CHAPTER 6

The Evolution of the NPR

In seeking to fulfil the overall purpose of this study in providing the first complete history of the NPR this chapter explores the end of the force and its evolution into the National Safety Force (NSF) and Ground Self Defense Force (GSDF). The chapter demonstrates that the gradual evolution into the NSF and GSDF represented a partial departure from the constabulary nature of the NPR. Nevertheless, these moves towards a more externally focused force did not eliminate the entirety of the NPR’s constabulary structure and some elements of it survive to this day. The examination of these vestiges of the NPR in the modern GSDF and the other commonalities between the forces forms the secondary aim of this chapter. This analysis helps both in achieving the second primary aim of this study of defining the character of the NPR, by clearly distinguishing the NPR from its successors, an approach not taken by most scholars who examine the forces. This approach helps both clarify the character of the individual forces and highlights their common characteristics, especially those elements of the NSF and GSDF which survived from the NPR.

The transition of the NPR to a more external security focused force took place through two processes: the acquisition of heavier armament and the incorporation of former military officers. These processes, intended to make the NPR capable of dealing with external threats to Japan’s security, also had external origins. The moves towards the transformation of the NPR into something closer to an army took place in the face of mounting pressure from parts of the US government, coupled with the diminishing influence of opponents of these changes, including MacArthur, Yoshida and Masuhara (the civilian head of the NPR). The examination of these struggles reveals the limitations of the domestic influences on the NPR in the face of concerted and concentrated American pressure boosted by external events, such as the dismissal of MacArthur and the Chinese intervention in Korea. The confluence of external pressures with domestic factors also played a role in limiting the effectiveness of domestic influences on the NPR and its successors, with the weakness of Yoshida after 1952 and the combination of GHQ, the US government and of Yoshida’s conservative rivals being good examples of this. These influences and limitations are examined here in detail as are their contributions to the evolution of the force and the ultimate end of the NPR project.
The Chinese Intervention and the Fall of MacArthur

The first event which significantly challenged the constabulary character of the NPR was the intervention of the Chinese Peoples’ Volunteer Forces (CPVF) in the Korean conflict in the winter of 1950–1951.

In October 1950, following the collapse of the North Korean People’s Army (NKPA) after MacArthur’s daring landing at Inchon, it seemed that the UN and South Korean forces were on the brink of victory. However, unbeknownst to the UN command around 410,000 Chinese troops had already crossed into North Korea. These forces took the overextended and dispersed UN and South Korean forces by surprise and threw them back from the Yalu river in confusion. General Walton Walker ordered the Eighth Army to retreat on 28 November but in the face of bitter winter conditions and overwhelming odds the retreat soon turned into a rout and within a week the Chinese forces had taken back Pyongyang. The situation became so desperate that the UN called for a ceasefire ten days later, and a state of emergency was declared in the US on 16 December.

The real possibility of defeat in Korea, the first appearance of Soviet built jet fighters over the peninsula and the perceived threat to Indochina and Europe, saw many in the US administration and military fear Soviet aggression elsewhere in the region, or general war with the USSR. This threat of a wider conflict and the buckling of his forces under the overwhelming Chinese pressure made MacArthur seesaw from deep depression to ‘near panic’. In order to shore up his position and to stem the deluge of Chinese troops into Korea, MacArthur began to advocate desperate measures. Over the following weeks three interconnected plans were recommended by the supreme commander: a widening of the air war, planning for the possible evacuation of Korea, and urgent requests for more troops.