We are seeing an increasingly severe security environment surrounding Japan, as well as shifts in the global balance of power including in the Asia-Pacific region. Since the beginning of this year, North Korea has repeatedly conducted military provocations, such as a nuclear test and ballistic missile launches. Such military actions by North Korea constitute a serious and imminent threat to security not only of Japan but also of the region and the international community. At the same time, Chinese and Russian military forces have intensified their activities in sea areas and airspace surrounding Japan. In the East China Sea, Chinese government vessels have repeatedly intruded into Japanese territorial waters and have been engaged in activities that are seen as promoting the Chinese government’s own assertions regarding the Senkaku Islands. In the South China Sea, China has continued large-scale and rapid land reclamations, established outposts, and utilized them for military purposes. By unilaterally altering the status quo and attempting to turn it into a fait accompli, these actions heighten tension in the region. Turning eyes to overseas, we can see international terrorist organizations including ISIL have increasingly gained power and Japanese nationals have fallen victim to their activities, which means threats can easily cross national borders today and no country can safeguard its security on its own.

Against this backdrop, the Ministry of Defense (MOD) / the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) has a responsibility to assume any situations and take seamless responses in order to resolutely secure the lives, property, and freedom of the people as well as Japan’s territorial land, water, and airspace. The legislation for peace and security was passed in the Diet last year and entered into force this March. This legislation enables Japan to strengthen its ability to prevent wars from occurring, i.e. its deterrence, and implement seamless responses. To ensure that our deterrence functions adequately, it is essential that Japan continues to build a more effective Dynamic Joint Defense Force that is ready to respond to various situations appropriately.

The Japan-U.S. Alliance is the centerpiece of Japan’s security and plays a critical role as the cornerstone of the peace and prosperity of the Asia-Pacific region. As the security environment surrounding Japan becomes increasingly severe, it will become indispensable that Japan and the United States work together
more closely and deal with any circumstances seamlessly from peacetime to contingencies. The legislation has significantly deepened trust between the two countries and further strengthened the Alliance. Sending this message out to the world will undoubtedly enhance our deterrence and further ensure Japan’s security.

Our partnerships with other countries are also pivotal for security of Japan and for the peace and stability of the region. With an unprecedentedly increasing need for international cooperation in the fields of security and defense, the MOD/SDF is proactively engaged in visible activities under the banner of Proactive Contribution to Peace based on the principle of international cooperation, including defense cooperation and exchanges and international peace cooperation operations.

Domestically, many areas of Japan underwent devastating damages due to the heavy rain in the Kanto and Tohoku regions in September 2015 and the Kumamoto Earthquake in April 2016. The MOD/SDF deployed a number of personnel who worked tirelessly around the clock to rescue the lives of the affected people and to help rebuild their daily life. The SDF personnel’s commitment to saving lives while putting their own lives at risk provides reassurance to communities and has earned much praise and support of the Japanese people.

Public understanding and support are indispensable for the defense policy of Japan and the activities of the MOD/SDF. Additionally, it is greatly significant to maintain the transparency of Japanese defense policy for gaining other countries’ further understanding and trust in Japan.

In this year’s Defense of Japan, we tried to provide a clear explanation of the legislation for peace and security, including a column on this topic. In addition, we tried to make the MOD/SDF more familiar to the people by adding an opening article summarizing this past year’s activities of the MOD, and basic facts regarding the MOD/SDF as well as information on facilities and events at the end of the book. It is my sincere hope that this year’s Defense of Japan will be read by as many people as possible, and that they will deepen their understanding of, as well as agreement and sympathy with, the MOD/SDF.