Report of the Council on Reconstruction of a Legal Basis for Security

Against the background of the greatly changing security environment surrounding the country, and with the recognition of the need to reconstruct a legal infrastructure for effective security that fits the situation of the times, the Council on Reconstruction of a Legal Basis for Security (the Council) was set up under the Prime Minister in May 2007. The role of the Council is to conduct studies on issues related to the constitution, including the issue of the right of collective self-defense in view of individual specific issues. The Council held seven meetings and two opinion exchange sessions.

The Council examined the following four issues, presented by then-Prime Minister Abe, and submitted a report on June 24 last year. The outline of the recommendation is introduced below:

1) Protection of US vessels in the high seas
   In order to protect the lives and property of our people in the increasingly severe security environment of today, the effective functioning of the Japan-US Alliance is more important than ever. To maintain and strengthen the relationship of trust between the allied countries, it is essential to allow the protection of US vessels in danger when Japan and the United States are engaged in a joint activity. In this case, exercise of the right of collective self-defense must be allowed.

2) Interception of ballistic missiles that could head for the United States
   If Japan does not shoot down ballistic missiles heading for the United States despite being able to do so, it would rock the foundation of the Japan-US Alliance, which forms the basis of our security. Such a situation should never happen. We need to exercise the right of collective self-defense in such a case involving ballistic missiles, too.

3) Use of weapons in international peace operations
   Currently the Self-Defense Force dispatched for UN PKO activities, etc. is only allowed to use weapons for self-protection and the protection of weapons, etc. This situation runs counter to common sense and could be criticized by the world community. We should interpret that participation in UN PKO activities is not forbidden by Article 9 of the Constitution. In addition to the purpose of self-defense, the use of weapons should be allowed when rushing to and guarding troops and military personnel of other countries participating in the same activity and executing duties.

4) Logistic support of the activities of other countries participating in the same UN PKO activities, etc.
   When discussing the relationship between logistics support, such as supply, transportation and medical care, that will never involve the use of weapons on the one hand and the use of weapons by other countries that are to be supported on the other, we should abandon the “integration” theory that concerns constitutional evaluation. Instead, we should decide on a policy of whether or not we should provide logistics support to other countries and to what degree, as an issue of policy appropriateness, considering whether or not the activities of the country to be supported are acceptable to the public and are based on a comprehensive assessment of the advantages and disadvantages.
Comments from SDF Personnel Member Temporarily Assigned to the Secretariat of the Strategic Headquarters for Space Policy

Lieutenant Colonel Yasuo Otani
Secretariat of Strategic Headquarters for Space Policy, ASDF

Do you know about the organization called the Secretariat of Strategic Headquarters for Space Policy? The Strategic Headquarters for Space Policy was set up on August 27, 2008, coinciding with the enforcement of the Basic Space Law, which was established in May of the same year, and the Secretariat was set up at the cabinet Secretary. Related ministries sent 21 staff members to the secretariat, including those on part-time assignment. Two people were sent from the Ministry of Defense. I felt very lucky to be included, because I had wanted a space-related job since my time at the National Defense Academy when I majored in space engineering.

At the Secretariat, I am responsible for the creation of the Basic Plan for Space Policy (draft) and gathering opinions on it. The Basic Plan for Space Policy presents six Basic Pillars: (1) Ensure a rich, secure and safe life, (2) Contribute to enhancement of security, (3) Promote the utilization of space for diplomacy, (4) Create an energetic future by promoting R&D of the forefront areas (5) Foster strategic industries for the 21st Century, (6) Consider the environment. The plan is scheduled to be developed and completed by the Strategic Headquarters for Space Policy by around May of this year (the plan will have been finalized by the time this white paper is published.)

I have gained very valuable experience by working at the Secretariat, which is the “control tower” of our space strategy, and being involved as a member of the SDF Regular Personnel in the creation of space strategies in a wide range of fields, including security, diplomacy and industrial development, at this time when the importance of space development/utilization by the country is increasing. For the development of the Basic plan for Space Policy, we set up the Special Committee on Space Policy, consisting of key figures in a wide range of fields, to obtain their opinions. Receiving opinions from a large number of the members to the effect that space utilization in the defense field should be aggressively pursued in the future, I felt my heavy responsibility as one of the SDF Regular Personnel, who are in charge of homeland security.

I believe that the Ministry of Defense and the Self Defense Force will work actively for the development/utilization of outer space as the fourth space after land, sea and air.

We are in an age when ASDF personnel are chosen as astronaut candidates. As someone involved in our space policy, I will make my contribution to SDF activities, including those related to outer space, while doing my utmost for the steady progress of our space development/utilization measures.
I was an F-15 pilot and a test pilot of the Air Self-Defense Force. On February 25 of this year, I was chosen as an astronaut candidate of the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA). I will briefly describe the background of my aspiration to become an astronaut.

Born in a village in Nagano Prefecture, where you can see wonderful stars at night, I wanted to become an astronaut from the time I was in an elementary school. However, I went to the National Defense Academy to reduce the financial burden on my parents. After entering the academy, I aspired to become a pilot, shifting my dream from outer space to the sky. After graduating from the academy, I trained to become a pilot in the United States. The basis of my English proficiency was formed by this training in the United States. During this time training I came across a movie entitled “The Right Stuff.” In the movie an ace fighter pilot of the US Force became a test pilot and then went on to become an astronaut. I knew there is no such career path in Japan but I applied for a test pilot course, thinking that Japan might also select astronauts from among test pilots in the future. Duties of test pilots include testing new equipment and were very challenging but I had a fulfilling time.

I heard that JAXA would accept astronaut candidates from the general public, while I was doing desk work at the Ministry of Defense. I was unable to make a quick decision, as I thought my aspiration to become an astronaut could cause trouble for my workplace. But I finally decided to apply, with the backing of my family, believing this was the last opportunity for me to realize my dream. Studying English, mathematics, physics, general culture, etc. for the examination was challenging but it was a really good experience as I could make friends with many other people following their dreams.

My life in the Air Self-Defense Force was not easy, both in terms of my duties and training, but I could mature a little more as a person every time I cleared a hurdle. I am really grateful to the Air Self-Defense Force for educating me. At the time you are reading this column I will be working for JAXA and undergoing rigorous training to become an astronaut. I will work hard to live up to the expectations of the nation, remembering the rigorous training and duties I experienced in the Air Self-Defense Force.

Readers who aspire to become an astronaut! Let’s work hard because we can open the way by dedicating all our strength to fulfill our role at different times with our dreams and imagination always at the back of our minds.
Comments from SDF Personnel Member Engaged in Anti-piracy Maritime Patrol Operations off the Coast of Somali and in the Gulf of Aden

Petty Officer Second Class Makoto Hirota
The 22nd Flight Squadron, MSDF

I am engaged in the maritime security operations to respond to pirates off the Somali coast and in the Gulf of Aden. I am an air navigator of a SH-60K patrol helicopter, based at the destroyer Sazanami. During the first escort operation on March 30 of this year, I participated in a flight to escort merchant vessels.

I remember how I was thrilled when I looked over the five merchant vessels escorted by the destroyers “Samidare” and “Sazanami” in front and behind in the Gulf of Aden, a strategic point of marine traffic about 6,500 nautical miles (about 12,000km) from Japan.

One of the major roles of patrol helicopters in this operation is to report the situation around the site swiftly and accurately, making the most of their mobility. My principal duty as air navigator is to search for small targets that could be pirates, and report the information to the mother ship. I work as much as possible with my hands, eyes and ears, with the help of devices such as binoculars, radar, noctovision equipment and a digital camera. We sometimes address small vessels that come close to the fleet using a Long Range Acoustic Device (LRAD).

Thanks to hard training with such equipment, I have no qualms at all about the execution of my duties. Instead, I feel great pride and satisfaction in engaging in this duty to provide direct protection to the vessels important for Japan, as they move between Japan and Europe, the Middle East and the African region.

Sometimes during flights I receive messages such as “small targets that looks like pirates are approaching” on International VHF, so I always stay on my guard during my duty so that I can respond anytime. The temperature here is over 35℃ some days, making me drenched with sweat after a flight.

Flight operations are always demanding both physically and mentally, but I feel my fatigue vanish when I see an “Arigatou!” message from a merchant vessel sailing away after the escort operation.

The long-term operation in this marine area far from Japan and my family naturally makes me feel lonely, but I will complete the assigned task and relieve my loneliness by looking up at the beautiful stars in the sky above the Gulf of Aden. Furthermore, I will use the valuable experience gained in these operations for my future duties as helicopter navigator.