April of this year marked the end of the Heisei era (the imperial era that lasted from 1989 through 2019). The Defense White Paper for the first year of the new Reiwa era introduces the history of the MOD/SDF during the Heisei era.

**Early Heisei period (1989–1997)**

### Fall of the Berlin Wall (1989)

The Berlin Wall, which had been a symbolic marker of the Cold War between the East and West, fell. Subsequently, the end of the Cold War was declared between the United States and the Soviet Union.

### Gulf War (1991)

Iraq invaded Kuwait. The multinational forces decided to use armed forces in order to evict Iraqi troops from Kuwait and restore peace and stability in the Gulf region, and the Gulf War started.

### Dispatch of minesweeper units to the Persian Gulf (1991)

After the Gulf War, a large number of mines laid by Iraqi troops remained in the Persian Gulf. In order to secure the safe navigation of Japanese vessels, a minesweeper unit of the Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) was dispatched. This was the SDF’s first international cooperation since its establishment.

### Relief operation for Rwandan refugees (1994)

The SDF engaged in such operations as medical care, disease control, water supply, and airlift in order to provide relief to refugees resulting from civil war in Rwanda. This was Japan’s first international humanitarian relief activity.

**Beginning of the Heisei era and the start of the post-Cold War world**

### PKO in Mozambique (1993–1995)

### PKO in the Golan Heights (1996–2013)
With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the Cold War, which lasted for more than 40 years, ended. The conventional structure of the East-West military confrontation centering on the United States and the Soviet Union was dissolved and the international situation took a significant turn. Under such circumstances, the SDF responded to large-scale disasters, such as the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, and also engaged in international peace cooperation activities, such as PKO activities in Cambodia. The SDF increased its reputation in and outside Japan and the roles of its defense capabilities expanded.

**Security environment and the SDF’s initiatives**

**Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake (1995)**
Up to about 19,000 SDF personnel per day engaged in disaster relief operations over a period of approximately 100 days from the occurrence of the earthquake. Based on the lessons learned through this activity, the disaster relief readiness was enhanced through measures including amendment of various laws and strengthening of coordination with local governments.

**Tokyo subway sarin gas attack (1995)**
An indiscriminate murder case using sarin gas in Tokyo subway stations and subway trains occurred. Chemical protection units of the GSDF were dispatched to detect and decontaminate the toxic gas at Kasumigaseki and Hibiya stations.

**Establishment of Special Action Committee on Okinawa (SACO) (1995)**
The Japanese and U.S. governments agreed to establish the SACO in order to discuss various issues concerning the facilities and areas of the United States Forces in Japan (USFJ) located in Okinawa Prefecture. SACO compiled the final report in 1996, and agreed to return approximately 21% of the facilities and areas of the USFJ located in Okinawa Prefecture at the time.

**Japan-U.S. Joint Declaration on Security (1996)**
The Japanese and U.S. governments had close discussions on the significance and roles of the post-Cold War Japan-U.S. Alliance, and announced the Japan-U.S. Joint Declaration on Security as the result of the discussions. In response to this, in 1997, the Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation providing for expanded cooperation to responses in situations in areas surrounding Japan (the 1997 Guidelines) were formulated.
Mid-Heisei period (1998–2007)

Ballistic missiles and international terrorism—heightening of new threats

North Korea’s ballistic missile firing (1998)

North Korea fired a ballistic missile (presumed to be Taepodong-1) without advance warning. A part of the missile flew over Japan and fell in to the Sanriku offshore waters. This fact revealed that North Korea had gained the technology to manufacture missiles capable of reaching every part of Japan.

Suspicious Boat Incidents off Noto Peninsula (1999)

In order to deal with two suspicious boats discovered in Japan’s territorial waters, an order for Maritime Security Operations was issued for the first time. JS destroyers gave orders to halt and fired warning shots, and P-3C aircraft dropped bombs as a warning. Later, the suspicious boats were concluded to be North Korea’s spy boats.

9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States (2001)

The 9/11 terrorist attacks that occurred in the United States in the wake of the 21st century produced a tremendous shock throughout the world.

Activities to support actions against terrorism (2001–2007)

In order to respond to the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States and to contribute to initiatives of the international community to prevent and eradicate international terrorism, the SDF’s replenishment ships and destroyers were dispatched. The dispatched units engaged in activities such as replenishing U.S. Navy vessels.

Activities for humanitarian and reconstruction assistance in Iraq (2003–2009)

The SDF was dispatched to Iraq following the collapse of the Hussein administration to provide relief for war victims and conduct reconstruction support activities, and engaged in activities such as providing medical care and water supply.
In the mid-Heisei era, dramatic changes occurred to Japan’s security environment. In particular, activities of international terrorist organizations became serious, as represented by the 9/11 terrorist attacks. In addition, weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles became proliferated more widely, and response to new threats and diverse situations posed challenges.

The SDF conducted replenishment activities on the Indian Ocean in order to deal with international terrorism as a member of the international community. The SDF also engaged in activities for humanitarian and reconstruction assistance in Iraq, and international peace cooperation activities came to be positioned as one of the SDF’s inherent duties along with the defense of Japan and the sustaining of public order.

In response to the threat of ballistic missiles, the SDF launched development of the Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) system.

As legislation necessary for responding to armed attacks against Japan, three laws related to emergency legislation, including the armed attack situation response law, which has the character of a fundamental law, were established in 2003, and seven laws related to emergency legislation, including civil protection law, were established in 2004.

In light of the increased proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles, Japan’s original ballistic missile defense system was put in place as a result of the start of deployment of Patriot PAC-3 units and the success in the Standard Missile (SM-3) launch tests by Aegis destroyers in 2007.

North Korea fired seven ballistic missiles into the Sea of Japan and announced that it had conducted its first nuclear test. In order to respond to such new threats, actions were taken to establish a response framework including development of the BMD system.
Counter-piracy operations (2009–present)

Piracy incidents were frequent and surging in waters off the coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden. In order to protect Japan-affiliated vessels from piracy, an order for Maritime Security Operations was issued, and MSDF destroyers and aircraft were dispatched. After that, the Anti-Piracy Measures Act was established, and not only Japanese vessels, but also foreign vessels became subject to protection.

Great East Japan Earthquake (2011)

The Great East Japan Earthquake caused devastating damage in a vast area centering on coastal areas in the Tohoku region. The MOD/SDF engaged in activities including lifesaving operations, livelihood support, and response to nuclear disaster, with more than 100,000 personnel at the peak.

At that time, the U.S. Forces conducted large-scale support activities, mobilizing up to about 16,000 personnel. (“Operation Tomodachi”)

Establishment of the National Security Council (2013)

The National Security Council was established as the control tower for Japan’s diplomatic and defense policies. In addition, Japan formulated a National Security Strategy for the first time as its basic policy concerning national security.

Implementation of capacity building assistance (2012)

The MOD/SDF started initiatives to provide capacity building assistance for facilitating the recipient country’s military to appropriately perform its roles for international peace and regional stability, and for creating a desirable security environment for Japan.

Developments concerning areas surrounding the Senkaku Islands becoming active (2012–present)

Following the Japanese government’s acquisition of ownership of three Senkaku islands, activities of Chinese military vessels and government vessels rapidly expanded and became active, such as Chinese government vessels intermittently intruding into Japan’s territorial waters near the Senkaku Islands.

The SDF’s operations continuing to increase, with military activities of surrounding countries becoming increasingly active and disasters of an unprecedented scale hitting Japan.
In the late Heisei era, Japan’s security environment became increasingly severe due to changes in the balance of power associated with the growth of China and India, and other reasons. Subsequently, various security issues and destabilizing factors became more visible and aggravated. As China’s military activities became active, and North Korea’s development of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles progressed, the SDF came to prepare against unexpected contingencies by conducting persistent warning and surveillance activities in the waters and airspace around Japan, and deploying ballistic missile defense units.

In addition, in order to respond to global issues that are difficult to address by a single country alone, the SDF also began to carry out international activities, such as dispatching counter-piracy units and providing capacity building assistance to other countries’ military. On the other hand, inside Japan, large-scale disasters, including the Great East Japan Earthquake, occurred in succession, and the SDF engaged in rescue operations and livelihood support for victims.

In December 2018, in order to respond to the new era, the “National Defense Program Guidelines for FY2019 and beyond (2018 NDPG)” was formulated as new guidelines defining how Japan’s national defense ought to be to form the foundation of Japan’s future.
Japan formulated its first NDPG in 1976. The 1976 NDPG adopted the concept of the Basic Defense Force, which aimed to maintain a minimum-necessary defense force as an independent nation, preventing a power vacuum that would destabilize the region surrounding Japan, under the Cold War structure.

Although the Cold War ended in the beginning of the Heisei era, the international situation was still fraught with factors of instability and uncertainty, and public expectations for international cooperation and disaster relief also grew. Based on such background, the 1995 NDPG were formulated.

While basically following the concept of the Basic Defense Force, the 1995 NDPG aimed to promote more rational, efficient, and compact defense capabilities, and to achieve enhancement of necessary functions and qualitative improvement of defense capabilities. In addition, “dealing with various contingencies such as major disasters” and “contributing to building a more stable security environment” were added to the roles of defense capabilities alongside the “defense of Japan.”

Regarding the National Defense Program Guidelines for FY1996 and beyond (1995 NDPG; approved by the Security Council and the Cabinet on November 28, 1995)

1995 NDPG:
In light of the post-Cold War situation, achieving more compact and higher-quality defense capabilities, and adding new roles

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The 2004 NDPG were formulated in view of the need to respond to the progress in proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, activities of international terrorist organizations and other new threats, and diverse situations, as represented by the 9/11 terrorist attacks against the United States and North Korea’s ballistic missile development.

The 2004 NDPG shifted from the conventional policy attaching importance to the deterrence effect to a policy emphasizing response capabilities. The Guidelines set forth that a “multifunctional, flexible, effective defense force” would be built in order to be able to effectively respond to new threats and diverse situations and engage in international peace cooperation activities independently and proactively. Meanwhile, the Guidelines maintained effective aspects of the concept of Basic Defense Capability.

Regarding the National Defense Program Guidelines for FY2005 and beyond (2004 NDPG; approved by the Security Council and the Cabinet on December 10, 2004)

2004 NDPG:

Shift from deterrence-oriented policy to a policy emphasizing response capabilities in order to deal with new threats and diverse situations

- The 2004 NDPG were formulated in view of the need to respond to the progress in proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, activities of international terrorist organizations and other new threats, and diverse situations, as represented by the 9/11 terrorist attacks against the United States and North Korea’s ballistic missile development.
- The 2004 NDPG shifted from the conventional policy attaching importance to the deterrence effect to a policy emphasizing response capabilities. The Guidelines set forth that a “multifunctional, flexible, effective defense force” would be built in order to be able to effectively respond to new threats and diverse situations and engage in international peace cooperation activities independently and proactively. Meanwhile, the Guidelines maintained effective aspects of the concept of Basic Defense Capability.

Roles and structure
The 2010 NDPG were formulated based on the new security environment in which changes were occurring to the global balance of power, with countries such as China gaining national strength, and in which the military situation in the region surrounding Japan, including the military movements of North Korea and China, were becoming ever more complicated.

Rather than the conventional concept of the Basic Defense Force, which emphasized deterrence based on the existence of the defense force, the 2010 NDPG aimed to develop a Dynamic Defense Force focusing on “dynamic deterrence” whereby the State’s will and high defense capabilities are indicated by conducting various activities in an appropriate and timely manner in peacetime. In that process, drastic efficiency improvement and rationalization were to be achieved through fundamental review of equipment, personnel, organization, deployment, etc.

Regarding the National Defense Program Guidelines for FY2011 and beyond (2010 NDPG; approved by the Security Council and the Cabinet on December 17, 2010)

**Developing a Dynamic Defense Force with focus on “operation” of defense capabilities based on the new security environment**

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The 2013 NDPG were formulated along with Japan’s first National Security Strategy in light of Japan’s increasingly severe security environment, with North Korea’s development of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles posing a serious and imminent threat, and China’s military activities expanding and intensifying, and based on the lessons learned from the experience of the Great East Japan Earthquake.

The 2013 NDPG aims to build a Dynamic Joint Defense Force, which enables conducting activities to be seamless as well as dynamic and adapting to situations as they demand through joint operations, by developing defense capabilities adequate both in quantity and quality that underpin various activities, such as securing maritime supremacy and air superiority, and by also enhancing the logistic support foundation.

Regarding the National Defense Program Guidelines for FY2014 and beyond (2013 NDPG; approved by the National Security Council and the Cabinet on December 17, 2013)

Developing dynamic defense capabilities through joint operations, in light of the increasingly severe security environment

- The 2013 NDPG were formulated along with Japan’s first National Security Strategy in light of Japan’s increasingly severe security environment, with North Korea’s development of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles posing a serious and imminent threat, and China’s military activities expanding and intensifying, and based on the lessons learned from the experience of the Great East Japan Earthquake.

- The 2013 NDPG aims to build a Dynamic Joint Defense Force, which enables conducting activities to be seamless as well as dynamic and adapting to situations as they demand through joint operations, by developing defense capabilities adequate both in quantity and quality that underpin various activities, such as securing maritime supremacy and air superiority, and by also enhancing the logistic support foundation.

Establishment of a security unit and surface-to-ship missile units on Amami Oshima Island, and relocation of the surface-to-air missile units (March 2019)

Reorganization into rapid deployment divisions/brigades; introduction of mobile combat vehicles (starting in March 2018)

Introduction of long-endurance unmanned aerial vehicle Global Hawk (to be deployed in FY2021) (photo: a model of the same type)

Establishment of the Acquisition, Technology and Logistics Agency (October 2015)

Establishment of the Ground Component Command (March 2018)

Introduction of new destroyers (to enter into service in FY2021)