



Japan's Military Shift: 60 Billion for Drones and Long-Range Missiles

Published on 05/09/2025

A record budget of 60 billion dollars for the fiscal year 2026, marking a further step towards transforming the Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) into a force capable of facing increasingly complex threats in the Indo-Pacific scenario. At the heart of the program are unmanned systems, long-range missiles, and the enhancement of the naval and air fleet.

SHIELD: Japan's New Coastal Defense

Among the novelties stands out the **SHIELD (Synchronized, Hybrid, Integrated and Enhanced Littoral Defense)** program, to which the Ministry of Defense (MOD) intends to allocate 875 million dollars. SHIELD will be a multi-layered system for littoral defense, integrating land, naval, underwater, and unmanned aerial means, with the aim of countering enemy amphibious and surface forces. Service entry is expected by March 2028.

At the same time, Japan wants to acquire new UAVs, including 4 **MQ-9 Sea Guardian**, 5 long-range maritime drones, and 6 coastal surveillance drones, capable of supporting amphibious operations and detecting obstacles along the beaches.

Hypersonic Missiles and International Cooperation

Another substantial portion of the budget, amounting to 8.4 billion dollars, will be dedicated to the acquisition of stand-off armaments, both domestically produced and foreign. Among the domestic systems are the **new Type 12** in a submarine-launched version, the **Hyper Velocity Gliding Projectile**, and hypersonic missiles.

On the international front, Tokyo aims to equip itself with **Joint Strike Missile (JSM)** for F-35A fighters, **JASSM** for modernized F-15s, and **Tomahawk** for two Japanese Navy destroyers.

The MOD has also announced the advancement of the deployment of the Type 12, after tests conducted in the United States, and the Hyper Velocity Gliding Projectile, which will enter service as early as 2025 at Camp Fuji. The wide range of over 600 miles of the Type 12 makes coverage possible that includes parts of China and North Korea.

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Naval and Air Fleet: Selective Expansion

On the naval front, Japan plans to purchase a new **enhanced Mogami frigate** (714 million), a **Taigei-class submarine** (808 million), two **patrol ships** (193 million), and an **Awaji-class minesweeper** (230 million). There is also a plan to experiment with two **Aegis System Equipped Vessels (ASEV)**.

For aviation, Tokyo is requesting funds for 8 **F-35A** (1.02 billion), 3 **F-35B** (492 million), a **P-1 MPA** patrol aircraft (319 million), and two **KC-46** tankers (615 million), essential for extending operational reach in the East China Sea.

The goal is to consolidate a modern air force, with a final fleet of 105 F-35A and 42 F-35B, capable of ensuring deterrence and rapid response capability against potential regional crises.

In summary, the new Japanese defense budget highlights a clear strategy: to strengthen projection and deterrence capabilities through advanced technologies, hypersonic systems, and

drones, in a context marked by increased Chinese and North Korean pressure. The rapid acceleration of programs, with the anticipated deployment of new-generation missiles, confirms Tokyo's intention to fill capability gaps and position itself as a key player in Pacific security.

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