall tension in the Indo-Pacific region, it is important for Ukraine to develop contingency strategies for scenarios where Japan's support could wane. However, by reframing bilateral cooperation as mutual strategic investment, building resilient grassroots constituencies, acknowledging Ukraine's larger context of Japan's trilateral frameworks, institutionalising key partnerships, and proactively managing risks, Ukraine can ensure that Japanese support remains robust and that the relationship keeps transitioning from a crisis-driven solidarity into a durable, multi-dimensional partnership that serves both nations' long-term goals.

WITH THE FINANCIAL
SUPPORT OF:



INTERNATIONAL
RENAISSANCE
FOUNDATION



Foreign Policy Council "Ukrainian Prism"
1 Kotsubynskogo, of. 202, Kyiv, Ukraine
www.prismua.org
info@prismua.org