Section 3. The Basis of Defense Policy

1. National Defense Policy
Under the Constitution, Japan has adhered to its National Defense Policy, which was adopted by the National Defense Council and approved by the Cabinet in 1957. (See Reference 6)

The National Defense Policy defines policies to establish the foundation of security through international harmonization and peace activities, as well as ensuring the stability of society, and then to establish efficient defense capabilities and to maintain the Japan-U.S. Security Arrangements.

2. Other Basic Policies
Under the National Defense Policy, Japan has been building a modest defense capability under the Constitution purely for defense purposes without becoming a military power that could threaten other countries, while adhering to the principle of civilian control of the military, observing the Three Non-Nuclear Principles, and firmly maintaining the Japan-U.S. Security Arrangements.

1. Exclusively Defense-Oriented Policy
The exclusively defense-oriented policy means that Japan will not employ defensive force unless and until an armed attack is mounted on Japan by another country, and even in such a case, only the minimum force necessary to defend itself may be used. Furthermore, only the minimum defense forces necessary for self-defense should be retained and used. This exclusively defense-oriented policy is a passive defense strategy that is consistent with the spirit of the Constitution.

2. Not Becoming a Military Power
There is no established definition for the term “military power.” For Japan, however, not becoming a military power that could threaten the security of other countries means that Japan will not possess more military force than is necessary for self-defense and that could pose a threat to other countries.

3. The Three Non-Nuclear Principles
The Three Non-Nuclear Principles are that Japan: will not possess nuclear weapons, will not produce nuclear weapons, and will not allow nuclear weapons into Japan. Japan adheres to the Three Non-Nuclear Principles as a fixed national policy.

Japan is prohibited from manufacturing or possessing nuclear weapons also under the Atomic Energy Basic Law. In addition, Japan ratified the NPT (Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons), and as a non-nuclear weapons state, is not permitted to produce or acquire nuclear weapons.

4. Ensuring Civilian Control
Civilian control of the military means the precedence of political will over the military in a democratic state, and hence democratic political control over the military.

Learning lessons from World War II, Japan has adopted the following systems of uncompromising civilian control that are entirely different from those under the former Constitution. Civilian control ensures that the SDF is operated in accordance with the will of the people.

The Japanese people are represented in the Diet, which makes legislative and budgetary decisions on matters such as the authorized number of SDF Regular Personnel and principal institutions of the SDF. It also approves defense operations. As part of its general administrative functions, the Cabinet has entire authority related to defense. The Constitution requires the Prime Minister and other Ministers of State in the Cabinet to be civilians.
The Prime Minister, acting on behalf of the Cabinet, is the supreme commander of the SDF. The Minister of Defense, who is exclusively in charge of national defense, exercises general control over SDF activities. The Security Council of Japan within the Cabinet discusses important defense matters.

At the Ministry of Defense, the Minister of Defense is in charge of administrative work related to national defense and controls the SDF. The Minister of Defense is assisted in planning political measures and administration by the Senior Vice-Minister and two Parliamentary Secretaries.

As mentioned above, the military is under civilian control. The success of the system depends on ongoing political and administrative efforts, as well as a keen interest among Japanese citizens in defense issues. With the emergence of serious issues relating to civilian control in the Ministry of Defense in recent years, fundamental measures are being considered.

In the report of the Council for Reforming the Ministry of Defense publicized in July of this year, an enhancement of the Prime Minster’s Office as well as the Defense Ministry was demonstrated as part of “the structural improvement for the modern civil control.” (See Part IV, Section 1)
Civilian Control

While the military is a necessary means to protect the peace and independence of a nation, the military meant to protect the people of a country can, to the contrary, expose them to danger if used wrongly, as the ancient Greek philosopher Plato said. Civilian control was developed as a measure to prevent military intervention in government utilizing the military under political control, and ensures the primacy of the democratic government over the military.

The system of civilian control first emerged in England, in the formulation process of constitutionalism in which a parliament limited the powers of the absolute monarch. In other words, the limitations of the monarch were clearly stated to protect civilian rights in the Magna Carta (Great Charter) established in 1215, and at an assembly in 1628, the Petition of Right, demanding right and liberty by legislation, was conducted. Also, established in 1689 after the Glorious Revolution, the Bill of Rights that formed the basis for British constitutional government made it illegal for a monarch to conscript and maintain a standing army in the country during peacetime without the consent of Parliament. The system remains in place to this day.

Furthermore, the Constitution of the United States of America established in 1787 and the post-French Revolution French Constitution of 1791 also provide for various systems of civilian control. Today, in democratic countries in Europe and the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, and France, not only does the Parliament make decisions on important military matters such as laws and budgets, but the president, prime minister, or other executive civilian leader exercises control over the military. In this way, policies to ensure civilian control have been established in each country.

Such systems of those countries are by no means identical. For example, Germany is particularly careful to exercise military control by the Parliament, while in France, the executive branch of government has stronger control over the military than the Parliament.

Moreover, the national defense organizations that assist the president or prime minister in implementing civilian control vary widely from country to country. In the United States, the central organization (the Office of the Department of Defense) is organized mainly by politically-appointed civilian executives (in this case, the Secretary of Defense), but in the United Kingdom’s central organization, the civilian and military executives are positioned in parallel.

Japan has also adopted various systems for strict civilian control, and leaving repentance preceding the end of the war, has put effort in achieving thoroughness in civilian control through maintaining and operating the SDF, a power organization, under democracy.

Today, the SDF has become an organization that is expected to be active in many contexts both within Japan and overseas, including international peace cooperation activities, with the aim of further ensuring Japan’s safety and security. These efforts are made in response to the changing times, including the end of the Cold War, the response to global terrorism, and Japan’s elevated international status.

From the perspective of how to best utilize the SDF to ensure the nation’s interests and fulfill Japan’s international responsibility, Japan is currently tasked to further improve and strengthen the various systems of civilian control in order to reconstruc the modality of the Ministry of Defense and the SDF.