Global Security Environment

The current global security environment has two aspects. Firstly, the United States, which remains the world’s most powerful nation, is thought to play an ongoing role in ensuring global peace and security. Meanwhile, due to change in the power balance caused by further advancement of China, India and other countries, and the relative change of the United States influence, the international community is becoming increasingly multi-polarized.

Secondly, globalization and rapidly advanced technological innovation have further expanded and deepened mutual dependence among countries. As a result, a conflict or other security issue in a country or region is likely to soon grow into a destabilizing factor that could affect the entire international community. In relation to this, the rapid spread of information communication networks, such as the Internet and social media that serve as a major factor behind globalization, has greatly expanded the ability of non-state actors to disseminate and mobilize their views and claims; and in the process increased their influence over nations and the international community. Examples include the explosive propagation or spread of individual criticism of nations or international terrorist groups disseminating their extremist views, leading in some cases to worldwide circulation.¹

Given this situation, emerging global security challenges include regional conflicts growing in complexity, international terrorism becoming more serious, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and securing the stable use of new domains such as maritime space, outer space, and cyber space.

(1) Regional Conflict and International Terrorism

There are underlying differences in the nature of conflicts occurring around the world. In the case of prolonged conflicts, it is believed there is a rising possibility that human rights violations, refugees, starvation, and poverty occurring as a result of conflict will affect a much broader area than the countries involved. Furthermore, climate change and competition to secure resources and energy could become more tangible, and cause regional disputes. They could become new factors that affect the global security environment.

Amidst this backdrop, in the Middle East and Africa, there are many examples where geographic blind spots without government control in vulnerable nations with unstable political situations and weak governance capabilities have become a hotbed for the activities of international terrorist organizations.²

Terrorist organizations are carrying out activities across national borders while obtaining personnel, weapons and financial resources by taking advantage of vulnerable border controls. Also, in European and North American countries, there is growing concern over the threat of terrorism posed by persons who sympathize with extremist thoughts propagated by international terrorist organizations or by persons returning to their home country after fighting in conflict zones. The extremist organization ISIL has repeatedly cited that Japanese nationals are a target of its terrorist attacks. Taking into account that Japanese nationals died in the terrorist attack on a restaurant in Dhaka, Bangladesh that occurred in July 2016, the threat of international terrorism must be considered a problem facing Japan, too.

In this manner, there is a growing risk that the impact of regional conflict and threat of terrorism will spread as a factor of instability affecting the entire international community, not just a single country or single region. It is important for the international community to review approaches to international frameworks and its involvement based on the character of each and to seek out appropriate responses. As for regional conflicts, the mission of UN peacekeeping operations has expanded to a wide range of fields including civilian and policing activities: supervision of disarmament, security force reforms, election and government monitoring, and humanitarian assistance for refugee repatriation. In particular, there is growing importance placed on missions for protecting civilians and women and for peace building. Additionally, there are examples in which multinational forces and regional institutions authorized by the UN Security Council are working to prevent conflict, maintain peace and build peace.

¹ Controlling such actions is becoming more difficult even for authoritarian states with strong control of their people and for the international community working to contain the activities of terrorist organizations. As a result, even authoritarian states have been forced to give more consideration than normal toward public opinion with regard to domestic governance and the management of national politics. Also, for the international community, problems that should be resolved become more complicated, making it even more difficult to address them.

² As noted above, the weakening of government structures can create a hotbed for the activities of international terrorist organizations and also make it more difficult to combat risks posed by the explosive spread and propagation of large-scale disasters or infectious disease.
In terms of international counterterrorism, there is growing importance for international cooperation due to the spread of activities by terrorist organizations across international borders. At present, in addition to the use of military means, the entire international community is working to block sources of financing for terrorist organizations and taking initiatives to prevent the international transfer of terrorists.

(2) Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction
The proliferation of WMDs, such as nuclear, biological, and chemical (NBC) weapons, and of ballistic missiles that serve as the means of delivery of WMDs is still viewed as a significant threat to the international community, including East Asia. As for chemical weapons, the Malaysian police announced that VX, a chemical whose production and use is banned under the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), was detected from the body of Kim Jong-nam following his assassination that occurred in Malaysia in February 2017. Additionally, U.K. Prime Minister Theresa May made a statement which says it is clear that Novichok, a Russian-made military nerve agent, was used. It is very likely that Russia is responsible for the attack, with regard to the attack on a former Russian intelligence agent that occurred in the United Kingdom in February 2017. Concerning the situation in Syria, in April 2017 the United States determined that the Assad regime used chemical weapons in an attack on a region controlled by anti-government forces in the south of Idlib Governorate in northwest Syria, and in response launched a missile strike on Shayrat Airbase, the base of the planes used in the Assad regime’s attack and which is believed to be housing chemical weapons. Furthermore, in April 2018 the United States, United Kingdom and France determined that the Assad regime used chemical weapons against civilians once again in Eastern Ghouta on the outskirts of Syria’s capital of Damascus, and in response they launched a missile strike on three chemical weapons-related facilities, demonstrating resolve to stop the use and proliferation of chemical weapons.

In addition, there are continuing concerns about the acquisition and use of WMDs by non-state actors, such as international terrorist organizations. In this regard, the international community continues to pursue efforts to counter terrorism activities that utilize nuclear materials and other radioactive substances.

(3) Maritime Domain
With regard to the maritime domain, which has been regarded as a foundation for supporting international trade, piracy acts have taken place in various parts of the world, and there have been cases where countries unilaterally assert their rights and take actions based on their own assertion that is inconsistent with the existing international order, thereby unduly infringing the freedom of navigation on the high seas and of overflight. China’s continued militarization such as large scale and rapid land reclamation in the South China Sea, and developing batteries and other military facilities and various kinds of infrastructure that can be used for military purposes constitutes acts that unilaterally change the status quo and further advances its efforts to create a fait accompli. In response to these situations, the international community has been taking various measures such as continuing to conduct antipiracy operations in relevant waters including off the coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden, collaborating to protect the existing international order based on law including a free and open maritime order, and implementing initiatives designed to avoid and prevent unintended consequences in the maritime domain and airspace.

(4) Cyberspace and Outer Space
Recently, securing the stable use of new domains such as outer space and cyberspace, in addition to the conventional domains of the ground, sea and air, has become an important challenge for the security of the international community. The further advancement of military science and technology along with significant advancements in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) has increased the dependence of social infrastructure and military activities on outer space and cyberspace. On the other hand, the development of anti-satellite weapons by countries and the diversification of cyber attacks with suspected government involvement have exacerbated the risks to the stable use of outer space and cyberspace. In recent years, countries are moving ahead with specific efforts aimed at reinforcing a nation’s ability to combat cyber attacks, including private sector companies, and acquiring the capabilities to monitor threats to space assets such as satellites. There are also moves seen in the international community to promote the rule of law in outer space and cyberspace by establishing certain codes of conduct.

(5) Technology
Rapid advancements in technological innovation are now spreading into military fields. Major powers such as the United States, China and Russia are believed to be focusing on research and development of precision guided technologies, unmanned technologies, artificial intelligence (AI) technologies, and stealth technologies,
among others. Such progress in military science and technology relies heavily on the development of civilian technologies. It is believed that the development and international transfer of civilian technologies will have a major impact on improvements in the military capabilities of each country. Meanwhile, countries without advanced technologies and non-state actors appear set to develop and acquire means for asymmetrical attack such as WMDs and cyber capabilities, along with obtaining through illicit means the technologies of developed countries. Such trends in the development of military technologies are believed to have a significant impact on the military strategies of each country and the power balance between countries.

As seen above, the international community today faces complex, diverse, and broad security challenges and destabilizing factors. Along with deterrence and handling of armed conflicts, the roles of military forces in responding to these challenges are becoming so diverse that they include a broad spectrum of activities from conflict prevention to reconstruction assistance, and military forces are now playing such important roles more frequently. Meanwhile, for military forces to play their roles, comprehensive responses are required that combine military capacity with other capacities such as diplomacy, law enforcement and justice, intelligence, and the economy.