

Japan Cabinet OKs record defense budget amid China concern

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Tokyo: Japan's Cabinet approved a record-high military spending plan Thursday, endorsing plans to purchase pricey U.S. surveillance drones and F-35 fighter jets as Tokyo steps up cooperation with Washington amid China's increasingly assertive activity in regional seas.

The 5.1 trillion yen (\$42.1 billion) proposal is part of a 96.7 trillion yen (\$800 billion) national budget plan for the year beginning April 2016, also an all-time high. The entire package requires parliamentary approval.

Military spending would rise 1.5 percent from this year, the fourth annual increase under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who ended a decade of defense budget cuts.

The defense budget is the first since Japan enacted new security legislation in September enhancing the country's military role and since Japan revised its bilateral defense guidelines with the U.S. earlier in the year to allow broader cooperation between the two allies.

Japan is bolstering surveillance and defense of its southern islands, where it has a territorial dispute with China. The budget plan also includes the purchase of an advanced Aegis radar-equipped destroyer with missile-defense capability, submarine construction and sonar development.

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