

Japan: Extremism & Counter-Extremism

On January 20, 2015, ISIS released a video threatening the lives of two Japanese hostages, Kenji Goto Jogo and Haruna Yakawa. As ISIS's deadline for its demands expired, both men were executed. ISIS's ransom demand of \$100 million for each hostage was a reaction to Japan's announcement two days earlier of its commitment to donate \$200 million in non-military aid to countries battling ISIS, which ISIS claims is a Japanese conspiracy to "destroy Muslim homes." Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe condemned the video and promised that Japan's "stance - contributing to the fight against terrorism without giving in - remains unchanged."

Overview

The Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs recognizes a high threat of terrorism directed against Japan. An important ally of the United States in counter-extremism efforts, Japan has frequently been identified as a target by al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and its affiliates, and was specifically cited in speeches by former AQAP leader Osama bin-Laden. Japan currently views AQAP as its chief terrorist threat. While largely insulated from extremist threats, Japanese counterterrorism capabilities are likely to be tested closer to 2020—a year that Japanese police have dubbed the "first year of high-tech security"—when Tokyo will host the Summer Olympics.

Compared to Europe, homegrown radicalization of Japanese nationals to Islamic extremism is minuscule. However, in October 2014, Tokyo police began questioning a group of young Japanese men apparently preparing to join ISIS in Syria. The investigation potentially represents the first serious stirrings of support for ISIS from among Japanese nationals.

While similarly infrequent, Japan has nonetheless suffered at the hands of domestic extremist groups, most notably Aum Shinrikyo (now known as Aleph). Aum Shinrikyo members released sarin nerve gas in several Tokyo subway lines, killing 12 and injuring perhaps thousands more. In recent years, the group's activities have receded as it has come under increasingly close scrutiny from Japan's Public Security Intelligence Agency. According to retired FBI agent Edward Shaw, Japanese intelligence has better physical surveillance operations than any other country in the world.

Japan has been at the vanguard of counter-extremism globally, especially through ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), the regional organizational body. Japan regularly provides large non-military aid packages - including infrastructure and humanitarian assistance for countries hosting refugees - for countries countering extremist violence. Following the January 2015 execution of two Japanese hostages taken by ISIS, Prime Minister Abe reiterated Japan's determination to "resolutely fulfill its responsibility to the international community in the fight against terrorism."

(Sources: [New York Times](#), [Japan News](#), [Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#), [al-Arabiya](#), [Japan Times](#), [New York Times](#), [BBC News](#))

Radicalization and Foreign Fighters

Homegrown Radicalization

Compared with many European countries, Japan has experienced little homegrown radicalization. However, non-political religious extremist entities have found their roots in Japan, such as the apocalyptic cult Aum Shinrikyo which carried out an attack on Tokyo in 1995. More recently, reports from late 2014 suggest that several young men were radicalized either online or at a bookstore in Tokyo to the point of joining ISIS.

Aum Shinrikyo

Aum Shinrikyo is a Japanese cult founded by Shoko Asahara in 1984. It follows a "dangerous religion and strict practices" that reflect a "twisted blend" of Buddhist, Hindu, Christian, and Taoist elements, with the promise of an impending apocalypse. Its aim is to control Japan and eventually the world, creating a global utopian society. The group received international infamy in March 1995 when members carried out a chemical attack by releasing the nerve agent sarin in the Tokyo subway system, killing twelve and injuring over six thousand. The United States, Canada, and the European Union have designated Aum Shinrikyo as a terrorist organization. According to the U.S. Congress, Aum Shinrikyo is the first

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terrorist group to have used weapons of mass destruction.

(Sources: [2009 Japanese White Paper](#), [Council on Foreign Relations](#), [U.S. Department of State](#), [Library of Congress](#), [Government of Canada](#), [EU Law and Publications](#), [Federation of American Scientists](#))

Foreign Fighters

In October 2014, Japanese police reportedly investigated several nationals suspected of planning to travel to Syria to fight with ISIS. The suspects were described as male university students in their twenties. One of the men was believed to have been recruited at a bookstore in Akihabara, Tokyo, where notices reportedly advertising unspecified work in Syria. According to the police, another man had been recruited online. According to a Japanese newspaper, the police confiscated the men's passports. (Source: [New York Times](#))

In September 2014, Israeli intelligence informed the Japanese Air Force that nine Japanese nationals had joined ISIS's ranks. (Source: [Jerusalem Post](#))

Major Extremist and Terrorist Incidents

On March 20, 1995, Japan suffered its worst terrorist attack to date when a group of religious extremists attacked the Tokyo subway system. The group, Aum Shinrikyo, launched five coordinated strikes with heavy use of sarin gas that injured scores of commuters and left a dozen dead.

In October 2003, Osama bin Laden issued a message threatening all nations participating in "unlawful" military operations in Iraq. At the time, units from Japan's "self-defense force" were dispatched to Iraq, but under strict conditions that excluded any combat role. Bin Laden declared that these nations, including Japan which was mentioned by name, would suffer a "retaliatory attack" by al-Qaeda "at the proper time and place." Numerous subsequent attacks were made on Japanese nationals in Iraq. In November 2003, two Japanese government officials were murdered south of Tikrit. In May 2004, two Japanese journalists were killed, along with their translator, near Baghdad.

The latest source of extremist violence against Japan has come from ISIS in Syria. In August 2014, Haruna Yukawa, a self-proclaimed "half-journalist, half-doctor" was kidnapped on the outskirts of Aleppo. In October 2014, Kenji Goto, a freelance journalist, was kidnapped near Raqqa. Both men were executed by ISIS in January 2015 as the deadline for meeting its demands expired.

(Sources: [Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#), [Guardian](#), [USA Today](#))

Domestic Counter-Extremism

In response to the October 2014 arrest of a Japanese university student allegedly trying to leave the country to join ISIS, the government vowed to take more proactive steps in countering domestic extremism. (Source: [Foreign Ministry of Japan](#), [Wall Street Journal](#))

Japan began addressing domestic extremism over 60 years ago. The 1952 Subversive Activities Prevention Act created the Public Security Intelligence Agency (PSIA), tasked with monitoring left-wing extremist groups such as the Japanese Red Army. After the domestic terrorist group/cult Aum Shinrikyo's 1995 sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway, Japan expanded the PSIA's mandate with the Act Pertaining to Control of Organizations That Commit Indiscriminate Murder of 1999, also known as the anti-Aum Act. The act allows the PSIA to place the officials and members of an organization under surveillance if any of the suspects taking part in an act of indiscriminate mass murder are members of the organization or there is evidence the organization's members may take part in such an act. "Subversive activities" does not appear to include "hate speech" for, unlike many countries in Europe, Japan does not have specific provisions against it. Japanese authorities do not consider this issue a major domestic problem and suspended the section that criminalizes hate speech in Article 4 of the 1995 [U.N. Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination](#), to which it is a signatory. (Sources: [Public Security Intelligence Agency](#), [Public Security Intelligence Agency](#), [United Nations](#))

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Japan addressed extremism again following the September 11, 2001, attacks, when statements by Osama bin Laden and others named Japan as a potential terrorist target. The Anti-Terrorism Special Measures law of October 2001 improved immigration control, intelligence, security measures for critical infrastructure, and efforts against terrorist financing. It also authorized the government to use its Self Defense Forces (SDF) to proactively combat the threat of terrorism. (Sources: [Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#), [Heritage Foundation](#))

In December 2004, Japan adopted the Action Plan for Prevention of Terrorism. The plan includes 16 “Urgently Needed Terrorism Prevention Methods,” such as increased immigration control, creation of a sky marshal program, thorough identification of foreign guests by the hotel industry, tightening control of materials that could be used in terrorist attacks, and boosting counterterrorism intelligence efforts. (Source: [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan](#))

The Action Plan led to a 2006 amendment of the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act, which required the submission of personal identification information of foreign nationals arriving in Japan. It also required reports on crew and passengers entering Japan. As an island nation, “border security means security of the coasts,” which is the responsibility of the Japan Coast Guard (JCG). Illegal or undocumented immigrants entering Japan mainly comprise Chinese nationals seeking better economic opportunities, who transfer to Korean cargo vessels via Chinese vessels near Korea. (Sources: [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan](#), [Library of Congress](#), [Japan Coast Guard](#))

The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) global watchdog censured Japan in June 2014 for its lack of progress in combating terror financing. The most recent FATF evaluation was published in 2008 and highlighted the low number of prosecutions and a lack of legislative clarity regarding the scope of criminalization of illicit fund-collecting and provision. Japan also [continues](#) to have an “incomplete mechanism for the freezing of terrorist assets.” (Source: [FATF](#))

As Japan prepares to host the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo, police are looking to introduce advanced Artificial Intelligence (AI) techniques to assist in identifying terrorist threats. For example, police may implement sophisticated face-scanning technology for large crowds, detecting certain facial tremors in individuals that correspond with the widely-recognized phenomenon of heightened trembling by terrorists prior to committing an act of terrorism. (Source: [Japan News](#))

International Counter-Extremism

Japan has been at the forefront of the global effort to counter extremism, despite the fact that the constitution prohibits the use of military offensive action. In September 2015, however, the Japanese parliament voted to allow Japanese troops to deploy in a combat role overseas. In November 2016, Japanese troops were sent in a limited military capacity abroad for the first time since World War II. Three hundred and fifty personnel from the Ground Self-Defence Forces arrived in Juba, South Sudan, to assist with peacekeeping operations, withdrawing in April 2017. Prior to and following the legislative decision, Japan has continued to provide maritime support to the coalition in Afghanistan and political and financial support to the coalition against ISIS.

Japan has been at the forefront of the global effort to counter extremism. Although its constitution prohibits the use of offensive military action, Japan has provided maritime support to the coalition in Afghanistan and political and financial support to the coalition against ISIS. Japan has engaged in international conferences to discuss regional and global cooperation in the fight against terrorism. Since 2006, Japan has participated in the annual ASEAN-Japan Counter Terrorism Dialogue (AJCTD), twice hosting the dialogues. In addition, Japan has engaged in bilateral counterterrorism talks with Australia, the European Union, India, Pakistan, Korea, Russia, Turkey and the United States, among others.

In addition to Japan’s counterterrorism efforts, the country has been proactive in addressing the threat of radicalization. In 2013, for example, Japan co-hosted the “Workshop on Countering Radicalization” in Tokyo.

Role in International Counter-Extremism Policy

Japan has a multilateral approach to combatting global extremism. According to the country’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan’s international efforts to combat terrorism involve: (1) working to strengthen the international community’s political will to fight terrorism, (2) formulating international law to combat terrorism, (3) providing support to international

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counterterrorism operations, and (4) exchanging information through talks and consultations with other countries.

(1) Working to strengthen the international community's political will to fight terrorism

Japan works to bring attention to the threats of terrorism and garner international support to fight it. It has implemented all 13 U.N. Security Council resolutions combatting terrorism, and adopted relevant declarations at international forums including the G8 and APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) and through bilateral talks.

(Sources: [New York Times](#), [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan](#), [APEC](#), [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan](#))

(2) Formulating international law to combat terrorism

Japan has ratified and implemented all of the U.N.'s counterterrorism conventions and protocols, and is engaged in the ongoing negotiations for the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism. Within the G8, Japan has joined efforts to establish standards for immigration control and transport security. Also within the G8, Japan and the United States established the Counter-Terrorism Action Group (CTAG).

(Sources: [Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet](#), [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan](#), [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan](#))

(3) Providing support to international counterterrorism operations

Japan's constitution prohibits Japan from engaging in offensive action. However, in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, Japan passed the Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law, authorizing its Self Defense Forces (SDF) to provide defensive assistance to the U.S. fight against terrorism. As a result, Japan was authorized to provide support (including intelligence-sharing, medical services, transportation, fuel and other supplies but excluding weapons and ammunition) to Operation Enduring Freedom. Japan contributed to the operation from December 2001 to January 2010.

Japan is officially part of the U.S.-led international coalition to fight ISIS, and provides broad political and financial support to the coalition. In January 2015, the country committed \$200 million in non-military aid to the anti-ISIS coalition. Japan had previously donated \$33 million towards humanitarian relief for Syrian and Iraqi refugees. As noted in the U.S. Department of State's Country Reports on Terrorism published in 2017, Japan identified counterterrorism as a top priority during its hosting of the "Group of Seven" (G-7) summit in May 2016.

Japan contributes SDF personnel and has made a significant financial contribution to U.N. peacekeeping missions. Over the past 20 years, Japan has dispatched about 9,300 SDF and police personnel. As of March 2014, around 400 personnel were engaged in the U.N. peacekeeping mission in South Sudan.

Although Japan ranks 49th in military and police personnel contributions to U.N. peacekeeping efforts, it ranks 2nd in financial contributions, having contributed 10.833% of UN Peacekeeping Budget as of March 2014.

(Sources: [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan](#), [Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet](#), [APEC](#), [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan](#), [U.S. State Department](#), [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan](#))

(4) Exchanging information through talks and consultations with other countries

Japan works to exchange counterterrorism information through talks and consultations with other countries and international organizations. These include bilateral talks with Australia, Belgium, the European Union, India, Pakistan, Korea, Russia, Turkey and the United States, among others. For example, the Japan-Belgium Counter-Terrorism Consultation took place in Brussels on November 23, 2016, between Japan's Ambassador for International Cooperation for Countering Terrorism and International Organized Crime, H.E. Mr. Yuji Kumamaru, and the Belgian Director for the Counter-terrorism Section of the Security Policy Directorate, Mr. Frank Arnauts.

Since launching the ASEAN-Japan Counter Terrorism Dialogue (AJCTD) in March 2006, Japan has met annually with ASEAN member states to discuss increased cooperation in the fight against terrorism. Japan has twice hosted the AJCTD. The February 2017 edition of the AJCTD took place in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and was chaired by the Japanese Deputy

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Chief of Mission to ASEAN.

In February 2013, Japan moved to address extremism born of radicalization. Alongside Malaysia, Japan co-hosted the “Workshop on Countering Radicalization” in Tokyo to “address [the] counter-radicalization issue, which attracts broad attention in connection with counterterrorism efforts.”

(Sources: [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan](#), [U.S. Department of State](#), [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan](#), [ASEAN](#), [APEC](#), [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan](#))

Response to Hostage Crisis

In response to the January 20, 2015, ISIS hostage video, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe reaffirmed his country’s political and financial commitment to the coalition against ISIS. He said, “The international community will not give in to terrorism and we have to make sure that we work together.”

Also responding to the hostage crisis, chief government spokesman Yoshihide Suga said, “Our country's stance -- contributing to the fight against terrorism without giving in -- remains unchanged.”

(Sources: [Reuters](#), [Al Arabiya](#), [Guardian](#), [New York Times](#))