Part III Measures for Defense of Japan
Chapter 1 Operations of Self-Defense Forces for Defense of Japan and Responses to Diverse Situations
Section 3 Lessons from the Great East Japan Earthquake

1. Response to the Great East Japan Earthquake

At 14:46 on March 11, 2011, a major earthquake occurred off the coast of Sanriku in the Tohoku region that measured 7.0 on the Japanese scale (magnitude 9.0, making it the largest observed in Japanese history). The massive tsunami triggered by the earthquake engulfed settlements located along an extensive section of the coast of Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima Prefectures, and damaged the nuclear reactors at the Tokyo Electric Power Company’s Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, causing a radiation leak. In terms of the extent of the area affected and the immense damage caused, it was a major disaster without precedent in Japanese history.

Directly following the earthquake, at 14:50, the Ministry of Defense established an Emergency Headquarters and commenced information gathering operations using aircraft and other means. At 15:40, the Emergency Headquarters held its first meeting and at 18:00 and 19:30 the Defense Minister ordered SDF units to dispatch to respond to the earthquake and the nuclear power station accident, respectively. In response to these orders, the SDF dispatched approximately 8,400 personnel on the day of the earthquake and commenced activities. GSDF Camp Tagajo and ASDF Matsushima Airbase were damaged in the earthquake and their aircraft and vehicles were submerged underwater, but the SDF dispatched as many personnel and as much equipment as possible amid these difficult circumstances, implementing a swift, large-scale initial response in order to save the lives of disaster victims.

In order to further strengthen arrangements for disaster relief operations and undertake more effective activities in the disaster area, on March 14 a joint task force for the Great East Japan Earthquake was formed under the overall command of the Commanding General of the GSDF Northeastern Army, which included the participation of a GSDF disaster relief unit under the command of that Commanding General, an MSDF disaster relief unit under the commandants of the MSDF Yokosuka Districts and an ASDF disaster relief unit under the command of the ASDF Air Defense Commander. This joint task force uniting the GSDF, MSDF and ASDF carried out various activities to support those affected by the disaster, including searching for missing persons. Furthermore, approximately 500 GSDF, MSDF and ASDF personnel under the overall command of the Commanding Officer of the Central Readiness Force were mobilized to deal with the nuclear disaster resulting from the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, spraying the plant compound with water. These activities marked the largest mobilization of personnel and equipment in history, and close cooperation was carried out between the military of the United States and other countries, the various headquarters of the Government, related ministries and
agencies, local governments, and others. This also marked the first time that ready reserves and reserves were summoned based on the Self-Defense Forces Law other than in exercises. Thus, the SDF employed full-scale efforts in order to ensure the safety of disaster victims and stability for the lives of those in the region.

Having received an order from Prime Minister to make preparations to dispatch 100,000 personnel, the number of dispatched SDF personnel surpassed 100,000 by March 18. When numbers were at their largest, the number of personnel reached approximately 107,000 (including ready reserves and regular reserves\(^2\)), about 543 aircraft, and nearly 54 ships. Under this posture, bases and camps in the disaster area and other areas provided major logistic support in order to assist the smooth activities of dispatched units, including receiving units and providing them with shelter and procuring large amounts of needed food, clothing, and equipment on an emergency basis. In this way, the bases and camps in the disaster area played a vital role in the provision of assistance.

(See Fig. III-1-3-1)

About three and a half months after the disaster occurred, on July 1, the joint task force was dissolved, as the arrangements for the Government and local authorities to provide support for the livelihoods of people in the disaster-stricken areas were being put in place; the disaster relief units of the GSDF, MSDF and ASDF switched to collaborative activities and the large-scale disaster relief deployment in response to the earthquake was concluded on August 31. On July 19, responsibility for the disaster relief operation in response to the nuclear disaster was transferred from the Commanding Officer of the Central Readiness Force to the Commanding Officer of the GSDF disaster relief unit (Commanding General of the North Eastern Army).

On December 6, 2011, the Ministerial Meeting on Decontamination and Special Waste Treatment took place and, based on the awareness that carrying out decontamination as a matter of urgency was a pressing issue for the whole Government, in order to facilitate at the earliest possible date the reconstruction of the areas contaminated by radioactive material discharged due to the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, it was decided that the GSDF would undertake decontamination activities, with the cooperation of bodies such as the Ministry of the Environment. For two weeks from the following day, approximately 900 troops, consisting mainly of personnel from the 44th Infantry Regiment and the 6th Artillery Regiment, carried out work at the municipal offices in Naraha, Tomioka, Namie and Iitate, which were due to be the bases for the full-scale decontamination activities to be implemented under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Environment from January 2012. The troops decontaminated the areas by removing sludge and collecting fallen leaves from gutters around the offices, and using high-pressure washers to decontaminate surfaces, such as the asphalt in the car parks, thereby putting in place the infrastructure to enable the Government and local authorities to carry out decontamination in the area.

The disaster relief operation in response to the nuclear disaster was concluded on December 26.
1. Large-scale disaster dispatch is conducted by order of the Defense Minister based on the Self-Defense Forces Law and Article 14 of the Order concerning SDF Disaster Dispatch (1980 Defense Agency Order 28). Commanding Generals, Self-Defense Fleet Commanders, Commanders of Regional District, or Air Defense Command Commander serve as the commanding officer of the disaster relief dispatch unit and units are dispatched.

2. In response to the great disaster in East Japan, 2,210 ready reserves (actual number: 1,373) and 496 reserves (actual number: 317) were summoned for the first time other than for a training purpose, and most of them served for 1 to 2 weeks at a time.

2. Overview of the Response to the Great East Japan Earthquake

The Great East Japan Earthquake was a complex situation in which a nuclear disaster occurred, in addition to a major earthquake and tsunami. An overview of the response to this disaster by the Ministry of Defense and SDF is provided below, focusing on the following three categories.

1. Response to the major earthquake and tsunami

Due to the immense scale of the earthquake, the districts stricken by the Great East Japan Earthquake were spread over a wide area, from the Tohoku to the Kanto regions, while the functions of many local authorities located in coastal areas were reduced because of the tsunami. As a result of this situation, the Ministry of Defense and SDF formed a joint task force that not only represented the largest-ever mobilization of troops in the SDF’s history, exceeding 100,000 personnel, but also marked the first time that such a task force had been formed in response to a disaster; not only GSDF, MSDF and ASDF units, but also reserves worked together in responding to the disaster. Moreover, in some disaster-afflicted areas, the troops were involved not only in the shipping of relief supplies, but also provided support for the transport of the mortal remains of the deceased.

2. Response to the nuclear disaster

Amid an unexpected situation, the Ministry of Defense and SDF played a central role in dealing with the nuclear disaster, determining the guidelines for spraying water at the plant and carrying out the work, and provided a unified response in partnership with other ministries and agencies. Troops worked without regard for the danger of exposure to radiation, and contributed to averting a critical situation due to the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. In addition, they also contributed to radioactive material decontamination, monitoring the air dose rate, etc., and providing support for the evacuation of residents living in the vicinity of the plant.
3. Joint operations involving Japan and the U.S.

During Operation Tomodachi, the U.S. military deployed approximately 16,000 troops, not to mention the aircraft carrier Ronald Reagan; as well as assisting tirelessly with rescue operations in the disaster-afflicted areas, they provided cooperation and support in various forms in regard to the nuclear disaster\(^1\). In doing so, the Ministry of Defense (Ichigaya), U.S. Forces, Japan (Yokota Base) and the joint task force headquarters (Sendai; GSDF North Eastern Army Headquarters) established bilateral coordination centers and close collaboration took place between the Ministry of Defense and SDF, and the U.S. military, enabling us to reaffirm the strong links forged through the Japan-U.S. Alliance, even in the midst of a state of emergency.

\(^1\) In response to the nuclear disaster, the U.S. military dispatched a specialist unit from the Marine Corps - the Chemical Biological Incident Response Force (CBIRF); this marked the first time that the unit had been deployed overseas.

3. Lessons Learned from the Response to the Great East Japan Earthquake

The response to the Great East Japan Earthquake implemented by the Ministry of Defense and SDF was on an unprecedentedly large scale, so lessons have been learned from it that will contribute to strengthening not only responses to future disasters, such as earthquakes, but also our ability to respond to a range of situations, including military emergencies affecting Japan. The various lessons learned are shown in Fig. III-1-3-4\(^1\).

Moreover, the status of deliberations concerning these lessons and their reflection in policies and procedures is shown in Fig. III-1-3-5.

1) The Ministry of Defense and SDF are striving to reflect these lessons in their policies and procedures; on March 28, 2012, the Ground Staff Office held a briefing to provide concrete details of the lessons learned on the ground, at the unit level, in order to disseminate these to SDF units and ensure that they serve as a point of reference in the running of military affairs involving SDF units in the future.

4. Evaluation of the Response to the Great East Japan Earthquake

In an opinion poll carried out by the Cabinet Office in January 2012, 97.7% of respondents answered that they "have a high opinion"\(^*\) of the SDF in relation to their disaster relief mission associated with the Great East Japan Earthquake. Moreover, many messages of encouragement, hope and thanks have been received through various media from people - including those affected by the disaster - in response to the
activities of the Ministry of Defense and SDF in the aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake.

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1 The figure for “have a high opinion” is the total for the responses “I have a very high opinion of them” and “I have a fairly high opinion of them”.