

News Flash

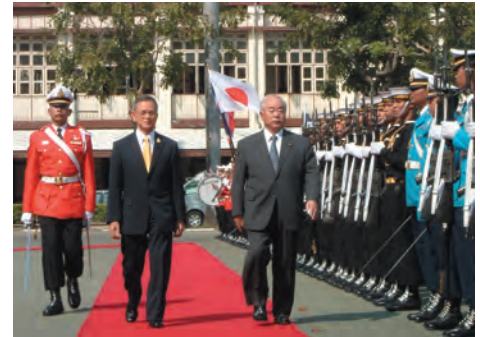
Japan-Thailand Defense Ministerial Meeting

Minister of State for Defense (now Minister of Defense) Fumio Kyuma visited Thailand January 2–6. During his stay he held talks with Minister of Defense General Boonrawd Somtas and Supreme Commander of the Royal Thai Armed Forces General Boonsrang Niumpradit, paid a courtesy call on President of the Privy Council Prem Tinsulanond, and visited the Chulachomklao Royal Military Academy, north-east of Bangkok.

In his meeting with General Boonrawd, Kyuma began by expressing thanks for the opportu-

nity to visit Thailand in the memorable year marking the 120th anniversary of Japan-Thailand diplomatic relations and for the warm welcome he had received. He also explained the scheduled transition of the Defense Agency to the Ministry of Defense, and the two ministers then exchanged views on their nations' defense policies, defense exchange, and other matters.

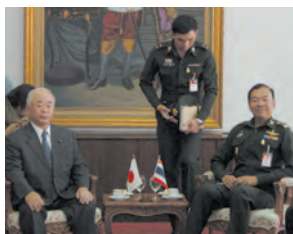
Commenting on the situation in Northeast Asia, Kyuma said that a series of deeds by North Korea, such as its recent missile launch and announcement of an underground nuclear test, posed a serious threat to the peace and stability of not only Japan but also Northeast Asia as a whole and the



General Boonrawd (center) and Defense Minister Kyuma (right) reviewing Thai troops

international community. He stressed that the international community should firmly criticize North Korea's behavior and make a coordinated response. He also discussed Japan-China relations and Japan's perception of China's military strength.

General Boonrawd responded that Thailand, too, was criticizing North Korea's missile launch and nuclear test announcement and talked about the situation in the ASEAN region and Thailand's political situation. ■



Defense Minister Kyuma (left) meeting with the commandant of the Chulachomklao Royal Military Academy

Current News

Commemorative Ceremony Marking Transition to Ministry of Defense

On January 9 a commemorative ceremony marking the transition of the Defense Agency to the Ministry of Defense took place in the auditorium of the Ministry of Defense, in Tokyo's Ichigaya district. Among those attending were Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Minister of Defense Fumio Kyuma, high-ranking executives of the Ministry of Defense and the Self-Defense Forces, and former Ministers of State for Defense. ■



Prime Minister Abe speaking at the ceremony marking the Defense Agency's transition to the Ministry of Defense



The entrance to the Ministry of Defense

Topics

Extension of SDF Dispatch to Golan Heights

At its January 26 cabinet meeting, the government decided to extend for half a year the term of dispatch of Self-Defense Force units to the Golan Heights, in the Middle East, for the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF). Based on this decision Minister of Defense Fumio Kyuma ordered that the 23rd Golan Heights dispatch transport unit be organized. The unit,

comprising 43 personnel mainly from the 13th Brigade of the

Middle Army, departed for the Middle East on February 23. ■



SDF personnel at work in the Golan Heights



JSO Chief of Staff Saito's Inspection of Iraq Transportation Wing



Admiral Saito (left) inspecting the Support Airlift Wing in Kuwait

Joint Staff Office Chief of Staff Admiral Takashi Saito visited

Kuwait January 27–31. While there, he inspected the Air Self-Defense Force's 11th Iraq

Reconstruction Support Transportation Wing, stationed at Ali Al Salem Air Base, and encouraged the personnel. After his return to Japan, he said, "I am proud that the transportation wing representing Japan is conducting airlift activities between Kuwait and Iraq and contributing to the reconstruction of Iraq in the harsh environment of the Middle East." ■



1st Airborne Brigade's First Drop Maneuver of the Year

On January 7 the 1st Airborne Brigade of the Ground Self-Defense Force conducted its first drop maneuver of the year at the Narashino Training Ground, located in Funabashi, Chiba Prefecture. Minister of State for Defense (now Minister of Defense) Fumio Kyuma, Chief of Staff of the Ground Staff Office General Tsutomu Mori, other guests, and

about 6,000 local residents and other citizens watched the maneuvers, which involved 17 aircraft and 37 ground vehicles. The high point was the parachute descent by 1st Airborne Brigade



Scenes of the 1st Airborne Brigade's drop maneuver



personnel, a fixture of the annual first drop maneuver. ■

Special Interview

Interview with Former UNDOF Force Commander Bala Nanda Sharma

Bala Nanda Sharma is a Nepalese lieutenant general who served as the force commander of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) from January 2004 to January 2007. As part of U.N. peacekeeping operations, UNDOF's primary mission is to maintain the cease-fire between Israel and Syria by supervising the disengagement of the two countries' forces in the Golan Heights, southwestern Syria. UNDOF currently consists of troops from Austria, Canada, India, Japan, Nepal, Poland, and Slovakia. The following interview took place at the Ministry of Defense in Tokyo.



Bala Nanda Sharma

How do you look back on your three years in the Golan Heights?

I think the situation in the Golan Heights has been calm and stable. Both Israel and Syria understand the importance of the disengagement and have been cooperative with us. Therefore, there were no major conflicts in the Golan Heights and no UNDOF casualties during my time there. When fighting broke out in Lebanon between Israel and Hezbollah in the summer of 2006, however, tension between Israel and Syria heightened as well. To prevent fighting, we frequently talked with both countries' officials and asked them to exercise self-restraint. As a result the disengagement was maintained.

What did you think of the Japanese troops in UNDOF?

We had 45 Japanese personnel altogether. Two engaged in public relations and the planning and coordination of logistic operations as staff officers to UNDOF headquarters. The other 43 provided logistic support for UNDOF activities, including transport of food, storage of supplies, and road repair, using trucks, snowmobiles, and armored person-

nel carriers. In my opinion, the Japanese troops were very polite and well disciplined. They caused no disciplinary problems during my tenure. They also showed great loyalty to me. All troops from the participating countries are replaced every six months, and one of the Japanese commanders said to me that they would go anywhere, anytime, if I ordered them. I was greatly impressed by his words.

Moreover, the Japanese troops were highly committed to work. One example has to do with road repair. One of the major roads in the region was blocked by a landslide. So I asked the Syrian government to repair the road, but there was no substantial progress for six months due to red tape. My request was transferred from office to office. Then I turned to the Japanese troops, and they repaired the road in only three days.

Are there any changes in U.N. peacekeeping operations?

Actually, I stopped by in Japan after submitting my final report on UNDOF to the U.N. Looking back on recent developments, I think the nature of peacekeeping has changed considerably. The original concept of peacekeeping was to maintain peace between conflicting parties. As you

can see in East Timor and African nations, however, the role of peacekeeping has expanded to nation building that aims to create a new social system or infrastructure. Therefore, peacekeeping forces are working with other U.N. organizations, including UNDP [the United Nations Development Programme] and UNHCR [the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees].

In what way should Japan contribute to U.N. peacekeeping operations?

Japan's contribution to peacekeeping has centered on financial assistance, but it's not very visible. If Japan sends more troops to peacekeeping operations, its contribution will become more visible to the local people involved as well as to the international community. Therefore, I think Japan should take part in peacekeeping operations more actively. In this respect, UNDOF is a good example because it has been successful. UNDOF will also be able to provide young Japanese officers with good opportunities to learn peacekeeping. Finally, I'd like to thank the Japanese government for sending troops to UNDOF and ask the Japanese people to continue to support them. ■

Spotlight

Interview with ASDF Chief of Staff General Tadashi Yoshida

Would you tell us about your career in the Air Self-Defense Force?

I joined the Air Self-Defense Force [ASDF] in 1970, and for the first 10 years or so I piloted transport planes, racking up about 4,000 flying hours. The next 10 years or so were spent mainly overseas, including teaching at the U.S. Air Force Academy and serving as defense attaché in the Japanese Embassy in France. During my time in Paris the Gulf War broke out, and I was able to build up a good deal of experience in a tense time, including gathering intelligence on multinational-force operations. I've spent the 17 years since then alternating between Air Staff Office posts and ASDF unit commands.

What experiences stand out especially in your memory?

After the end of the cold war, the Self-Defense Forces [SDF] shifted from their initial period of “building” to one of “working” and then

to one of “showing results.” When I was director of the Defense Department, I repeatedly argued that there was a need for a joint operations system for the SDF in order to meet the public’s expectations. I was happy when this was finally achieved last year.

The 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States took place when I was commander of the Western Air Defense Force. As a field commander, I thought about what we should do if the same kind of incident occurred in Japan. Responding to airborne terrorism is an extremely difficult issue not just for Japan but for the world as a whole.

What are your thoughts on the future shape of the ASDF?

The ASDF can have confidence in its ability to respond to the kinds of emergencies that were assumed during the cold war. The challenge for the future is how to preserve ground functions in the face of new

threats, such as terrorism and guerrilla attacks. By their very nature, aircraft have to take off from and land on air bases. A major issue from now on will be to protect ground functions from terrorism. We’re putting a lot of energy into base security.

As a student I belonged to the boating club. In boat races, no matter how strong some of the athletes are, you can’t propel the boat skillfully if any member of the team is weak. The ASDF, too, is made up of people with special skills—piloting, maintenance, radar, missiles, and so forth. Unless they all do their jobs perfectly, the ASDF can’t function to its full potential. I see it as an organization in which both the improvement of individual skills and teamwork are important. ■



Tadashi Yoshida

Information

Japan Defense Focus Questionnaire

Japan Defense Focus is published as a tool providing information on various policies and activities of the Ministry of Defense and the Self-Defense Forces. The attached questionnaire is designed to help us improve the newsletter. We

request readers to fill in the questionnaire and return it to the Ministry of Defense by fax. Your cooperation will be greatly appreciated. Thirty respondents will be selected by lot to receive Ministry of Defense original goods (see the photograph).

