

Japan's Defense Ministry requests Largest Ever Military Budget

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Japan's Defense Ministry has asked for the country's largest ever military budget as Tokyo seeks to boost its armed forces amid persisting territorial conflicts with China and Russia as well as concerns over Beijing's expanding naval power.

The defense ministry on Monday requested an annual budget of 5.09 trillion yen (USD 42.38 billion) for the next fiscal year, reflecting Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's efforts to build a stronger and more active military that mainly focuses on a potential intensification of tensions with China.

The key objective of Tokyo's military build-up is said to enhance the protection of a series of southern islands that stretch from Japan's mainland to waters near Taiwan.

If approved, the new budget would be the fourth straight hike in the nation's annual defense budget, marking a 2.2 percent increase compared to the budget for the current fiscal year, which ends in March 2016.

This is while Abe is further pushing to revise Japan's pacifist constitution that will likely lead to Japanese troops engaging in combat for the first time since the end of the World War II.

However, the move has proved quite unpopular across Japan and triggered a major protest rally outside the parliament on Sunday with the participation of tens of thousands of demonstrators.

The latest request for a military budget increase came after Abe's administration decided to set aside a budget of nearly 25 trillion yen between 2014 and 2019 to spend on military drones, submarines, fighter jets and amphibious vehicles.

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