



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on August 30, 2023

Top Japanese General: Japan Needs U.S. Nukes to Defend Itself

SINGAPORE — On August 29, General Yoshihide Yoshida, the chief of the Joint Staff for Japan's Self-Defense Forces, contended in an interview to *Nikkei Asia* that his country should bolster its domestic arms sector, including relying on U.S. nuclear weapons for the “deterrence” of regional adversaries.

During the interview, the top Japanese general laid out Tokyo's defense needs, stressing his country's close military ties with Washington.

“We cannot maintain Japan's security with our current capabilities,” Yoshida declared, before elaborating, “First, we must fundamentally strengthen our defensive capabilities so that we are not underestimated. Second, we need to do what we can to sustain extended deterrence, including through strategies involving US nuclear weapons.”

Subsequently, the general proceeded to state that Japan has been involved in “deep dialogue” with the United States for more than 10 years regarding “extending the US nuclear umbrella over Japan,” pointing out that an agreement was inked in June for greater information exchange, joint training as well as joint missile response.

Japan is the only country in the world so far to have been hit by atomic weapons. On August 6, 1945, a U.S. Army Air Force bomber dropped an atomic bomb over Hiroshima, killing up to 126,000 people, mostly civilians. On August 9 that same year, the United States dropped another atomic bomb over the city of Nagasaki, killing up to 80,000 people, again mostly civilians. A week later, Japan surrendered to the Allied powers, thus ending the Second World War.

Following the atomic bombings, Japan became an American ally after U.S. forces stationed themselves there and set up its “pacifist” constitution. Japan still has the highest number of U.S. bases and troops globally, and as a non-nuclear state, has also long been assured of American security guarantees. Australia, South Korea, New Zealand, and some NATO members also have similar deals with the United States.

Yoshida asserted that Japan is “on the front lines” in the Indo-Pacific, assuring that Tokyo and its partners would cooperate to “maintain an international order based on the rule of law” while cautioning against “provocations by North Korea and China.” The general continued that the “strategic environment facing Japan” is increasing public backing for more military spending and better “counter



AP Images
Yoshihide Yoshida



strike capabilities.”

Earlier this month, Japanese officials commemorated the 78th anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima without singling out their current ally, the United States, as the country responsible for the attacks. In light of this, pro-Russia media outlet Russia Today (RT) pointed out Japan’s omission, stating that while the United States had staged the only two atomic bombings in history so far, Japan still decided to denounce Russia for its “nuclear threat.”

“Japan, as the only nation to have suffered atomic bombings in war, will continue efforts towards a nuclear-free world,” Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida declared in a speech. The path to such a world is becoming “increasingly difficult because of deepening divisions in the international community over nuclear disarmament and Russia’s nuclear threat,” Kishida elaborated.

While stating that the “devastation brought to Hiroshima and Nagasaki by nuclear weapons can never be repeated,” the Japanese leader failed to single out the United States as the country culpable for the bombings.

Moreover, Hiroshima Mayor Kazumi Matsui omitted singling the United States out in his commemoration speech of the bombings. Matsui urged world leaders to “confront the reality” of “nuclear threats now being voiced by certain policymakers,” possibly alluding to Russia.

Likewise, UN Secretary-General António Guterres declared that “a nuclear weapon incinerated Hiroshima,” without pointing out the United States as the culprit. “And some countries are recklessly rattling the nuclear saber once again, threatening to use these tools of annihilation,” he continued, possibly subtly referring to Russia.

Since the devastating atomic bombings, Japan has been a staunch ally of the United States, with Kishida enforcing sanctions on Moscow and, together with other G7 leaders, slamming the Kremlin of “irresponsible nuclear rhetoric” and “undermining of arms control regimes.”

The same RT article then claimed that U.S. nuclear doctrine permits a nuclear first strike “to defend the vital interests of the United States or its allies and partners.” On the contrary, Russia’s nuclear strategy calls for the use of atomic weapons after a first nuclear strike on its territory, or if conventional or nuclear weapons threaten the existence of the Russian state.

Quoting Ukraine’s frequent threats against nuclear power plants on Russian territory, Moscow lampooned the West last month for enabling “nuclear terrorism.”

As Washington, Seoul, and Tokyo boost military ties in the region, the communist state of North Korea’s authoritarian leader Kim Jong-un declared during a visit to the North Korean Navy headquarters on August 27 that his country was ready to install atomic weapons on some of its naval vessels, pledging to make the Navy a vital element of Pyongyang’s nuclear deterrent.

At the Navy headquarters, Kim addressed sailors, saying that some ships would soon be equipped with “tactical nuclear weapons” and form part of the DPRK’s “state nuclear force.”

“Our navy should play the biggest role in defending the sovereignty, dignity and development and interests of the DPRK,” Kim asserted, based on a transcript of the speech published by KCNA. The leader then continued, “It is only possible to defend the security of the country with a fully prepared naval force.”

Also, Kim pointed out that “the US imperialists” and other regional rivals are becoming “more frantic than ever before,” exemplifying various instances of joint military drills between Washington, Seoul,



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and Tokyo in recent months.

“Owing to the reckless confrontational moves of the US and other hostile forces, the waters off the Korean Peninsula have been reduced to the world’s biggest war hardware concentration spot, the most unstable waters with the danger of a nuclear war,” Kim added, citing the permanent mobilization of U.S. nuclear assets in regional waters.

Apart from stepped-up drills, the United States, Japan, and South Korea have launched other forms of military cooperation over the past year, such as information-sharing, joint missile defense projects, and even joint nuclear planning. Although Pyongyang has called out the three allies for plotting an attack on North Korea, Washington maintains the military actions have been purely defensive.



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