

Japan annual defence paper shows increased worry over China

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Tokyo: Japan emphasised China as a threat in escalating regional tensions in this year's annual defence report even as Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's government tries to convince the public of the need to pass legislation to give Japan's military a greater role.

The report, approved on Tuesday by the Cabinet, was delayed for more than a week as Abe's ruling party panel demanded mention of additional examples of China's "one-sided" maritime activities, such as undersea gas and oil development in the East China Sea.

Abe's ruling coalition has been pushing to pass highly contentious legislation allowing Japan's Self-Defense Force to fight for foreign militaries even when it is not under attack, while expanding its role in international peacekeeping.

China by far topped Japan's list of security concerns, taking up one-third of a chapter on global security trends covering eight countries and regions.

The 429-page white paper underscored that Japan's security risk had worsened overall and cited continuing missile and nuclear threats from North Korea and terrorist threats from the Islamic State group as examples.

The report raised concerns over China's recent reclamation work in the South China Sea, saying it had escalated regional tensions. The defence ministry report also added a new section that also refers to maritime activities elsewhere.

China has been building artificial islands in the vast, resource-rich area, alarming neighboring nations.

"China, particularly over conflicting maritime issues, continues to act in an assertive manner, including coercive attempts to change the status quo, and is poised to fulfill its unilateral demands high-handedly without compromise," the report said. "Japan is strongly concerned about China's actions, which we need to keep watching closely."

- AP