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SPECIAL FEATURE
TWO DECADES OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION
A Look Back on 20 Years of SDF Activities Abroad
International Peace Cooperation Currently Underway

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changes in the international community have meant that it has become increasingly more difficult for a single country to cope with global threats alone. In the midst of these changes, two decades have passed since the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) began to undertake activities internationally, in order to provide support for peacekeeping missions and disaster relief efforts as well as to help prevent conflict and terrorism. With the SDF expected to participate in a wider range of activities in more countries in the future, this special feature will look back on the international cooperation activities undertaken by the SDF over the past two decades in the following six areas.

- Cooperative activities based on the Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law Replenishment activities based on the former Replenishment Support Special Measures Law
- Dispatch of minesweepers to the Persian Gulf
- International disaster relief activities, etc.
- Activities based on the Act on Special Measures concerning Humanitarian Reconstruction and Reconstruction Work in Iraq
- International peace cooperation operations
- Anti-piracy measures

A Look Back on 20 Years of SDF Activities Abroad

With tensions continuing between Syria and Israel, the SDF has dispatched staff and a transport unit to the UNDOF to achieve stable peace in the Golan Heights. Activities have included the transport of supplies, road repair work and snow removal. This represents the SDF’s longest running peacekeeping operation, as activities continue today.

As its first-ever international humanitarian relief activity, the SDF provided tents, blankets, water and the transport of supplies from Surabaya, Indonesia to Kuban by air.

A GSDF relief supply unit and ASDF emergency relief air transport squadron were dispatched at the request of the government of India to areas in Western India that had been severely damaged in a major earthquake. The units transported blankets and tents as well as instructed local staff on how to set up the tents.

International disaster relief activities in India (February 2001)

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Activities based on the Law concerning the Special Measures on Humanitarian Relief and Reconstruction Assistance and Support Activities for Ensuring Security in Iraq (December 2003 – February 2009)

Following assistance provided to refugees in Iraq at the beginning of 2003, the GSDF provided water, medical assistance, school and road repairs and general construction as part of its mission to provide humanitarian and reconstruction assistance as well as help ensure the stability of Iraq. The ASDF also played a vital role in the international reconstruction effort by transporting supplies between Kuwait and Iraq.

International disaster relief activities in Thailand (December 2004 – January 2005)

At the request of the government of Thailand an MSDF unit that was on its way back to Japan from its support activities under the Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law rushed to the scene to help search for victims in the wake of the tsunami that hit the country following the Sumatra earthquake. In addition to the collection of victims’ bodies from the ocean, the MSDF also transported international emergency aid teams and equipment by air.

International disaster relief activities in Indonesia (January 2005 – March 2005)

Units from the GSDF, MSDF and ASDF were dispatched at the request of the government of Indonesia in the wake of the Sumatra earthquake and tsunami. This marked the first time that SDF helicopters were dispatched for international disaster relief activities. The mission also served as a test for joint operations, as the GSDF helicopters were transported atop a MSDF vessel.

International disaster relief activities off Kamchatka Peninsula of the Russian Federation (August 2005)

Four MSDF vessels, including a submarine rescue ship, were dispatched at the request of the Russian government to help rescue the crew of a Russian Navy submarine off the coast of the Kamchatka peninsula that was unable to surface. The submarine’s crew was rescued by a Royal Navy submarine rescue ship, but the Russian government also lauded the MSDF’s rapid response.

International disaster relief activities in Pakistan (October 2005 – December 2005)

At the request of the government of Pakistan following a major earthquake in the country the ASDF used a large cargo plane to transport six GSDF helicopters to the quake zone. The helicopters were used to transport 131 tons of relief supplies, including medicines and tents, as well as 824 victims of the disaster.

International disaster relief activities in Indonesia (June 2006)

An international emergency medical aid air transport squadron and other personnel were dispatched to the Special Region of Yogyakarta that had suffered significant damage from a major earthquake that struck off the coast of Java. GSDF medical officers and other personnel provided medical assistance locally, performing medical exams for or giving vaccinations to some 5,400 people.


The SDF was deployed as a specialized peacekeeping unit. SDF personnel were dispatched to the UNMIN as military observers in order to maintain stability in the region following the end of many years of armed conflict between the Nepalese Army and Maoist forces. SDF personnel observed the management of weapons and soldiers in camps and barracks. Their actions helped to ensure stability in Nepal after the peace accord.


Activities were temporarily suspended because the Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law expired, but these activities were restarted with the passing of the Replenishment Support Special Measures Law. The mission included supplying water as well as helicopter and ship fuel to foreign naval ships engaged in anti-terrorism activities in the Indian Ocean.

The United Nations Mission in Sudan (October 2008 – November 2011)

SDF personnel were dispatched to the UNMIS as headquarters staff following the end of the ongoing civil war in Sudan. The SDF personnel helped ensure stability locally working as “Logistics” staff to coordinate logistics operations and information staff to manage databases.

The United Nations Stabilization Missions in Haiti (February 2010 – present)

MINUSTAH, which was established prior to the earthquake, decided to increase the number of personnel in order to support the post-quake reconstruction effort. Japan received a request from the UN for assistance and dispatched a GSDF engineer unit that brought heavy machinery and other equipment to clear rubble, repair roads and perform simple engineering as well as construction work.

Anti-piracy measures off the coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden (March 2009 – present)

A surface unit and air unit have been dispatched to the Gulf of Aden area where a number of piracy incidents are taking place in order to ensure the safe passage of private-sector vessels. Forces include a P-3C patrol plane used for warning and surveillance activities and two destroyers to protect civilian commercial ships transiting the area. GSDF personnel were also dispatched to provide security for the air unit’s facility located in Djibouti.

International disaster relief activities in Indonesia (October 2009)

Upon the request of the government of Indonesia, following a major earthquake that occurred off Padang that caused more than 1,000 deaths, the SDF dispatched a medical assistance unit to the scene. The three medical officers and other personnel from the unit provided emergency medical care to a total of 919 patients.
International disaster relief activities in Pakistan (August 2010 – October 2010)

At the request of local governments in Pakistan, following flood damage resulting from torrential rains, a joint rescue unit was dispatched to the country consisting of personnel from the GSDF, MSDF and ASDF. An MSDF transport ship, ASDF C130H transport plane and six GSDF helicopters helped transport 260 tons of relief supplies and 49 aid officials.

UNMIT personnel replacements

The MOD initially has dispatched two GSDF personnel as military liaison officers to the United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT) to monitor the compliance with the cease of armed conflict in Timor-Leste since September 2010 following its independence. Those officials were replaced in September 2011, and now the third replacement is to be made. The third detachment will continue to report the security conditions in border areas and villages to the PKO headquarters.

Japan’s operations at the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) headquarters concluded and the sixth detachment returned home

In accordance with the completion of operations at the UNMIS, Captain Ko Kosaka and Major Masahide Kimura, who had been dispatched as the sixth staff officers, returned to Japan on July 25 and September 29, respectively. A total of 12 personnel have participated in activities on the ground over the course of two years and 11 months, contributing to the United Nations’ peacekeeping operations in Sudan, which was assisting the implementation of the peace agreement signed by the Sudanese Government and the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement. The mission has now been completed.

Defense Minister issues orders to prepare dispatch of GSDF unit to UNMISS

On November 1, the government decided that preparations would be made for dispatching a GSDF engineer unit to the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) based on the International Peace Cooperation Law, and the same day Defense Minister Ichikawa issued orders to make preparations. In a press conference after issuing the order, Defense Minister Ichikawa commented that, “We have received a strong request from the government of South Sudan and United Nations. Japan is highly expected. We intend to ensure that proper preparations are made so that we can fulfill our responsibility.” Units are expected to be deployed in a sequential manner to Juba and surrounding areas starting next January, where they will aim to contribute to building the newly independent country.

Japan–U.S. Defense Ministerial Meeting

On October 25, the Ministry of Defense held the first Japan–U.S. Defense Ministerial Meeting since the launch of the Noda administration. At the meeting, Defense Minister Ichikawa commented that the Japan–U.S. Alliance was a vital foundation for peace and stability in Japan and the Asia-Pacific region, and that cooperation between the two countries based on the Alliance carries out an important role in effectively responding to numerous difficult security problems around the world. U.S. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta responded by saying that regardless of the stern situation surrounding the defense budget in the United States, it would maintain and further strengthen its presence in the Asia-Pacific region.

Both ministers agreed that, in light of the increasingly uncertain security environment in the region, including a growing level of military operations, the two countries would carry out timely and effective joint exercises and joint surveillance operations, and promote the shared use of each country’s facilities in order to increase the number of options to use as bases for the operations. Through these activities the two ministers agreed on energizing the operations of units, demonstrating the presence and abilities of both Japan and the United States, and developing a dynamic relationship in terms of defense cooperation.

The two also agreed on advancing Japan–U.S. cooperation in the fields of information security, space, cyber, and ballistic missile defense (BMD).

Moreover, with regard to the relocation of Futtena Air Station, Minister Ichikawa explained that preparations were underway to be able to submit the environmental impact assessment by the end of the year. Minister Ichikawa and Defense Secretary Panetta agreed that the danger of Futtena Air Station would be promptly eliminated and that the facility would be replaced and returned as quickly as possible based on the agreements made between Japan and the United States while acquiring the understanding of Okinawa.

Japan–ASEAN vice-ministerial level meeting and related events (bilateral meetings and seminar)

On Wednesday, September 28, in Tokyo, the Ministry of Defense hosted the “Third Meeting of Senior Defense Officials on Common Security Challenges in the Asia-Pacific Region (Japan–ASEAN vice-ministerial level meeting)”. Mr. Nakae, Administrative Vice-Minister of Defense chaired the meeting and senior officials of Vice Minister or Permanent Secretary level or their deputies from Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, and the ASEAN Secretariat participated. During the meeting, participants had a frank and constructive exchange on common regional security challenges, such as “Regional Efforts to Strengthen Maritime Security” and “Support for Capacity Building Focusing on Non-traditional Security Areas.”

With regard to “Efforts to strengthen maritime security in the region”, the main discussions were as follows:

• With respect to counter-piracy, it is necessary to closely cooperate on information collection and information sharing, etc. in the region as well as international community

...
Japan–Vietnam Defense Ministerial Meeting (signing of Memorandum of Understanding)

On October 24, Defense Minister Ichikawa met with Minister of National Defense Phung Quang Thanh of Vietnam, who was on a visit to Japan, at the Ministry of Defense. An exchange of views took place on maritime security and the international and regional security situations.

During the meeting, both ministers shared the view on the importance of maintaining close coordination among the international community and the regional countries concerned regarding the South China Sea issue and other matters. The ministers signed the Memorandum of Understanding on Japan–Vietnam Defense Cooperation and Exchange, which sets forth, among other items, the regular holding of vice-ministerial level talks, on regular basis mutual visits by working–level, of each service and cooperation on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

Japan–UK Defense Ministerial Meeting

On October 31, Defense Minister Ichikawa held a defense ministerial meeting with Secretary of State for Defence Philip Hammond of the United Kingdom (UK) at the Ministry of Defense. Both sides shared the view to further enhance Japan–UK defense cooperative relations. At the meeting, it was agreed that a new Memorandum on Defense Cooperation will be established between the leaders of both countries.

The Memorandum on Defense Cooperation between Japan and the UK will be the first memorandum to be formulated since 2004. In light of the changes in the security environment over the last seven years and the emergence of new issues requiring cooperation, including cyber defense, the new Memorandum will aim to further enhance Japan–UK cooperative relations in addition to the anti-piracy measures and joint exercises to date.

Japan–India Defense Ministerial Meeting

On November 2, Defense Minister Ichikawa held a Japan–India defense ministerial meeting with Indian Defence Minister A K Antony, who was on a visit to Japan.

At the meeting’s outset, Minister Ichikawa expressed appreciation for India’s assistance in the wake of the Great East Japan Earthquake. He said that he would like to forge amicable relations between Japan and India and that he would like to deepen the defense exchanges and cooperation between the two countries, which will celebrate the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations in 2012. Both sides concurred to carry out mutual visits of vessel and aircraft and bilateral exercise between the MSDF and Indian Navy. They also concurred to implement exchanges between the GSDF and Centre for United Nations Peacekeeping (CUNPK) of India.

Visit of Administrative Vice-Minister of Defense to the Republic of Korea

On November 1, Administrative Vice-Minister of Defense Nakae visited the Republic of Korea (ROK) and held a Japan–ROK defense vice-ministerial level meeting with Vice Minister Lee, Young Geol of the Ministry of National Defense of the ROK. The vice-ministerial level talks were held based on the agreement reached at the Japan–ROK defense ministerial meeting in January 2011 to hold these meetings regularly. With a view to strengthen- ing Japan–ROK defense cooperation, both vice ministers exchanged views on the regional situation, including the DPRK, and the defense policies of the two countries.

Production of F-2 fighters complete

On September 27, production of the final F-2 fighter was completed at Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, Ltd., Nagoya Aerospace Systems Works Komaki Minami Plant in Aichi Prefecture. Parliamentary Vice-Minister of Defense Mitsu Shimojo and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries President Hideaki Omiya were in attendance to celebrate the complete delivery of the 98 planes (including prototypes). The F-2 was jointly developed with the United States and is based on the United States’ F-16. After a first successful test flight in 1995, delivery began to the Japan Defense Agency in 1996.

Disaster relief in response to Typhoons No. 12 and No. 15

Based on requests received from the governors of Wakayama, Mie, and Nara Prefectures for disaster dispatch in accordance with the record-breaking torrential rain that accompanied Typhoon No. 12, from September 3 (Sat) to September 4 (Sun) approximately 28,790 personnel were dispatched. Mainly comprising personnel from the GSDF Middle Army, units engaged in search operations for missing persons, worked to clear roads, transport supplies, supply water, and in other assistance activities. Moreover, Typhoon No. 15 hit Shizuoka Prefecture just after September 20, causing extensive damage in prefectures from Chubu to Tohoku region, including destroyed housing resulting from flooded rivers and mudslides. Based on requests from Aichi, Miyagi, and Fukushima Prefectures, the SDF were dispatched to carry out rescue operations and employ efforts aimed at damage reduction.

Anti-piracy operations off the Coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden

Overview of P-3C patrol aircraft operations off the coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden

Operational Activity from September to October 2011

1. Number of flights: 36 (Accumulated total of 563)
2. Flight hours: Approximately 270 (Accumulated total of approximately 4,350 hours)
3. Number of visually confirmed commercial ships: Approximately 3,180 (Accumulated total of approximately 42,540)
4. Number of times information was provided to Japanese destroyers, foreign warships, and/or commercial ships: Approximately 330 (Accumulated total of approximately 5,090 times)

Overview of surface unit escort operations off the coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden

Operational Activity from September to October 2011

1. Number of escort operations: 17 (The 280th to 296th escort operations) (The 239th to 255th escort operations under Japan’s Anti-Piracy Measures Law)
2. Number of escorted vessels: 122 (Accumulated total of 2,151 since the commencement of escort operations)

[Breakdown]
Japanese-registered ships: 0 (Accumulated total of 13) Foreign ships operated by Japanese shipping companies: 20 (Accumulated total of 463) (Out of the 20 foreign ships, Japanese citizens were on board 0 ships)

Foreign ships other than the above: 102 (Accumulated total of 1,675) (Out of 102 foreign ships, Japanese citizens were on board 0 ships)

The above record does not include the 1st-41st escort operation performed as Maritime Security Activities, which were performed before the establishment of the Anti-Piracy Measures Law.

If the Anti-Piracy Measures Law had not come into force, Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force destroyers would not have been able to legally escort 102 of the 463 escorted vessels (the 102 foreign ships not operated by Japanese shipping companies.)
Air Review, an event commemorating the establishment of the SDF, took place at the ASDF Hyakuri Base in Ibaraki Prefecture on October 16. Around 800 SDF personnel and 46 aircrafts as well as approximately 6,000 visitors, including guests and invitees, such as Diet members, ambassadors to Japan, and members of the U.S. forces participated in the event.

The Air Review is held once every three years. As such, many invitees arrived early in the morning not only to watch the ceremony, but also to see exhibited items such as planes and equipments. The venue was filled with people even before the ceremony started at 11:20am. While missiles and the F-15 fighter drew much attention, the Medical Evacuation Unit sparked interest as an unusual item, among the many exhibited items, and people made lines to see the medical container, which is used for the transportation of critically injured and ill patients and can be loaded onto a C-130H transport aircraft. The container was used in practice in the aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake, having showed its effectiveness. Among the invitees, a man who visited from Iwaki City, Fukushima Prefecture, one of the areas devastated by the earthquake, noted that he was filled with a sense of appreciation after hearing the explanation that the rescue helicopter showed there was the actual model that was used in the wake of the earthquake.

At the ceremony venue, following the musical performance of the ASDF Central Band, the Air Review units of the GSDF, MSDF, and ASDF marched in, and then, the review officer Prime Minister Noda arrived together with the Defense Minister Ichikawa. After the formal salute, they moved to the review platform together with senior members of the Ministry of Defense and the SDF and offered a silent prayer to the victims of the Great East Japan Earthquake as well as the victims of the heavy rains and typhoons that occurred later in Japan.

Prime Minister Noda observed the review flights of five aircrafts – the MSDF P-3C, ASDF U-125A, C-1, KC-767, and F-2, and toured the units. Then, without looking at his script, Prime Minister Noda delivered instructions. In his remarks, the Prime Minister lauded that the SDF are the “pride of Japan” and commended their rescue efforts in the wake of the Great East Japan Earthquake for “meeting expectations with ‘courage’ and ‘sincerity.’” In addition, while touching on the instability of the security environment surrounding Japan, the Prime Minister indicated that the development of a Dynamic Defense Force is an urgent challenge in line with the National Defense Program Guidelines that was approved by the Cabinet in December 2010. Furthermore, the Prime Minister discussed the further initiatives of the SDF’s international peace cooperation activities. Afterwards, a total of six aircrafts (F-15, F-4, and F-2) roared down the taxiway in front of the review platform. Following this, Prime Minister Noda pushed a button on the podium and two F-4 fighters made a demonstration of emergency takeoff. The finale featured the T-4 Blue Impulse that showed 20-minutes aerobatics. Invitees enjoyed them much giving a large round of applause from the stands.
Japanese people receive
Spain’s Prince of Asturias Award for Concord

On October 21, the award ceremony for the Prince of Asturias Award for Concord took place. The Prince of Asturias Award is an award that rewards the social and scientific, artistic, humanistic and other work performed at an international level by an individual, or individuals or groups which contributed to humankind. The award is bestowed by a foundation, whose honorary president is served by His Royal Highness Felipe de Borbón of the Spanish Royal Family.

In September, it was decided that the award will be bestowed on the “heroes of Fukushima,” including the SDF, police, and firefighters, who, in the wake of the damage from the large tsunami caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake, participated in the efforts to cool the nuclear reactors of Tokyo Electric Power Company’s (TEPCO) Fukushima nuclear power station that was in an extremely dangerous situation as well as efforts to evacuate the residents. On behalf of the SDF, the award ceremony in October was attended by Colonel Shinji Iwakuma, head of the Central Nuclear Biological Chemical Weapon Defense Unit (CNBC), which led the water-spraying operations from the ground and the decontamination activities, and Lieutenant Colonel Kenji Kato, head of the 104th Squadron of the Helicopter Brigade, which led the cooling operations by launching water from helicopters.

At the award ceremony, Colonel Iwakuma accepted the award from His Royal Highness Felipe, and all members shook hands with His Royal Highness. There was a large round of applause when the two SDF personnel bowed to the audience, standing next to the three representatives of the police and firefighters on the podium. His Royal Highness lauded that their courageous spirit of sacrifice had set an example for the world.

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