

Japan Defense Ministry plans to adopt new equipment production strategy

Monday 18 November 2013, by [Kyodo News](#) (Date first published: 10 November 2013).

Japan mulls new defense equipment production strategy

TOKYO (Kyodo) — The Defense Ministry plans to adopt by March a new defense equipment production strategy, revamping the policy followed since 1970 of limiting production to domestic makers, a Japanese government official said Saturday.

The new strategy will open the way for Japan to take on a greater role in jointly developing and producing weapons with other nations, and to globally market more noncombat equipment for commercial use, the official said.

The first change in strategy in 43 years is linked to the review by the administration of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan's self-imposed arms export embargo.

Japan's so-called "three principles" on arms exports were introduced in 1967, with the rules tightened into a virtual blanket ban in 1976. Under the three principles, Japan prohibited weapons sales to communist states, countries subject to embargoes under U.N. resolutions, and nations involved in international conflicts.

But in 2011, Japan made drastic changes to make it possible to participate in joint weapons development and production with other countries.

Reviewing the existing policies on defense equipment production and the arms embargo reflects Japan's desire to bolster security cooperation with other countries in light of China's growing maritime assertiveness and North Korea's nuclear ambitions, political experts said.

Under the new policy, Japan will classify defense equipment, identifying equipment to be developed jointly with other countries as distinct from equipment which should continue to be produced domestically, the official said.

Among the items considered better suited for joint international development are aircraft, chemical protective suits and missile defense-related weapons, while radar equipment and ammunition are among the items that would continue to be made domestically for security and other reasons, the official said.

The government plans to market abroad certain equipment, such as the US-2 search and rescue amphibious aircraft used by the Maritime Self-Defense Force, Ground Self-Defense Force trucks, and noncombat items such as decontamination equipment, the official said.

In 1970, the basic policy regarding production and development of defense equipment was adopted by Yasuhiro Nakasone, then chief of the Defense Agency, later upgraded to the Defense Ministry.

The policy was drawn up to rebuild Japan's defense industry, which was virtually destroyed after the end of World War II.

Under the policy, about 90 percent of defense equipment was made either domestically using Japanese technology or under license, mainly from Japan's key ally the United States.

But this set-up is no longer feasible because more and more countries and companies have joined forces to create defense equipment.

A case in point is the U.S. F-35 stealth fighter jet, which is being developed by a U.S.-led international consortium. The Air Self-Defense Force is set to introduce the F-35 jets as Japan's next-generation mainstay fighter.

Kyodo News, November 10, 2013

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* <http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20131110p2a00m0na006000c.html>