

Japan Cancels Key Security Talks Following U.S. Defense-Spending Pressure

July 21, 2025

— Categories: Defence & Security



Japan has abruptly canceled its annual bilateral “2+2” security dialogue with the United States, which was scheduled to take place on July 1 in Washington. The high-level talks, expected to include U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, were called off after Washington requested that Tokyo raise its defense spending to 3.5

percent of gross domestic product (GDP), up from the approximately 3 percent level.

The request reportedly came at the urging of Elbridge Colby, the U.S. Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, known for his assertive push to get allies to take on more security responsibilities. Colby has previously led a review of the AUKUS submarine deal with Australia, raising concerns about allied defense commitments, although he has not publicly questioned specific elements of the pact. The pressure from Washington reflects a broader Trump administration strategy to demand stronger military commitments from key allies across both Asia and Europe.

According to Japanese officials, political timing played a significant role in the decision to cancel. With Upper House elections looming on July 20, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party is treading carefully. Hosting controversial security discussions just weeks before a national vote risked igniting domestic backlash over defense spending, a sensitive issue in Japan's post-war pacifist society.

Japanese foreign ministry representatives said no formal commitment had been made to raise defense spending to 3.5 percent or higher. They emphasized that such decisions remain the sovereign right of the Japanese government and are not subject to external directives.

The cancelled meeting also occurs amid strained U.S.–Japan trade negotiations, with Washington reportedly considering tariffs on Japanese goods as part of its broader trade pressure campaign. While Secretary Rubio attempted to downplay tensions, claiming there is “no drama or division” between the allies, the abrupt cancellation suggests otherwise.

Analysts believe Tokyo's move is a calculated diplomatic maneuver aimed at buying time until after the election and gaining leverage in ongoing defense and trade talks. However, there are concerns that the United States' increasingly rigid stance on burden-sharing could strain long-standing alliances, particularly as both nations seek to counter growing threats from China and North Korea.

As defense coordination and trade talks hang in the balance, the cancellation highlights the challenges of maintaining alliance cohesion while navigating national priorities. Whether the talks will be rescheduled remains to be seen, but the episode underscores rising friction within one of the region's most critical security partnerships.