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Japan's Significant Uprising

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Japan is now joining hands with two European Nations, the United Kingdom and Italy, to develop a new next-generation fighter jet. It was almost 100 years ago that the battle of Tsushima was won by the Japanese ships against the Russian fleet. All thanks to the technologies and efforts put in to it by Britain and Italy to make the ships combat-ready. Japan's reengagement with these nations draws attention to whether Japan is preparing for a military exercise in the Indo-Pacific. If not, what is the rationale behind such a strategic move in the security domain?

The whole initiative successfully combines the British-led Future Combat Air System Project with Japan's FX program to form a 'Global Combat Air System.'¹ The aim of the project is to develop a next-generation fighter jet by the year 2035. This next-generation fighter jet will primarily work with Artificial Intelligence to assist human pilots under stress or in emergencies. The fighter jet will be a successor to the F-2s and the Eurofighter Typhoons. It would also include cutting-edge air combat technologies. The fighter jet will be highly capable of holding hypersonic missiles and possessing laser weapons which require high amounts of electricity to function. The programme will be built with the combined efforts of Britain's BAE Systems, Japan's Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, and Italy's Leonardo, along with many other high tech companies.²

Since Fumio Kishida became Prime Minister of Japan, the country has not only enhanced its defence capabilities at a rapid pace but also joined hands with leading liberal nations in Asia and beyond. PM Kishida was the first leader from Japan to attend the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Summit is a perfect example to show that he looks for an upgrade in the country's ties with NATO. The increase in the defence budgets over the next five years and the development of a counterstrike capability perhaps signals a transformation in the overall strategic game of Japan.³ With the increasing testing of missiles by North Korea and disturbances instigated by China in Taiwan. It is clear that Japan will enhance its security measures.⁴

The European presence in the Pacific region has never declined, and this partnership with Japan sets a relevant example. Undoubtedly, Japan intends to increase its defensive capabilities in the region by stressing deterrence and security partnerships. Japan realized that now was the time for a solution, and there was an increasing need to provide protection against future iterations. Skipping an entire generation of fighter aircraft was indeed tough, but it was the only viable option left for the country. Japan is diversifying its defence partners so that it is not dependent on just one ally, the US. Japan was successful in building up the Mitsubishi X-2 Shin-Shin, which indeed was a critical part of the F-X project.⁵

Noticeably, the UK, Japan, and Italy are moving ahead with the technological advancements within the domain of modern warfare, and that too without the assistance of the US. This is indeed a big step for all three countries that generate a self-reliant sentiment across the globe. Japan ignoring the US and choosing Italy and UK instead must have been shocking news for the US.⁶ However, on the other hand, the AUKUS partnership (Australia, United Kingdom, and United States), which is a defence cooperation act and an alignment against China's growing influence and power in the Indo-Pacific, aims to bring Japan back into the picture, and that may formulate the name to JAUUKUS.⁷ It was also seen in a joint statement released by US-Japan officials that stated, "We have begun important collaboration through a series of discussions on autonomous systems capabilities, which could complement Japan's next fighter program among other platforms."⁸

The countries are boosting their trilateral relationships through channels of defence cooperation, trade enhancements, and economic progressivity. The trilateral relationship will not only increase employment opportunities at massive levels but also enhance scientific developments. The three countries are yet to unveil how the program will progress in the coming years, which will include the how and whereabouts, but it is believed that the project, once successfully delivered, will be a boon for the three countries' trilateral partnership in the future.

NOTES:

- ¹ T Kosuke, "Why Japan Chose Britain and Italy for Its F-X Fighter Program," *The Diplomat*, December 09, 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/12/why-japan-chose-britain-and-italy-for-its-f-x-fighter-program/>, accessed on January 01, 2023.
- ² A Shukla, "UK, Italy, Japan team up to build sixth-generation fighter by 2035," *Business Standard*, December 10, 2022, https://www.business-standard.com/article/international/uk-italy-and-japan-partnership-to-develop-sixth-generation-fighter-122120900858_1.html , accessed on December 19, 2022.
- ³ J Johnson and G Dominguez, "Japan approves major defense overhaul in dramatic policy shift", *The Japan Times*, December 16, 2022, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2022/12/16/national/japan-dramatic-defense-shift/>, accessed on December 29, 2022.
- ⁴ M Cheung, "Japan's reluctant realism on Taiwan" *East Asia Forum*, May 13, 2022, <https://www.easiaforum.org/2022/05/13/japans-reluctant-realism-to-taiwan/> , accessed on December 26, 2022.
- ⁵ C McFadden, "The Extraordinary Power of Japan's Sixth-Gen F-X Fighter Jet," *Interesting Engineering*, August 19, 2021, <https://interestingengineering.com/innovation/the-extraordinary-power-of-japans-sixth-gen-f-x-fighter-jet> , accessed on January 01, 2023.
- ⁶ K Iwamoto and & RI Bartlett, "Japan shuns U.S. to sign next-gen fighter plan with U.K., Italy." *Nikkei Asia*, December 09, 2022, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Japan-shuns-U.S.-to-sign-next-gen-fighter-plan-with-U.K.-Italy> , accessed on December 26, 2022.
- ⁷ "Aukus: UK, US and Australia launch pact to counter China." *BBC*, September 16, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-58564837> , accessed on January 01, 2023.
- ⁸ "U.S. Department of Defense and Japan Ministry of Defense Joint Statement on Cooperation for Japan's Next Fighter Aircraft," *U.S. Department of Defense*, December 08, 2022, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3241016/us-department-of-defense-and-japan-ministry-of-defense-joint-statement-on-coope/> , accessed on December 26, 2022.