

Japan confirms plans to cancel deployment of US missile defence system

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The council is expected to also revise Japan's basic defence plan later this year to update the missile defence program and scale up the country's defence posture. (Reuters file photo. Representative image)

Tokyo: Japan's National Security Council has endorsed plans cancel the deployment of two costly land-based US missile defence systems aimed at bolstering the country's capability against threats from North Korea, the country's defence minister said Thursday.

The council made its decision Wednesday, and now the government will need to enter negotiations with the US. about what to do with payments and the purchase contract already made for the Aegis Ashore systems.

The council is expected to also revise Japan's basic defence plan later this year to update the missile defence program and scale up the country's defence posture.

Defence Minister Taro Kono announced the plan to scrap the systems earlier this month after it was found that the safety of one of the two planned host communities could not be ensured without a hardware redesign that would be too time consuming and costly.

The Japanese government in 2017 approved adding the two Aegis Ashore systems to enhance the country's current defenses consisting of Aegis-equipped destroyers at sea and Patriot missiles on land.

Defence officials have said the two Aegis Ashore units could cover Japan entirely from one station at Yamaguchi in the south and another at Akita in the north.

The plan to deploy the two systems already had faced a series of setbacks, including questions about the selection of one of the sites, repeated cost estimate hikes that climbed to 450 billion yen (\$4.1 billion) for their 30-year operation and maintenance, and safety concerns that led to local opposition.

Kono said Japan has signed contract worth nearly half the total cost and paid part of it to the U.S.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who has steadily pushed to step up Japan's defence capability, said last week that in light of the scrapping the government would need to reconsider Japan's missile defence program and do more under the country's security alliance with the US.

Abe said the government would consider the possibility of acquiring pre-emptive strike capability, a controversial plan that critics say would violate Japan's war-renouncing Constitution.

- AP