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Japan Authorizes Military to Shoot Down Chinese Drones

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Japan has approved a significant shift in its defense policy by granting the Japan Self-Defense Forces the authority to shoot down foreign drones that violate the country’s airspace, even if they do not pose an immediate threat to human life.

The decision was formally approved by Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba’s Cabinet on June 27, 2025, reflecting heightened security concerns in East Asia, as China expands its use of sophisticated unmanned aircraft. Until now, Japan’s air force pilots were only allowed to

take “necessary measures,” stopping short of engaging drones unless there was a clear and direct danger to people.

The policy change follows a steady rise in Chinese drone activity around Japan’s territory. In fiscal year 2024, Japanese fighter jets scrambled 704 times to intercept Chinese and Russian aircraft approaching Japan’s air defense identification zone. Defense Ministry data indicate that 30 Chinese drones were detected in Japan’s air defense identification zone during fiscal year 2024, a buffer area used to track aircraft before they enter national airspace.

So far, no Chinese drones have been officially accused of crossing into Japanese sovereign airspace. Still, defense officials say the new rules will allow quicker responses to any future incursions. The disputed Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea, called the Diaoyu Islands by China, remain a potential flashpoint. Both countries claim sovereignty over the rocky outcrops, which are covered by the United States–Japan security treaty.

Some Japanese lawmakers believe the policy is necessary to keep pace with the changing nature of warfare. Independent lawmaker Jin Matsubara stated on June 30, “With the rapid changes in security, particularly in military matters, we must constantly update our efforts.

On the Chinese side, officials have urged restraint. Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun said on June 25 that China hopes Japan will work to ‘resume intergovernmental negotiations’ and avoid escalating tensions.

Japan is also investing in ground-based anti-drone systems, including interceptor drones and radio-frequency jamming ‘guns,’ alongside research into directed-energy weapons like lasers to disable hostile drones without using traditional missiles or guns. For now, however, fighter jets remain the main line of defense if any unmanned aircraft cross into Japan’s airspace.

While no incidents have escalated into direct conflict so far, the new policy underscores Japan’s determination to safeguard its territory as regional rivalries intensify. The move could also test already-strained ties between Tokyo and Beijing in the months ahead.

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