



# **Policy Recommendation on Enhancing the Foundation for Human Resource Base of Defense Capabilities**

May 2025

Sasakawa Peace Foundation  
Security Strategy Studies Project

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# List of Proposers

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# Introduction

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On April 4, 2024, the inaugural meeting of the Security Strategy Studies Project (hereinafter referred to as the “Project”) was convened with a total of nine members, including the staff of the Secretariat, chaired by former Administrative Vice-Minister of Defense Tetsuro Kuroe. Since then, a total of 13 meetings of the Project have been organized to hold debates.

In order to respond to the most severe and complex security environment since World War II, including Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, China’s unilateral changes to the status quo by force and use of economic coercion, and North Korea’s reinforcement of its nuclear capabilities and rapid development of missile-related technologies, the government decided to formulate the so-called Three Strategic Documents, including the National Security Strategy and two more, in December 2022 to fundamentally reinforce its defense capabilities.

However, even after the formulation of the Three Strategic Documents, the international situation has continued to evolve significantly. In addition to the ongoing tensions between the United States and China, the war between Russia and Ukraine has entered its fourth year. During this time, North Korea has sent troops to the battlefield, underscoring the rapidly strengthening ties between Russia and North Korea. Furthermore, under the “Trump 2.0” administration, the United States has pursued a foreign policy that prioritizes its own economic interests while placing less emphasis on alliances and multilateral cooperation. This shift has contributed to growing instability within the international community. Unfortunately, we can no longer expect the United States to play the stabilizing role it once did in global affairs.

In order to prevent conflicts and protect Japan’s peace and security in this kind of severe security environment, Japan has no choice but to accelerate the measures presented in the Three Strategic Documents and to hasten the reinforcement of Japan’s defense capabilities.

For now, the United States continues to regard China as its primary strategic competitor. Nevertheless, it remains essential for Japan to strengthen its defense capabilities—not only to enhance its own security, but also to help maintain the continuity of U.S. engagement in the Northeast Asia region over the long term.

As part of efforts to strengthen Japan’s defense capabilities, the Three Strategic Documents set forth the reinforcement of the human resource base to ensure that Self-Defense Forces (SDF) personnel—who form the core of these capabilities—can fully demonstrate their skills and fulfill their roles effectively. Despite increased defense expenditure and the development of necessary defense equipment, the capabilities of the SDF cannot be fully exercised if there is a shortage of essential personnel. In particular, in recent years, a situation in which the number of SDF personnel hired has not met the recruitment target number has become normalized.

In response to these challenges, the Ministerial Meeting on Improving the Treatment and Working Environments and Establishing New Lifetime Career Plans of Self-Defense Forces Personnel chaired by the Prime Minister (hereinafter referred to as the “Ministerial Meeting”) was established in October 2024. In December of the same year, the Basic Policy on Improving the Treatment and Working Environments and Establishing New Lifetime Career Plans of Self-Defense Forces Personnel (hereinafter referred to as the “Basic Policy”) was decided. Currently, there are ongoing efforts to improve the treatment of SDF personnel and reverse the recruitment trend at a rapid pace.

Turning our attention to the domestic situation, Japan is facing rapidly progressing population decline. According to the figures of the Vital Statistics published by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, the number of births in 2024 was approximately 686,000, which is more than 5% decrease from the previous year. Despite various efforts by both the public and private sectors, there is currently no prospect that the demographic situation will improve. At present, the majority of new recruits to the SDF are young people aged 18. Even though this age group still numbers over one million, the SDF continues to face challenges in securing personnel due to intense competition from private sector companies and other organizations.

As the recruitment source itself decreases at an accelerating pace, it would be overly optimistic to assume that the required personnel can be secured merely by improving their treatment. Furthermore, it is not viable to expect that the level of improvement in treatment comparable to that of private sector companies can be sustained over the long term.

It is commendable that, in contrast to the past, the Ministry of Defense and the entire government are collaborating to enhance the treatment of SDF personnel and reverse the recruitment trends. However, in order to build resilient SDF that can withstand a serious population decline that has never been experienced before, we must take in-depth measures not constrained by existing frameworks and systems.

In view of these developments and the resulting sense of crisis, this Project discussed and affirmed the need to reconsider the role of SDF personnel in the nation and society, as a premise for its recommendations. This reconsideration was based on the critical importance of their duty—national defense, which underpins the very existence of the state—and their unique status as the only public servants who have sworn an oath to risk their lives in service.

Next, we defined the purpose of these recommendations as focusing on medium- to long-term issues rather than short-term ones and deriving appropriate responses. To examine these issues systematically and comprehensively, we began by listing, organizing, and classifying the major points of contention. We then engaged in deeper discussion on each of these points. Finally, from the three perspectives of the state of the nation, public awareness, and reform of the SDF, we explored these issues using bold ideas unconstrained by existing frameworks.

To gain insights into how other countries are strengthening the human resource bases of their defense capabilities, we conducted overseas field research in the United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, and Singapore, and incorporated the findings into our deliberations.

Based on the above, we have compiled eight policy recommendations—presented here as the interim report of this Project—for both the government and the public. We sincerely hope that these recommendations will contribute meaningfully to the genuine strengthening of Japan’s human resource base of its defense capabilities.



## Sustained Government-Wide Deliberation Including the Strengthening of Social Infrastructure

**The government's foremost responsibility is to resolutely protect the peace and independence of Japan, the lives and peaceful livelihood of its nationals, and its territory, territorial waters, and airspace —this is the foundation of national security. Amid a rapidly declining birthrate, it is essential for the government, in a truly all-of-government-wide effort, continuously advance comprehensive measures across various sectors to ensure the long-term, stable recruitment and retention of SDF personnel, who are the backbone of Japan's defense capabilities.**

Regarding the human resource base of the SDF, the Public Opinion Survey on the Japan Self-Defense Forces and Defense Issues (November 2022 Survey) implemented by the Cabinet Office (hereinafter referred to as the “Public Opinion Survey”) found that 90% of citizens currently have a favorable impression of the SDF. Despite this, in FY2023, the SDF was only able to recruit approximately 10,000 of the approximately 20,000 people they sought to recruit. The chronic shortage of SDF personnel continues, with approximately 90% of positions filled.

In light of this critical situation, and with the understanding that “at a time when Japan faces the most severe and complex security environment since World War II, it is necessary to continue to stably secure outstanding SDF personnel in order to truly realize fundamental reinforcement of Japan's defense capabilities” (from the Basic Policy), the Ministerial Meeting was inaugurated in October 2024. The Ministerial Meeting considered three items: improving the treatment of SDF personnel, improving their living and working environments, and establishing new lifetime career plans. The outcomes of these considerations were reflected in the FY2025 draft budget.

Furthermore, the Basic Policy presented the following key directions for future implementation: (i) promptly advancing the necessary legal and institutional amendments and gradually incorporating feasible items into the FY2026 budget allocation requests; (ii) verifying the effects during FY2025 and conducting follow-up evaluations annually thereafter; and (iii) continuously considering new measures based on the results of these evaluations. These were achieved expeditiously due to the implementation of a government-wide consideration framework under the leadership of the Prime Minister, which enabled cross-ministerial and agency coordination.

The environment surrounding Japan's human resource base of defense capabilities is forecast to become more challenging in the future, due to a decline in the population of people suitable for recruitment, a result of the falling birthrate. It is also due to the arrival of a society facing serious labor shortages and changes in the citizens' attitudes toward work. It is essential not to treat the current Ministerial Meeting as a one-off initiative, but rather to broaden the scope of items under consideration and ensure that the government as a whole continues to engage proactively and systematically in strengthening the human resource base of Japan's defense capabilities over the long term.



In addition to the aforementioned three points, one particularly important item for expansion is the reinforcement of the social infrastructure that supports the SDF. According to the Public Opinion Survey, 4.7% of respondents answered the question “What would you do if Japan was invaded by a foreign country?” with “I would volunteer for the SDF.” Furthermore, in the World Values Survey (7th survey, 2017–2022), which surveys the values and other views of the citizens of dozens of countries based on a common questionnaire for all of the countries, in response to the question “Of course, we all hope that there will not be another war, but if it were to come to that, would you be willing to fight for your country?,” only 13.2% of Japanese respondents answered 'yes', the lowest among the surveyed countries (Vietnam was highest at 96.4%, China scored 88.6%, and the United States scored 59.6%).

While the origins of these survey results are likely multifaceted, including a long-standing aversion to military affairs since World War II, the positioning of the SDF in the Constitution, insufficient education concerning security and the prevalence of individualism, these results reflect the current state of the social infrastructure supporting the SDF.

To reinforce Japan’s human resource base of defense capabilities, it is crucial to cultivate a social infrastructure in which national defense and the significance of the SDF are broadly understood and respected by the public. Such a foundation must embody a societal attitude that honors public service and those who choose to serve in the SDF, enabling SDF personnel to perform their duties with pride and dignity.

Under a firm national resolve to “stably and reliably secure high-quality SDF personnel essential for national defense” a broad, cross-ministerial effort is strongly required. This effort must include verifying the outcomes of each measure, and, in cases where the intended effects are not achieved, analyzing the underlying causes and deepening deliberations until concrete results are realized. The decisive implementation of these measures is strongly required.

## Reacknowledgement of the Unique Nature of Self-Defense Forces (SDF) Personnel

**SDF personnel are subject to a wide variety of constraints that differ from those of employees in the private sector or other public servants. They are also engaged in dangerous and difficult duties that pose a serious risk to their lives. It is imperative for both the executive and legislative branches of government to accurately reacknowledge the unique nature of the duties performed by SDF personnel. They must ensure that the public is thoroughly informed about these duties, and that appropriate honor and sufficient compensation are provided in recognition of the unique constraints and life-risking nature of their duties.**

While the SDF's primary mission is, needless to say, the defense of Japan, it is also inherently responsible for vigilance and surveillance in the sea areas and airspace surrounding the country. In addition, it plays a vital role in protecting the lives and property of Japanese nationals during various emergency situations, including earthquakes, typhoons, floods, wildfires, and pandemics. The more challenging the situation, the greater the expectations placed on the SDF, owing to its prominent level of expertise and resilient organizational strength. At the same time, as a force serving the public interest by protecting citizens and society, the SDF is expected to demonstrate a spirit of self-sacrifice and selflessness.

This commitment is underpinned by Article 52 of the Self-Defense Forces Act, which stipulates that SDF personnel must “face any situation without regard for danger and work to fulfill their duties themselves, thereby meeting the trust placed in them by the people.” This provision defines the core spirit of service, and SDF personnel are legally required to swear an oath to uphold it. Furthermore, Article 56 of the Act stipulates that “SDF personnel... must not avoid danger or responsibility in the course of their duties or leave their duties without the permission from a superior.” In other words, SDF personnel are duty-bound to fulfill their responsibilities even at the risk of losing their lives. Even though the SDF has never engaged in combat in the 70 years since their establishment, more than 2,100 personnel have died in the line of duty.

In addition, the need for SDF personnel to respond promptly to emergent situations necessitates their constant readiness to perform their duties. Accordingly, as a general rule, personnel with the rank of Sergeant Major (Japan Ground Self-Defense Force), Chief Petty Officer (Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force), or Senior Master Sergeant (Japan Air Self-Defense Force) or lower are required to live in barracks, and warship crew members are obligated to live on board the ship (Articles 54 and 55 of the Act).

Furthermore, when a member of the SDF applies for retirement, the application is not automatically approved. If it is deemed that retirement will significantly hinder the SDF's mission, the retirement may be withheld for a certain period, and the members of SDF personnel will be required to remain in their current role (Article 40 of the Act).

Fundamentally, because the duties of SDF personnel generally require strong physical strength, the retirement age is set lower than that of employees of private sector companies and other public servants, at 55 to 60 years old, depending on the rank. This leads to a situation where SDF personnel have a long retirement life, which complicates the development of lifetime career plans.

Not only SDF personnel but also their families are subject to numerous constraints in their daily lives. The workplaces, especially those of SDF officers, are geographically dispersed throughout the country, which often requires families to relocate or live apart from the officers whenever they are reassigned. This frequently has a detrimental effect on the education of their children and the careers of their spouses.

In addition to these constraints, the SDF is the only group in Japanese society that is permitted to use highly destructive weapons. Consequently, SDF personnel are entrusted with significant responsibilities and held to stringent disciplinary standards. For instance, they are obligated to adhere strictly to the directives issued by their superiors (Article 57 of the Act), to uphold their dignity at all times, and to refrain from any actions that could bring discredit to their organization (Article 58 of the Act).

Naturally, SDF personnel are not permitted to form labor unions or negotiate their salaries (Article 64 of the Act). Political activities are also subject to restrictions (Article 61 of the Act), and a strict obligation to prioritize duty is imposed (Article 60 of the Act).

Japan imposes numerous stringent constraints on SDF personnel, as outlined here, and demands that they safeguard the lives and property of citizens and the nation's sovereignty, irrespective of the risks, in the event of contingencies. Both the executive and legislative branches of government must reckon with this reality and ensure that the public is properly informed. Given these circumstances, it is only natural to grant SDF personnel the honor and compensation commensurate with the severity of the constraints and the demanding nature of their duties.

The defense of the country and responses to various contingencies are vital responsibilities that are indispensable for the survival of the country. These roles are, quite naturally, regarded as both profoundly meaningful and inherently noble. However, if the current outdated organizational practices continue, which relies solely on the selfless devotion and personal sacrifice of individual SDF members without providing adequate honor or compensation, the sustainability of the organization will be jeopardized, and it may face a crisis of collapse in the near future. Before this occurs, both the executive and legislative branches of government must urgently implement fundamental reforms measures immediately.

## Improvement of the Treatment of SDF Personnel

**After reacknowledging the unique nature of SDF personnel, we identify inadequacies in the current system concerning honors, appropriate treatment for SDF members, and support for their families. These include shortcomings in existing decoration systems—particularly those applicable to active-duty personnel—as well as in benefit programs. Based on these findings, we propose key issues and measures for improvement.**

Given the unique nature of SDF personnel (see Recommendation 2), it is necessary to consider their treatment throughout their entire career—from recruitment, hiring, education and training, unit operations and management, living and working conditions, retirement, and post-retirement—encompassing the entire lifecycle from entry to active duty to exit. This includes salaries, allowances, living and working conditions, pensions, decorations, etc..

Therefore, the government and the Ministry of Defense are working to improve treatment as part of strengthening the human resource base of Japan’s defense capabilities, as outlined in the Basic Policy and other policies. Specific measures are as detailed in Reference 1 to 3 at the end of this Recommendation, and the early realization of these is essential.

In this recommendation, in addition to the measures presented in the Basic Policy and other policies, after reacknowledging the unique nature of SDF personnel, we identify inadequacies in the current system concerning honors, appropriate treatment for SDF members, and support for their families. These include shortcomings in existing decoration systems—particularly those applicable to active-duty personnel—as well as in benefit programs. Based on these findings, we propose key issues and measures for improvement.

### **(1) Consideration of Establishing a National Compensation Pension System (tentative name) (Example: a three-tiered pension system for SDF personnel)**

As stated in Recommendation 2 “Reacknowledgement of the Unique Nature of SDF Personnel,” special post-retirement treatment for SDF personnel entrusted with national defense must be considered. In the case of the United States military personnel, the retirement benefits include defined benefit plan (fully funded by the government), a defined contribution plan (jointly funded by employer and employee with tax advantages), and the Social Security benefit system (the so-called National Pension). Furthermore, in overseas field research conducted by this Project, similar military pension systems were confirmed in the United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, and Singapore.

In contrast, Japan currently lacks a system that provides comparable benefits for SDF personnel. In light of this situation, and in addition to mitigating the income disadvantages caused by early retirement, we propose the establishment of a National Compensation Pension System (tentative name) — for example, a three-tiered pension system in which the third tier funded by the government, supplementing the Employees' Pension Insurance and National Pension— as compensation for the demanding duties and strict obligations of SDF personnel.

## **(2) Reconsideration of Systems Necessary for Contingencies**

Many measures to improve the treatment of active-duty SDF personnel in order to maintain their fortitude have been considered and are being promoted under the Basic Policy and other policies. However, the fundamental purpose of reinforcing the human resource base of Japan's defense capabilities is deterrence and response for national defense. Therefore, in addition to these measures and in light of the current security situation, it is necessary to immediately begin considering preparations for systems required in contingencies. This includes the concrete implementation of appropriate “basic allowances for defense mobilization” and “special work allowances for defense mobilization” in contingencies, a reconsideration of decoration systems for active-duty personnel, and a review of pension schemes for injured SDF members and for the bereaved families of those who have died in the line of duty, along with other necessary institutional preparations.

## **(3) Systemization of Welfare Support for the Families of SDF Personnel in Peacetime and Contingencies**

SDF personnel perform duties of a unique nature, engaging in dangerous and difficult tasks under severe constraints without regard for their own lives. Accordingly, welfare support for their families is also of critical importance.

From the perspective of battlefield psychology, it is said that soldiers with stable and happy families demonstrate greater fortitude. In other words, for SDF personnel to maintain their strength and resilience, it is essential to establish a system in which the government provides protection not only for SDF personnel themselves but also their families — both in peacetime and contingencies —so that they can serve with peace of mind. Put differently, family support must be recognized as part of the fighting force.

Contingency-related systems include compensation for the bereaved families of SDF personnel who have died in the line of duty (see item (2) of this Recommendation). However, to maintain the fortitude of SDF personnel, it is necessary to establish a support system for their families that is on par with the systems institutionalized for military families in the United States and other countries. Furthermore, even in peacetime, Japan must reconsider welfare support for the families of SDF personnel in a manner suited for its societal conditions, living environment, and specific needs. This

should be informed by overseas examples such as medical compensation and welfare systems for military personnel and their families — for instance, the PX system in the United States (Post Exchange: on-base and on-board stores offering daily necessities at low prices), and the free train fares for military personnel returning home to their families in Germany and South Korea.

#### **(4) Education that Enhances Individual Career Development by Leveraging the Strengths of Unit-Based Education**

In FY2023, the recruitment rate for SDF personnel (the number hired relative to the planned recruitment target) fell to a record low of approximately 50%, with only around 10,000 recruited out of a planned 20,000. While various recruitment and hiring initiatives are outlined in the Basic Policy and other policies (see Reference 1), further utilization and enhancement of unit-based education is a key area for improvement.

Recruitment difficulties for military personnel are a common challenge in many countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Australia. In these contexts, military education and work experience are often regarded as career assets, contributing positively to recruitment efforts. For instance, in the United Kingdom, most companies prioritize hiring individuals who can contribute immediately, resulting in limited opportunities for new graduates. In contrast, the military remains one of the few institutions that recruits new graduates, offering structured training in social etiquette, physical fitness, and technical skills. These opportunities make military service appealing beyond financial incentives.

Currently, the SDF provides a short-term training period of approximately three months for enlisted personnel. However, this training is primarily focused on developing military-specific competencies and does not necessarily incorporate broader education aimed at cultivating general professional skills or preparing individuals for life and employment after leaving the service.

By expanding post-enlistment education to include foundational skills required as working professionals—such as basic professional conduct, physical conditioning, and specialized training in areas like artificial intelligence (AI) and cybersecurity—the SDF can enhance its appeal to potential recruits while simultaneously strengthening unit capabilities. Moreover, making unit-based education more attractive could encourage reenlistment and increase applications from the private sector. If individuals who have undergone SDF training continue to contribute as the SDF Reserve Personnel after retirement, this would further reinforce the organizational structure and resilience of the SDF.

**Reference 1: Measures Specified in the Basic Policy and Related Policies Concerning Recruitment and Hiring**

According to the Basic Policy and related government policies, a series of measures have been outlined to address the critical recruitment challenges and to attract a broader range of personnel, including enlisted members. These proposals include abolishing the status of SDF personnel candidate and introducing a new fixed-term enlisted position, in which individuals will be hired as full SDF members from the outset (during FY2026) ; establishing a Designated Place Living Adjustment Allowance (tentative name) to support personnel adapting to barracks life; increasing the lump-sum allowance for enlisted personnel; and expanding education support benefits and the SDF Scholarship Program (all during FY2025).

In addition, efforts to strengthen recruitment outreach and public relations activities to promote the recruitment of SDF personnel include enhancing the student loan program, digitizing and expanding online recruitment communications and promoting collaboration with local governments to improve recruitment efforts. Furthermore, a new specific-term SDF personnel system will be established to recruit highly skilled professionals in specialized fields such as space and cybersecurity.

**Reference 2: Measures Specified in the Basic Policy and Related Policies Concerning Active-Duty SDF Personnel**

According to the Basic Policy and related government policies, a wide range of measures have been outlined to maintain the operational readiness of active-duty SDF personnel through improved treatment and working conditions. These measures aim to enhance the attractiveness of the profession—including in terms of treatment and working conditions—and include the revision of salaries and allowances; promotion of private living quarters within barracks; improvement of living and working environments for naval crew members; enhancement of accommodation facilities; development of communication infrastructure; improved access to bases and camps located in areas with limited public transportation; and the enhancement of cyber education.

In addition to these efforts to improve the appeal of the profession, other initiatives include reducing required personnel numbers by accelerating the introduction of AI, labor-saving technologies, and unmanned equipment; improving the treatment of personnel on long-term assignments; supporting the balance between work and childcare or nursing care; promoting the active participation of women; enhancing systems related to clothing, food services, and health management; reviewing the system of honors and privileges to appropriately recognize achievements; reducing mid-career resignations; strengthening vocational training for post-retirement employment; securing civilian staff, technical experts, and engineers; utilizing external resources; considering the extension of the retirement age; and promoting the reappointment of retired SDF personnel.

**Reference 3: Measures Specified in the Basic Policy and Related Policies Concerning Retirement and Post-Retirement Support**

According to the Basic Policy and related government policies, a range of measures have been outlined concerning retirement and post-retirement support for SDF personnel. These measures include enhancing vocational training for reemployment, expanding the range of reemployment opportunities, and providing reemployment support up to the age of 65—not limited to the time of separation from service.

Additional measures include improving the treatment of the SDF Reserve Personnel and others, reviewing the system of decorations and honors to appropriately recognize achievements—such as expanding eligibility to individuals who previously had no opportunity to receive awards while living—and reassessing the level of government benefits provided after early mandatory retirement, including raising the benefit level for early retirees.

Further initiatives include utilizing retired SDF personnel as external resources, and implementing policies to ensure a stable supply of reappointed personnel, including expanding the scope of reappointment to those who have temporarily left service after reaching mandatory retirement age.



## Organizational Reform of the SDF to Overcome the Era of Population Decline

**In order to overcome the era of a rapidly declining population and to build robust defense capabilities for Japan into the future, it is essential to implement organizational reforms. These reforms must be aligned with effective response to future warfare, adaptable to evolving environmental factors, including advancements in science and technology, an expanded operational scope through military-civilian integration, and the evolving attitudes of citizens toward work.**

Currently, Japan is undertaking a fundamental reinforcement of its defense capabilities based on the Three Strategic Documents formulated in December 2022, including the National Security Strategy, in order to fully protect the lives and peaceful living of its citizens in the most severe and complex security environment since World War II. In building its defense capabilities, Japan is guided by the concept of “focusing on the capabilities of opponents and promoting responses to new ways of warfare,” and plans to prioritize seven key areas, including stand-off defense capabilities, integrated air and missile defense capabilities, unmanned defense capabilities, and cross-domain operation capabilities, and to possess counterstrike capabilities.

Going forward, the SDF will be required to respond to emerging new forms of warfare, including large-scale missile attacks using ballistic and cruise missiles; asymmetric attacks in space, cyber, and electromagnetic domains or via unmanned aircraft or other methods; and hybrid warfare, including information warfare. In addition, new operational demands are expected for the newly established JSDF Joint Operations Command (JJOC).

In the future, in the context of the rapidly declining birthrate and the arrival of a society with serious workforce shortages, the SDF will be required to build a structure which can satisfy the above growing defense requirements. From this perspective, three key areas of reform are necessary:

### **(1) Reorganizing the SDF into a Force Specialized in Missions That Only SDF Personnel Can Perform**

Modern warfare is increasingly characterized by the blurring of boundaries between military and non-military domains. The land, sea, and air domains can be broadly divided into combat and combat-support functions. Many operations within the latter exist can be transferred to the private sector by leveraging external capabilities and retired SDF personnel, including the SDF Reserve Personnel. Military-civilian integration is particularly evident in emerging domains such as space and cyber, as well as in areas like information warfare. This is equally applicable to training areas for SDF personnel's specialized skills and qualifications, and to base and garrison operations.

The SDF operations should be clearly categorized into those that require active-duty personnel and those that can be managed by external or retired personnel. The latter should be actively outsourced to the private sector, allowing personnel resources to be reallocated to meet new defense demands. To facilitate this transition, it is essential to introduce a security clearance system and revise relevant laws and regulations to ensure the ability to perform duties during contingencies, including compensation framework.

## **(2) Addressing Population Decline Through the Introduction of AI and Labor-Saving and Unmanned Defense Equipment**

From the JJOC to frontline units, command and staff activities must ensure decision-making superiority to respond swiftly to changing situations and maximize operational effectiveness. In this context, the use of AI is of critical importance. AI is also effective in supporting a wide range of peacetime operations. The introduction of labor-saving and unmanned defense equipment – highlighted as a key lesson from the Russia-Ukraine war—can embody advanced forms of warfare and serve as a practical response to demographic decline.

## **(3) Introducing a Personnel Development System That Actively Utilizes Talented Human Resources from the Private Sector**

In domains such as space and cyber, military-civilian integration is advancing, and there is strong compatibility with private-sector expertise in functional areas such as information, communications, satellites, transportation, hygiene, logistics, and maintenance. Currently, job mobility is particularly high among young people, who tend to seek motivation, a sense of growth, and career development.

The SDF is a highly skilled organization with unique responsibilities in national defense. By combining initiatives such as job-focused employment and improved treatment, the SDF is well-positioned to appeal to the career preferences of younger generations and attract talented individuals from the private sector. This approach also facilitates the active incorporation of private-sector expertise.

For individuals who have left the SDF mid-career, gained experience in the private sector, and wish to re-enlist, their experience should be appropriately evaluated and reflected in their treatment upon reappointment. Traditionally, the SDF has recruited new graduates from high schools and universities and managed personnel development from enlistment to retirement. Going forward, recruitment from the private sector should be actively promoted across all ranks and functional areas.



## Bold Revision of the SDF Reserve Personnel Systems

**The reservist systems in the militaries of foreign countries serve to secure personnel depth in contingencies and to supplement active-duty forces during peacetime. A similar role is expected of the SDF Reserve Personnel systems <sup>(Note)</sup>. However, Japan’s valuable human defense resources are not being fully utilized under the current framework, and bold reform is urgently needed.**

The National Defense Strategy, which was approved by the Cabinet in December 2022, emphasized that SDF personnel form the core of Japan’s defense capabilities, while stating that “MOD/SDF will secure necessary SDF personnel without increasing capacity.” However, in FY 2023, only about 10,000 SDF personnel were recruited—half of the planned 20,000—continuing a long-standing trend of under-enrollment.

With Japan’s rapidly accelerating decline in birthrate, the population eligible for recruitment (ages 18–32) is projected to shrink to approximately 60% of its current size within 30 years. Even with improved working conditions, sustaining the current SDF structure will become increasingly difficult.

Amid growing societal expectations for older adults to remain active, and with the Act on Stabilization of Employment of Elderly Persons mandating stable employment up to age 65, Japan should boldly reform its SDF Reserve Personnel systems, following the example of reservist models in other countries. Leveraging retired SDF personnel is essential—not only in contingencies, but also, of course, in peacetime operations.

The SDF Reserve Personnel system was introduced simultaneously with the establishment of the SDF in 1954 to ensure workforce during emergencies. Subsequently, the SDF Ready Reserve Personnel system was introduced in FY1997 alongside the reduction in the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force. In FY2001, the Candidates for SDF Reserve Personnel system was introduced to utilize personnel with specialized skills in the civilian sector (hereinafter collectively referred to as “the SDF Reserve Personnel and others”, referring to individuals registered under these systems).

However, in recent years, the staffing rate for the SDF Reserve Personnel—authorized at 47,900—has remained below 70%. In particular, the SDF Ready Reserve Personnel —tasked with reinforcing frontline units— have reached only around 50% of their designated strength.

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(Note) The term “SDF Reserve Personnel systems” refers to the three institutional frameworks: the SDF Reserve Personnel system, the SDF Ready Reserve Personnel system, and the Candidates for SDF Reserve Personnel system.

Despite being the only group capable of rapidly and systematically supplementing active-duty forces, the SDF Reserve Personnel and others are currently unable to fulfill this role effectively. To fully leverage the SDF Reserve Personnel and others as a critical component of Japan's human defense resources, retired SDF personnel—including those who left mid-career after serving for a certain period—should be recognized as valuable assets in peacetime as well. A system should be considered in which, as a general principle, retired SDF personnel—including those who left mid-career—serve as SDF Reserve Personnel and others for a certain period following their retirement, supporting SDF operations including those of frontline units.

To achieve this, it is important to consider the following three points:

### **(1) Enhancing the Social Recognition of the SDF Reserve Personnel and Others**

In order for retired SDF personnel to feel assured and motivated to volunteer, public attitudes toward the SDF Reserve Personnel systems must be reformed. The main reason for the small number of volunteers is the difficulty of balancing civilian employment with training obligations. While many retired SDF personnel are reemployed in the private sector, they often face insufficient understanding from their employers regarding their responsibilities as the SDF Reserve Personnel and others. As a result, many struggle to coordinate their training schedules with regular work duties.

A shift in corporate and societal attitudes is urgently needed. Government and industry must jointly promote the view that the SDF Reserve Personnel and others are “representatives fulfilling national duties.” In parallel, the government should introduce clear incentives—such as financial compensation and tax benefits—for employers supporting the SDF Reserve Personnel and others.

### **(2) Reforming Employment Models for the SDF Reserve Personnel and Others**

Japan's labor market is increasingly embracing diverse work styles beyond full-time permanent employment, accompanied by growing mobility and fluidity in human resources. Reflecting this shift, the SDF Reserve Personnel systems should offer flexible employment formats—such as fixed-term or part-time roles—that enable the SDF Reserve Personnel and others to concurrently serve while maintaining civilian employment. While training and emergency mobilization remain the core responsibilities of the SDF Reserve Personnel and others, a system should be developed that allows for coordination with employers to facilitate the SDF Reserve Personnel and others' participation in these duties.

Such reforms would not only enhance the SDF Reserve Personnel and others' skills but also help mitigate the chronic personnel shortages faced by the SDF. Additionally, mechanisms should be established to maintain qualifications held prior to retirement, including security clearances.

### **(3) Improving the Treatment of the SDF Reserve Personnel and Others**

Retired SDF personnel—particularly those who have served long-term—face a significant psychological burden when continuing to serve as the SDF Reserve Personnel and others, taking on duties without regard for danger. As long as the role is perceived merely as a profession, securing sufficient volunteers will remain difficult.

To address this challenge, Japan should consider a comprehensive improvement in the treatment of the SDF Reserve Personnel and others, tailored to the unique nature of their duties and informed by international best practices. This includes recognizing the outstanding SDF Reserve Personnel and others through national honors, extending eligibility for medical and welfare benefits equivalent to those provided to active-duty personnel, and improving financial compensation through enhanced and tax-exempt allowances. Furthermore, the proposed “National Compensation Pension System” (tentative name), as outlined in Recommendation 3(1), should be applied to the SDF Reserve Personnel to ensure long-term support and recognition.

Australia offers a useful reference point. Despite having a population roughly one-fifth that of Japan, it has developed a robust reservist framework in which retired military personnel are registered and supported. Employment barriers are lowered to facilitate personnel exchange between the military and civilian sectors, and remuneration is adjusted in line with private-sector trends. Promotion and salary increase reflect performance in both military and civilian roles, while services related to healthcare and housing for reservists and their families are improved. Most notably, both reservists and their employers take pride in contributing to national defense.

Japan must similarly foster an environment in which the SDF Reserve Personnel and others and their families can serve with peace of mind and pride. The SDF Reserve Personnel systems should be redefined—from a reserve force activated only in contingencies to a core component of Japan’s defense capabilities that operates seamlessly across both peacetime and contingencies.

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## Promoting Public–Private Cooperation to Strengthen the Human Resource Base

**As Japan faces increasing difficulty in maintaining the current structure of the SDF due to the accelerating decline in birthrate, it is essential to promote public–private cooperation aimed at reinforcing the SDF’s human resource base.**

Following World War II, Japan lost the integrated public–private structures that once supported the manufacturing and maintenance of tanks, warships, aircraft, weapons, and other items, such as the former army and navy arsenals. Nevertheless, even today, the production and sustainment of defense equipment cannot be achieved without private-sector involvement.

In contrast, many countries have institutionalized public–private cooperation in national defense as a standard practice. Japan, however, continues to lag behind in this area. Given the accelerating decline in birthrate and the growing difficulty of maintaining the current SDF structure, it is imperative to promote seamless public–private cooperation across peacetime, gray-zone (GZ), and armed contingencies, with a focus on reinforcing the SDF’s human resource base.

### **(1) Promoting Outsourcing by Leveraging Private-Sector Capabilities**

One key strategy for strengthening the SDF’s human resource base is the promotion of outsourcing by leveraging private-sector capabilities. In particular, outsourcing logistics functions—such as maintenance, supply, and transportation—has already progressed in peacetime. Expanding this approach would allow SDF personnel currently engaged in these roles to be redeployed to frontline units, thereby helping to maintain both the structure and operational readiness of the SDF.

In the area of defense technology, deeper public–private collaboration in joint development and operations would enable the rapid integration of advanced technologies held by private entities, including AI, cybersecurity, and unmanned systems. This would contribute directly to the realization of Recommendation 4(2), “Addressing Population Decline Through the Introduction of AI and Labor-Saving and Unmanned Defense Equipment,” which calls for the adoption of AI and labor-saving technologies to address demographic decline.

Moreover, in times of contingencies, combat data, operational outcomes, and lessons learned could be swiftly fed back into private-sector development processes, accelerating the deployment of enhanced equipment to frontline units and supporting the SDF’s continued effectiveness.

Additionally, in preparation for contingencies, Japan should establish a transportation network through outsourced logistics to ensure the delivery of supplies and support for civilian evacuation. It is also essential to build alternative communication infrastructure in cooperation with private telecommunications providers to ensure operational continuity in the event of attacks on SDF communication systems. These measures would help mitigate personnel shortages during contingencies.



## **(2) Strengthening Information Warfare Capabilities through Public–Private Collaboration and Promoting Shared Access to Data**

In the GZ, where cyberattacks and information warfare are expected to intensify, it is essential to secure skilled personnel from the private sector and reinforce defense systems through strategic collaboration with IT companies and other relevant industries. To sustain and expand such cooperation, it is important for the public and private sectors to operate on a shared foundation of information, including operational data and other relevant materials.

This requires not only the promotion of secure and structured information-sharing mechanisms with cooperating companies, but also the implementation of robust information protection policies to ensure trust and continuity in collaboration.

## **(3) Enhancing Training and Joint Exercises between the SDF and Private Sector**

To maintain and strengthen the SDF's human resource base, it is vital to introduce extensive training and educational programs in partnership with private-sector organizations. These programs should aim to improve the skills of SDF personnel by providing access to innovative technologies and expertise. In addition, leveraging private-sector trainers and coaches can contribute to better physical conditioning and health management for SDF personnel.

However, the capacity of private-sector entities to respond effectively in contingencies is inherently limited. Without sufficient coordination and joint training in advance, rapid response and seamless cooperation may be compromised. Therefore, it is crucial for the Ministry of Defense and the SDF to conduct regular joint exercises with private-sector partners during peacetime, while also strengthening information-sharing frameworks. This will help ensure that cooperation can be mobilized smoothly in GZ and armed contingencies.

#### **(4) Establishing Guidelines to Facilitate Public–Private Cooperation Across All Contingencies**

One of the key challenges in promoting and maintaining seamless public–private cooperation is the increased risk that private-sector companies, and their employees may become targets of hostile actions, such as sabotage, physical harm, or intelligence gathering by adversarial forces. From the standpoint of ensuring the legitimacy of cooperation with the SDF and the safety of cooperating personnel, this may lead to public backlash or anxiety among employees.

Especially in times of contingency, the risk of companies and their staff being targeted is expected to rise, and measures must be taken to ensure that such risks do not restrict private-sector cooperation. Furthermore, during GZ or armed contingencies, private companies may face tough decisions in balancing their own business continuity with their role in supporting the SDF.

To address these concerns, Japan should develop comprehensive guidelines that clarify roles, responsibilities, and risk management protocols for public–private cooperation across peacetime, GZ, and armed contingencies. These guidelines should be accompanied by measures to ensure the safety of cooperating personnel, including compensation schemes for harm incurred and financial support mechanisms for participating companies. Furthermore, it is necessary to create an environment that facilitates private-sector participation in public–private cooperation contracts.

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## Enhancing Security Education as a Social Foundation for the Entire Nation

**Japan is currently facing the most severe and complex security environment since the end of World War II, with domestic and international conditions evolving at an increasingly rapid pace. Public interest in national security is steadily increasing.**

**To respond appropriately to these developments, it is essential to strengthen security education as a foundational element of society that supports the maintenance of national safety and peace. This effort should begin with school education and be expanded gradually.**

### (1) Enhancing Security Education in School Curricula

The 2017, 2018, and 2019 Revised National Curriculum Standards (hereinafter referred to as the “National Curriculum Standards”), the ninth revision since World War II, include references in elementary and junior high school “social studies” to concepts such as “loving one’s country and working for its peace and prosperity.” They also describe activities aimed at protecting people from natural disasters, including the roles of local institutions such as fire departments and police, as well as the involvement of national agencies such as the SDF. These elements serve as introductory components that connect to broader themes of “national defense” and “security.” At the high school level, “civics” courses include topics such as “national sovereignty and territory (including territorial waters and airspace)” and “Japan’s security and defense,” indicating that the curriculum is designed to introduce security-related learning in a gradual and structured manner.

However, it remains unclear whether the security-related content prescribed in the curriculum guidelines is being effectively implemented at the classroom level, or whether it is functioning as a source of further interest or influencing students’ career choices. This requires verification by relevant ministries and agencies<sup>(Note)</sup>. Moreover, opportunities to study security consistently from high school through university are extremely limited in Japan, and a comprehensive educational framework has yet to be established.

This gap stems from the structure of Japan’s education system: while elementary and secondary schools follow nationally defined curriculum standards, universities independently design their curricula based on their own educational philosophies and objectives. Therefore, in order to position security education as a foundational element of national society, it is necessary for the government to articulate unified educational goals and plans across all levels—from elementary to higher education—and to build a robust and coherent educational framework.

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(Note) According to the Public Opinion Survey, in response to the question “Do you think it is necessary to discuss the defense of the nation in educational settings?”, 89.3% of respondents (subtotal) answered “Yes, it is necessary.”

## **(2) Expanding Opportunities for Security Education in Society**

To deepen public understanding of national security, it is important to challenge the overly optimistic assumptions about peace often held by the Japanese public and foster greater awareness of security issues and potential threats. In elementary and secondary education, opportunities for experiential learning—such as “field survey activities” and “social investigation projects”—should be expanded. These activities can include visits to facilities and sites related to national security, such as SDF bases, museums, exhibition halls, archives, and memorial centers.

To enrich these experiences, participation should not be limited to teachers alone; parents and subject-matter experts should also be involved. This approach would enhance the effectiveness of programs such as the “Period for Integrated Studies” and the “Period for Inquiry-Based Cross-Disciplinary Study,” helping students engage with security-related topics in a more practical and meaningful way.

Beyond formal education, opportunities for security education should be expanded throughout society. This includes establishing faculties of national security in higher education institutions, offering flexible security-related courses for working professionals such as executives and new employees, and promoting collaboration between universities and security-focused think tanks through joint research and seminars. These efforts are essential to building a comprehensive and inclusive educational ecosystem for national security.

## **(3) Establishing Facilities and Expanding Training Opportunities to Support the Above**

Internationally, many countries have developed national museums, public outreach centers, and training facilities dedicated to security education, where teachers and curators collaborate to educate students across all levels. In some cases, military personnel also visit schools to provide direct instruction on national security topics.

In contrast, Japan lacks national museums dedicated to security, and military-related museums are few. While there are many well-developed history museums and exhibition centers, they are not necessarily designed to convey the importance of “protecting the nation’s peace and security,” making it difficult to cultivate public awareness of these issues. Similarly, existing public outreach centers—such as SDF regional facilities and archives—face similar limitations. To realize the goals outlined in (1) and (2) of this Recommendation, it is strongly recommended that Japan establish and expand facilities dedicated to security education and training.

By implementing these measures, Japan can cultivate human resources capable of responding swiftly to changes in both domestic and international security environments. At the same time, these efforts will help raise public awareness of national security as a foundational element of society. Enhancing this awareness across the entire population will serve as a highly effective means of strengthening Japan’s overall defense capabilities.



## Promoting Public Understanding of the Role of SDF Personnel

**Public relations for the SDF have been strengthened, but no specific objectives or performance targets have been set. To enhance their effectiveness, civilian expertise should be incorporated to improve strategic communication and ensure accountability for results. Promoting reward programs for personnel and their families from a public relations perspective can enhance the organization's appeal across diverse social groups. There is still room to identify and engage new stakeholders who can contribute to these efforts.**

Currently, recruitment-related discussions are underway within the Expert Panel on Reinforcing the Human Resource Base of the MOD/SDF, the Review Committee for Fundamentally Reinforcing the Human Resource Base, and the Ministerial Meeting. Several measures have already been implemented, and this Project strongly supports these efforts.

However, even if the organization becomes more attractive, recruitment will not improve unless its appeal is widely understood. It is therefore an urgent priority to communicate clearly to the public what kind of training SDF personnel undergo, how they live, and what benefits come with joining the SDF.

In recent years, the SDF has actively expanded its public outreach, including by using social media. Yet unlike private-sector companies, where public relations activities are expected to yield measurable business outcomes, the SDF's communications are not subject to performance evaluation. As a result, public relations efforts risk becoming self-referential, with limited clarity on their actual impact.

In the Public Opinion Survey, there were results such as the responses to the question "If a person close to you said they wanted to become SDF personnel, would you be in favor or opposed to that?" were "in favor (subtotal): 68.7%, opposed (subtotal): 29.5%," and their "reasons for opposing the person becoming SDF personnel" were "because it is dangerous work if a war or other conflict occurs: 79.7%," "because I do not understand the actual circumstances of the SDF very well: 46.0%," and "because the work looks tough: 31.8%." These results indicate that a lack of understanding of the realities of SDF service remains a significant barrier.

Despite the Ministry of Defense and the SDF's ongoing efforts, public recognition of the SDF's role remains insufficient. To move beyond the current stage, it is essential to establish a new public communication framework that transcends conventional approaches and strategically enhances public understanding of the SDF's mission and value.

## **(1) Expanding the Use of Private-Sector Expertise in Public Relations, Including Full Outsourcing**

To significantly enhance public relations, efforts by the Ministry of Defense and the SDF alone are insufficient. A government-wide approach is essential, alongside a stronger integration of private-sector capabilities. In foreign countries, there are examples where public relations and recruitment have been revitalized through collaboration with professional experts, yielding measurable results. Japan should similarly explore possibilities beyond conventional frameworks, including full outsourcing of public relations operations.

Rather than relying on SDF personnel to distribute recruitment flyers, the most effective form of outreach is to cultivate admiration—making people aspire to become SDF personnel. In outcome-driven public relations, it is essential to begin with thorough market research to determine which regions, age groups, and audience segments to target, and what types of approaches are likely to be accepted. This process starts by aligning strategies with diverse needs such as preferences, age demographics, and regional characteristics. Even high-quality content is ineffective if it fails to attract attention, and the expertise required to ensure visibility resides primarily in private-sector entities such as research firms, PR agencies, and advertising companies.

It is therefore desirable to shift from the traditional model in which content evaluation is conducted solely by government authorities, toward a results-based framework where public opinion and recruitment outcomes serve as the primary metrics. This approach would also reduce the operational burden of public relations within the Ministry of Defense and the SDF.

## **(2) Implementing Public Relations Strategies Targeted at SDF Families**

International examples show that establishing museums and other facilities related to national security not only promotes education but also serves as an effective public relations strategy. However, if the social status and value of SDF personnel are not widely recognized, outreach efforts may remain confined to those already interested. To achieve genuine public engagement, educational initiatives must be strengthened.

In reality, even the families of SDF personnel—who are directly affected—rarely receive structured education about the significance of SDF missions. Drawing inspiration from initiatives such as the U.S. military's Month of the Military Child, Japan should consider expanding the opportunities for formal commendation for SDF personnel and encouraging family participation in such events. These efforts would not only foster understanding but also cultivate family members as potential advocates for the SDF. Consideration for families should be integrated into public relations strategy as a vital component.

### **(3) Shifting Public Relations Content Toward Self-Realization and Purpose**

The most critical question in public relations is what to communicate. Young people's values and motivations are constantly evolving in response to changes in society, the economy, and global affairs. In this context, simply promoting comfort or stability has limited appeal, as such messages quickly become outdated. In contrast, international examples show that overcoming challenges is often seen as a path to personal growth and self-realization.

Given the universal nature of military service, public relations should highlight the skills and experiences gained through joining the SDF. While it is relatively well known that SDF personnel can obtain a large vehicle license, fewer people are aware that opportunities for overseas study or assignments are also available, depending on individual performance and career development. Accompanying benefits, such as language training and family accompaniment programs, should be more widely promoted.

Moreover, the misconception that high athletic ability is a prerequisite for enlistment remains a barrier. In reality, individuals who cannot run or swim can still join. Considering the public's growing interest in health and fitness, the physical and mental benefits of SDF service should be more actively promoted.

In recent years, increased media coverage of the SDF during natural disasters has unintentionally raised public awareness of its activities. However, it is not intended that large-scale natural disasters, which cause significant harm, serve as *de facto* public relations for the SDF. Moreover, such portrayals risk fostering the misconception that disaster relief is the primary mission of the SDF.

The SDF is a professional force tasked with national defense, and public relations must convey this core mission. To that end, the production of documentaries featuring the SDF should be actively encouraged. While government-produced content is generally trusted, viewers may perceive it as overly positive or lacking transparency. Documentaries that reveal both the admirable and the difficult aspects of military life have proven effective in building public trust in countries such as the UK, Germany, and the United States. Presenting a balanced and realistic view is key to credibility.

In portraying the SDF, it is valuable not only to show the realities of active-duty personnel, but also to include the voices and experiences of retired members. The broader SDF community—including current and former personnel as well as their families—represents a significant population. Engaging these individuals can provide rich and diverse perspectives, and their cooperation should be actively encouraged to enhance the depth and authenticity of public outreach.



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## Conclusion

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As stated in the Introduction, over the past year we have focused our deliberations on the unique nature of SDF personnel, who are the only public servants to formally swear an oath to risk their lives in line of duty. However, this same oath is also required of the civilian officials, technical and engineering officials, and others working at the Ministry of Defense. These individuals “play an important role not only in supporting the activities of SDF as an element of defense capability but also in fundamentally reinforcing defense capability, designing policies associated with the fundamental reinforcement, and providing operational support to units” (from the National Defense Strategy). Securing such personnel is therefore a critical issue.

To reinforce the human resource base of Japan’s defense capabilities, it is necessary not only to address practical matters—such as recruitment strategies for civilian officials and others and the improvements in working conditions proposed in this Recommendation—but also to confront more fundamental questions. These include reexamining the division of roles between the public and private sectors and reconsidering how the nation utilizes its human resources. We intend to continue engaging with these multifaceted challenges while monitoring the progress of government efforts to improve SDF recruitment.

This interim report presents a range of policy proposals, some of which—such as security education and seamless public-private cooperation from peacetime through contingencies—cannot be resolved by the Ministry of Defense and the SDF alone. Many of these challenges stem from the fact that Japan has yet to establish a clear societal and institutional understanding of the SDF’s role, and of the fundamental necessity of national defense that underpins it. It is evident that explicitly articulating both the necessity and importance of national defense and the existence of the SDF in the Constitution of Japan would strengthen the nation’s social foundation and help address these unresolved issues.

Thanks to its long-standing dedication—including disaster relief efforts grounded in a spirit of self-sacrifice—the SDF has earned broad public understanding and support. Nevertheless, the absence of constitutional clarity regarding its existence has allowed legal interpretations to persist that question its legitimacy. Leaving this ambiguity unaddressed distorts public understanding of the necessity of national defense and the significance and challenges of the SDF’s mission. It also prevents the SDF from being properly recognized and its personnel from being accorded the respect they deserve.

Some recent arguments from constitutionalist circles suggest that, since the government already interprets the SDF as constitutional and public support is widespread, there is no need to rush toward formal constitutional recognition. However, this line of reasoning appears to prioritize preserving the Constitution’s wording over adapting it to current realities—a reversal of priorities that undermines constructive debate.

Moreover, Japan's postwar peace has contributed to a lack of momentum for serious discussion about how the nation should respond to contingencies. Public aversion to war and military matters remains strong, and there has been insufficient debate on how citizens should engage with the SDF's activities or contribute to civil protection in the event of armed conflict.

However, Japan's ongoing population decline not only threatens economic growth but also poses serious challenges to national emergency response capabilities. Recent large-scale disasters have demonstrated that effective response is impossible without coordination among the national government, the SDF, local governments, private companies, residents, and volunteers. The importance of combining "self-help, mutual help, and public help" is now widely recognized. This principle applies equally to armed attack scenarios. From this perspective, a grounded and realistic discussion of emergency provisions in the Constitution is urgently needed.

Although the current political climate may seem far from conducive to serious debate on constitutional reform, the increasingly severe international environment, and the need for both ruling and opposition parties to pursue pragmatic policies in the Diet present a unique opportunity. Now is the time to engage in constructive dialogue on how the Constitution should define the fundamental structure of the nation. We sincerely hope that vigorous and forward-looking discussions will take place across all sectors of society, including within the Diet.

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Video “SPF Security Strategy Forum:  
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