

In-depth Reports on the Impact of Lifting Pacifist. Japan's Arms Export Ban



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Japan has recently relaxed its arms export restrictions, marking a major shift away from its postwar pacifist principles. Against this backdrop, two leading English-language publications in Japan examine the rationale behind the policy change and its implications: Japan Forward explores why Tokyo is rethinking its long-standing arms export taboo and what is at stake, while The Japan Times reports that the policy shift is positioning the country as a key defense manufacturing hub for allied technologies.

[Japan, July 28, 2026]

The following article was first published by Japan Forward on July 28, 2026.

Why a Pacifist Japan Is Rethinking Its Arms Export Taboo

For almost eight decades, Japan effectively barred itself from selling weapons abroad. As Tokyo dismantles restrictions once seen as untouchable, its defense industry is being pushed onto the global stage -with implications for supply chains, alliances, and the balance of power from the Indo-Pacific to Europe.

In the view of Dr. William Chou, Japan's April 2026 revision to its defense equipment transfer rules is not a sudden reversal of postwar restraint -it is the latest step in a trend that has been building for over a decade.

"No doubt it's a pivot from post-war restraint," said Chou, senior fellow and deputy director of Hudson Institute's Japan Chair, in an interview with Japan Forward.

He traced the change back to Japan's 2015 decision to permit collective self-defense, and argued that Russia's invasion of Ukraine accelerated a broader public readiness for "a more realistic approach to foreign policy."

Chou was careful to frame the April revision as pragmatic rather than radical.

Amending Article 9 of the Constitution remains politically out of reach, he said. The postwar clause renounces war and has long been interpreted by the government as limiting Japan to self-defense.

Instead, the export reform is designed to push Japanese defense manufacturers to build capacity, innovate, and respond to what foreign militaries actually want, rather than relying solely on the domestic defense budget. ([*Continue reading*](#))

The following article was first published by The Japan Times on June 29, 2026.

Does a new arsenal of deterrence run through Japan?

The strategic competition between the United States and China is increasingly being decided as much by industrial capacity as by military power—and Japan is emerging as the focal point of allied efforts to build the manufacturing base needed to sustain deterrence in the Indo-Pacific.

The signs have accumulated rapidly.

Over the span of just a few weeks, a European aerospace giant has announced plans to codevelop long-endurance military drones with Japanese industry. Ukrainian companies have begun bringing battlefield-proven unmanned technologies to potential partners in Tokyo. And American defense-tech company Anduril Industries has signaled its intention to establish production in the country, while the Defense Ministry in Tokyo

reportedly weighs adopting a U.S. military artificial intelligence system for the Self-Defense Forces' (SDF) command-and-control operations.

Viewed individually, each announcement appears to be another routine defense partnership. Taken together, however, they suggest something much larger: Japan is no longer being viewed simply as a customer for military hardware, but as an emerging manufacturing hub where allied technologies, industrial capacity and battlefield experience are beginning to converge.

The commercial activity also coincides with a profound shift in Tokyo's own approach to defense production, including by reportedly preparing legislation that would allow the nationalization of factories producing critical defense equipment while private companies continue to operate them.

The proposal follows recommendations by the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, which has argued that Japan must fundamentally adapt to what it describes as a "new way of warfare" shaped by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The proposals call for rapidly expanding domestic drone production, accelerating investment in AI and robotics, strengthening dual-use manufacturing, building the capacity for wartime surge production and fostering a better defense innovation ecosystem.

Drawing directly on lessons from Ukraine, the proposed changes seek to ensure that Japan can sustain defense production during a prolonged conflict rather than relying solely on peacetime procurement. More broadly, it reflects a growing recognition in Tokyo that industrial capacity has become a strategic asset in its own right.

The lesson from Ukraine is difficult to ignore. (*[Continue reading, free until August 24](#)*)

Related links;

<https://japan-forward.com/arms-export-policy-defense-industry-william-chou>

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2026/06/29/japan/japan-defense-industry-drones-analysis/>

(free until August 24)

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Japan Forward is an English-language news and opinion platform launched in 2017 by The Sankei Shimbun, one of Japan's leading newspapers. It provides trusted reporting, expert analysis, and commentary to bring Japan's stories and viewpoints to a global audience.

About **The Japan Times** <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/>

Japan's largest English newspaper. Founded in 1897, will mark its 130th anniversary in 2027. It has the largest circulation of any English newspaper in Japan.

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Email: japan_connect@clc.net

PRESS KIT

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Japan's Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi speaks during a press conference at the G7 summit, in Evian, eastern France, on June 17, 2026. (c) AFP

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Japan's Defense Minister Shinjiro Koizumi. (c) Sankei

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(L to R) Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang, Fujitsu CEO Takahito Tokita, FANUC CEO Kenji Yamaguchi, Yaskawa Electric Corporation Vice Chairman and Executive Officer Masahiro Ogawa and Kawasaki Heavy Industries President Yasuhiko Hashimoto attend a photo call of a press conference in Tokyo on July 16, 2026. Nvidia and Kawasaki Heavy Industries will co-develop AI-powered robots for use in shipbuilding, the Japanese firm said on July 16 during a visit to Tokyo by the US chip giant's CEO Jensen Huang. (c) AFP

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A display for the next generation Global Combat Air Programme (GCAP) stealth fighter Tempist is pictured on the second day of the Farnborough International Airshow 2026 in Farnborough, south-west of London, on July 21, 2026. (c) AFP



Britain's Defence Secretary Wes Streeting speaks with Japanese Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi (L) at the Global Combat Air Programme (GCAP), at Wellington Barracks in London on July 21, 2026. (c) AFP