Justified Defense: Understanding Contemporary issues faced by the JSDF

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The Japanese Self Defense Force has long been a topic of debate amongst the policy makers and citizens of Japan. Today the JSDF continues to stare down the barrel of a multitude of internal problems. Externally, pressure from both allies and potential threats, including Russia to the North and China to the South, further adds fuel to the argument to increase defense budgets. How is the JSDF adapting to these issues and preparing for the future?

Article 9: Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes. In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, wll never be maintained.
The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized.

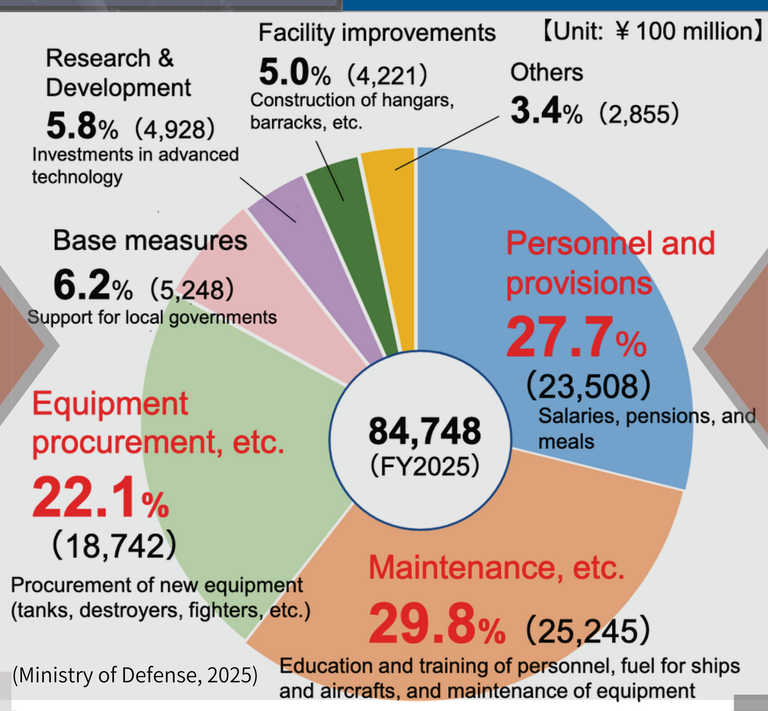
Politicians vs. Scholars

Politicians
- Right to Self-Defense
- Not to be seen as a potential offensive capability
- Collective Self-Defense
- Threats from international community

Scholars
- Strike Capability Critique
- Risk of Escalation
- High Costs and Public Resistance
- Lingering Ambiguity and Constitutional Limits
- Justification of the interpretations

NDS Proposes Seven Critical Capabilities to maintain the effect of Article 9:
- Stand-off Defense
- Integrated Air and Missile Defense
- Unmanned Defense
- Cross-Domain Operation
- Command and Control and Intelligence-related Functions
- Mobile Deployment / Civil Protection
- Sustainability and Resiliency

Total defense spending in the 2025 fiscal year came out to just under ￥8.5 trillion. While maintenance, equipment procurement, and personnel expenditures were consistent with previous years recorded, 2025 saw a near doubling of investment in Research and Development from the previous year. FY2026 will see an even larger defense budget, planned to be more than ￥8.5 trillion, with at least ￥779 billion dedicated to all areas of R&D. This is in line with the FY23 to FY27 plan to steadily increase the defense budget to 2% of GDP, accounting for approximately ￥43.5 trillion in defense investment.



(Ministry of Defense, 2025)

Equipment procurement and investment into new capabilities and technologies are not the only places money is being spent. More than a quarter of the budget is being invested into personnel in the form of increased pay, improved facilities and living conditions, as well as medical care and educational opportunities.

Okinawa maintains firm stance against Self-Defense Forces Base

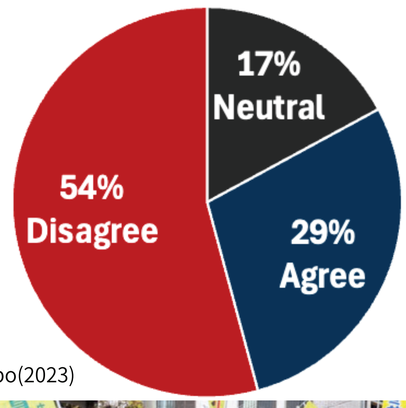
From the outset of the information disclosure process, citizens have actively pursued signature campaigns, and the Ministry of Defense has been criticized for insufficient explanations to the residents. Consequently, in the case of Ishigaki Island, while citizens submitted 14,022 signatures opposing the plan, this failed to exert sufficient influence on the policy decision-making process.

Local newspapers
- Okinawa Times
- Ryukyu Shimpo

→characterized by their community-focused editorial stance, shaping the daily opposition to the JSDF among Okinawan residents.

The regular readership of these newspapers indicates that the consciousness of Okinawan people is tied to pre-war experiences and historical memory.

Strengthening the deployment of the Self-Defense Forces to the Nansei Islands



Ryūkyū Shimpo(2023)

e.g.) When protest demonstrations against joint training exercises between the JSDF and the U.S. military occur, articles supporting these protests tend to be reported in detail.

Public opinion across Japan

In Japan, many people hold a neutral stance on the increase in defense spending. Some say it is necessary for national security but do not support higher taxes. In areas like Okinawa, where bases are located, opposition is stronger because of concerns regarding noise and accidents.

The Reality of Discrimination Against the JSDF

JSDF members and their families regularly face discrimination, especially in places like Okinawa, where they are denied the opportunity to participate in local events or are criticized by civic groups because of their job. To solve this issue, the prefectural assembly passed a resolution asking people to stop such negative attitudes and support understanding. Many citizens appreciate the SDF's work in disaster relief, although some still oppose it due to war memories and peace movements.

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