

Foreword

The Great East Japan Earthquake that occurred on March 11, 2011 brought catastrophic damage to the Tohoku region and beyond. In response to this unprecedented disaster, the Japanese Ministry of Defense (MOD) and Self-Defense Forces (SDF) swiftly initiated large-scale activities, including search and rescue efforts and crisis management for tackling the nuclear crisis in Fukushima.

What made the Great East Japan Earthquake particularly challenging was the nearly simultaneous occurring of the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear accident, or a “complex disaster,” which by nature requires extremely multifaceted responses beyond the scope of conventional disaster response. In light of this huge challenge, the SDF went beyond precedence by mobilizing as many as 100,000 personnel to form a Joint Task Force—the largest ever for a disaster relief mission—and calling up Ready Reserves and Reserves. At the same time, the SDF’s disaster response activities were conducted in close concert with foreign partners, including through Operation Tomodachi by the United States and Operation Pacific Assist by Australia.

Such a large-scale, international response offers valuable lessons and insights that can be incorporated into future operational planning, education programs and international joint trainings. These findings should be utilized to inform international cooperation in disaster relief, especially in the Asia-Pacific region, which is increasingly prone to major natural disasters, including earthquakes, tsunamis, and floods.

At this year’s Symposium, a distinguished team of academics, policy experts, and practitioners from Japan and overseas engaged in animated discussions on the role of the military in disaster relief operations as well as the way forward for international cooperation in this regard. I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to everyone who participated in the Symposium for their dedicated efforts and insights. It is my hope that this report will enhance the understanding of

the operations in response to the Great East Japan Earthquake as well as the role of the military in disaster relief more generally.

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