The Ministry of Defense (MOD) / the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) is constantly committed to crisis management and takes on the noble mission of defending Japan’s independence, peace, and security and securing the lives and property of the Japanese people.

Looking at the security environment surrounding Japan, North Korea, repeatedly carried out nuclear tests and launched ballistic missiles through last year, and begun to engage in dialogue this year. Nevertheless, we cannot ignore the reality that North Korea still continues to possess and deploy several hundred Nodong missiles capable of reaching almost every part of Japan. In addressing the North Korean nuclear and missile issue, it is essential for the international community to remain united, following results at the U.S.-North Korea Summit Meeting held in June 2018, toward the realization of the dismantlement of all weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles of all ranges in a complete, verifiable, and irreversible manner. Japan needs to carefully monitor specific actions by North Korea.

China’s recent activities, including its rapid military modernization and enhancement of operational capabilities, its unilateral escalation of actions in areas around Japan, and with the lack of transparency in the military build-up, present a strong security concern for the region including Japan and the international community. In addition, Russia continues frequent activities around Japan. Furthermore, global security issues, including challenges emerging in new domains such as outer space and cyberspace, are broadening and diversifying.

Given these circumstances, the MOD/SDF must strengthen Japan’s defense capabilities and expand its role in order to fulfill our mission. For this purpose, we are currently reviewing the National Defense Program Guidelines and examining the next Medium-Term Defense Program to complete them by the end of this year under the instruction from Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Concerning this process, we will identify what defense capabilities are truly needed to protect the people, rather than simply extending the existing capabilities.
It is also necessary to further strengthen the Japan-U.S. Alliance. Since I was appointed as Defense Minister last year, I have been in close consultation with U.S. Secretary of Defense James Mattis and pursued close cooperation between Japan and the United States. Our two countries have closely coordinated our understanding and policies and taken united actions in responding to North Korea issues. We are striving to further reinforce the bonds of the Japan-U.S. Alliance and strengthen the deterrence and response capabilities of the Alliance. At the same time, initiatives to mitigate the impact of the bases on the local residents in Okinawa and other areas are important and we continue to listen sincerely to the local residents’ voices and make further efforts.

Japan must also continue to promote security cooperation with other countries. In recent years, we have steadily expanded a variety of cooperation, including bilateral/multilateral training, joint development of equipment, and capacity building assistance, with many other countries that share fundamental values and security interests. Japan intends to robustly promote strategic international defense cooperation as part of further commitment to peace and stability in the region and the international community from the standpoint of “Proactive Contribution to Peace” based on the principle of international cooperation.

While the MOD/SDF is steadily implementing a variety of measures in this way, individuals of the SDF, who diligently work day and night, despite the dangers, with abundant motivation and a strong sense of responsibility in difficult environments, such as posts on remote islands, radar sites, and on-board ships away from home, are obviously the ones who are carrying out these measures.

This year’s Defense White Paper explains the measures taken by the MOD/SDF in detail and the opening feature introduces the front-line SDF members, who assiduously and seriously carry out their duties as part of 24-hour, 365-day operations. By this, we aim to promote a wider understanding of how steady implementation of these measures and daily efforts of the SDF members contribute to the peaceful lives and securing of the Japanese people.

The MOD/SDF must gain support and trust of the Japanese people in order to fully exert our capabilities and fulfill our mission. It is sincerely regretted that issues related to document management and information disclosure have significantly affected the trust of the Japanese people in the MOD/SDF in the past two years. The MOD/SDF continues to vigorously strive to prevent the recurrence so that such issues never happen again.

Finally, we hope that many people will take the Defense White Paper in hand and deepen their understanding of the MOD/SDF and think about the SDF members who are carrying out their missions in various locations to protect our peaceful lives even at this moment.