

Section 3. The Basis of Defense Policy

1. Basic Policy for National Defense

Under the Constitution, Japan has adhered to its Basic Policy for National Defense, which was adopted by the National Defense Council² and approved by the Cabinet in 1957. (See Reference 6)

The Basic Policy for National Defense defines policies to establish the foundation of security through international harmonization and peace activities, as well as ensuring the stability of society, and then to establish efficient defense capabilities and to maintain the Japan-U.S. Security Arrangements.

2. Other Basic Policies

Under the Basic Policy for National Defense, Japan has been building a modest defense capability under the Constitution purely for defense purposes without becoming a military power that could threaten other countries, while adhering to the principle of civilian control of the military, observing the Three Non-Nuclear Principles, and firmly maintaining the Japan-U.S. Security Arrangements.

1. Exclusively Defense-Oriented Policy

The exclusively defense-oriented policy means that Japan will not employ defensive force unless and until an armed attack is mounted on Japan by another country, and even in such a case, only the minimum force necessary to defend itself may be used. Furthermore, only the minimum defense forces necessary for self-defense should be retained and used. This exclusively defense-oriented policy is a passive defense strategy that is consistent with the spirit of the Constitution.

2. Not Becoming a Military Power

There is no established definition for the term “military power.” For Japan, however, not becoming a military power that could threaten the security of other countries means that Japan will not possess more military force than is necessary for self-defense and that could pose a threat to other countries.

3. The Three Non-Nuclear Principles

The Three Non-Nuclear Principles are that Japan: will not possess nuclear weapons, will not produce nuclear weapons, and will not allow nuclear weapons into Japan. Japan adheres to the Three Non-Nuclear Principles as a fixed national policy.

Japan is prohibited from manufacturing or possessing nuclear weapons also under the Atomic Energy Basic Law³. In addition, Japan ratified the NPT (Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons), and as a nonnuclear weapons state, is not permitted to produce or acquire nuclear weapons⁴.

4. Ensuring Civilian Control

Civilian control of the military means the precedence of political will over the military in a democratic state, and hence democratic political control over the military.

Learning lessons from World War II, Japan has adopted the following system of uncompromising civilian control that is entirely different from those under the former Constitution⁵. Civilian control ensures that the SDF is operated in accordance with the will of the people.

The Japanese people are represented in the Diet, which makes legislative and budgetary decisions on matters such as the authorized number of uniformed SDF personnel and principal institutions of the SDF. The Diet also approves defense operations. As part of its general administrative functions, the Cabinet has entire authority

related to defense. The Constitution requires the Prime Minister and other Ministers of State in the Cabinet to be civilians. The Prime Minister, acting on behalf of the Cabinet, is the supreme commander of the SDF. The Minister of Defense, who is exclusively in charge of national defense, exercises general control over SDF activities. The Security Council of Japan⁶ within the Cabinet discusses important defense matters.

At the Ministry of Defense, the Minister of Defense is in charge of administrative work related to national defense and controls the SDF. The Minister of Defense is assisted in planning political measures and administration by the Senior Vice-Minister and two Parliamentary Secretaries.⁷

As mentioned above, the military is under civilian control. The success of the system depends on ongoing political and administrative efforts, as well as a keen interest among Japanese citizens in defense issues. With the emergence of serious issues relating to civilian control in the Ministry of Defense in recent years, fundamental measures are being considered.

In the report of the Council for Reforming the Ministry of Defense publicized in July of last year, an enhancement of the Prime Minister's Office as well as the Defense Ministry was demonstrated as part of "the structural improvement for the modern civil control." Accordingly, the Ministry of Defense has been continuing its efforts to ensure civilian control through the legal establishment of the Defense Council, etc. (See Part IV, Section 2)