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Japan–Poland Defense Ministerial Meeting

On March 15, Defense Minister Onodera met Minister for National Defence Siemoniak of Poland, and exchanged views on bilateral defense relations, among other matters. Mr. Onodera started the meeting by welcoming the first visit to Japan by Polish National Defence Minister, and expressed his appreciation for Poland’s support in the wake of the Great East Japan Earthquake. Mr. Siemoniak stated that the two countries share common values, including human rights and democracy, and expected that his visit to Japan would further promote their bilateral defense exchanges.

On March 16, Defense Minister Onodera met with then Deputy Defence Minister of Saudi Arabia at the Ministry of Defense. Mr. Onodera started the meeting by recalling the favorable bilateral relations that the two countries have developed, in particular, the economic relations. Mr. Onodera also expressed his hope to further deepen bilateral relations in the area of defense exchanges. The two sides concurred to continue to hold high-level exchanges and exchanges between defense units.

Both sides exchanged their views regarding their respective regional situations, and concurred that the two countries will continue to closely monitor the situations and exchange views.

On March 17, a graduation ceremony was held at the National Defense Academy in Yokosuka City, Kanagawa Prefecture. The National Defense Academy is the only academic institution of higher learning in Japan that educates and trains cadets who will be officers of the Ground, Maritime, and Air Self-Defense Forces. The graduation ceremony is traditionally held with the attendance of the Defense Minister and the Prime Minister, who is the Commander-in-Chief of the SDF. The Prime Minister directly addresses the graduates regarding the expected roles of SDF personnel, as they in the future will become the core members of the SDF. At this year’s graduation ceremony, Prime Minister Abe addressed that graduates must engage in training and missions in preparation for emergencies.

Central Readiness Force headquarters relocates to Zama

The Central Readiness Force (CRF) was newly organized in March 2007 to respond to the diversification of SDF missions. It centrally manages combat units, including the 1st Airborne Brigade and specialized units. Presently, the CRF directs the units dispatched to South Sudan. On March 26, 2013, the CRF headquarters and its affiliated units were relocated from Camp Asaka to Camp Zama. Camp Zama is the site of the military headquarters of the U.S. army in Japan. This relocation will strengthen the Japan–U.S. partnerships by enabling closer communications and information exchanges between the two countries more than ever before.

Submission of Request for Approval of Public Water Reclamation Concerning Construction of Futenma Replacement Facility

On March 22, pursuant to the Act on Reclamation of Publicly-owned Water Surface, the Okinawa Defense Bureau submitted to the Governor of Okinawa Prefecture the Request for Approval of Public Water Reclamation concerning the construction of the Futenma replacement facility. This submission marks the start of the steps towards the early realization of the relocation of Futenma Air Station to Henoko in line with the 2006 Japan–U.S. agreement. The U.S. Government commended that this is a key milestone that comes after many years of hard work between the United States and Japan.
Completion of the development of fixed-wing patrol aircraft P-1 and assignment to MSDF Atsugi Air Base

The MOD possesses fixed-wing patrol aircrafts, which are used mainly for constant wide-area monitoring and patrolling in the sea surrounding Japan. They carry out diverse missions, including disaster deployment and search of vessels in distress. The aircraft are assigned to five bases throughout Japan, such as MSDF Atsugi Air Base in Kanagawa Prefecture. Since FY2001, the MOD has been developing the next generation fixed-wing patrol aircraft (P-1) in response to the aging of the existing fixed-wing patrol aircrafts P-3C, which have been used since FY1981. On March 12, 2013, the development of P-1 was finally completed following the ground tests and test flights. On March 29, two P-1 aircraft were assigned to MSDF Atsugi Air Base. The location of the base allows for swift deployment to sea areas in all directions from Japan for the execution of various missions, including surveillance operations. The P-1 has improved detection performance, flight performance, data processing ability, attacking ability and quietness compared to the P-3C. It is expected that the P-1 will more effectively carry out the continuous operations of information collection and surveillance of the sea areas of Japan under peace time and other circumstances.

Fixed-wing patrol aircraft P-1

East Asian Strategic Review 2013

On March 29, the National Institute for Defense Studies (NIDS), a research and educational institution of the Ministry of Defense, released the East Asian Strategic Review (EASR) 2013. This year’s report marks the 17th publication since 1996. Every year, the EASR analyzes the key security issues of the previous year among the countries of East Asia. This year’s report highlights the leadership transitions in East Asia, as well as the security situation that has been severely aggrivated in East Asia. The EASR is widely recognized as an annual security report on East Asia and is cited by international security institutions. On March 12, 2013, the development of P-1 was finally completed following the ground tests and test flights. On March 29, two P-1 aircraft were assigned to MSDF Atsugi Air Base. The location of the base allows for swift deployment to sea areas in all directions from Japan for the execution of various missions, including surveillance operations. The P-1 has improved detection performance, flight performance, data processing ability, attacking ability and quietness compared to the P-3C. It is expected that the P-1 will more effectively carry out the continuous operations of information collection and surveillance of the sea areas of Japan under peace time and other circumstances.

Printed copies of the EASR in both Japanese and English are available for purchase. The both editions are also available on the NIDS website.

[Contents of EASR 2013]
- Chapters 1 and 2: Security issues with regional/global significance
- Security policies of India and Australia
- Chapters 3-8: Overviews of countries/sub-regions
  - Japan
  - Korean Peninsula, China, Southeast Asia, Russia, and the United States
  - Columns
  - China–ROK security cooperation
  - “BeiDou” navigation satellite system, U.S. Marine Corps operation concept, etc.

(http://www.nids.go.jp/publication/east-asian/2013.html)

Return of land areas south of Kadena

On April 5, with attendance of Prime Minister Abe, Japan and the U.S. jointly announced a consolidation plan that the two countries have coordinated for the return of land areas south of Kadena.

For each area the plan details conditions and sequence as well as timelines for return, as part of the realignment of U.S. forces to mitigate their impact on local communities in Okinawa while maintaining deterrence. This was done according to the three categories of returns confirmed in the April 2012 Joint Statement of the Security Consultative Committee (SCC) with regard to the six facilities and areas south of Kadena Air Base, which were to be considered for total or partial return under the May 2006 SCC document entitled, “United States–Japan Roadmap for Realignment Implementation.”

The plan sets forth a specific roadmap for the return of sizable lands (approx. 1,048ha) in densely populated areas.

Measures against piracy off the coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden

Aerial activities of Japanese P-3C patrol aircraft off the coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden

Record of Mission (January–March 2013)

1. Number of flights: 54 flights (Accumulated total: 869 flights)
2. Flight hours: Approx. 435 hours (Accumulated total: Approx. 6,740 hours)
3. Number of visually confirmed commercial ships: Approx. 4,710 ships (Accumulated total: 68,500 ships)
4. Number of times information was provided to Japanese destroyers, foreign warships, and/or commercial ships: Approx. 350 times (Accumulated total: Approx. 7,600 times)
5. Escort operations performed by Japanese MSDF units in the same area

Record of Mission (January–March 2013)

1. Number of escort operations: 26 Times (The 420th – the 445th escort operation) The 397th – 404th escort operation under Japan’s Anti-Piracy Measures Law
2. Number of escorted vessels: 103 vessels (Accumulated total of 2,912 escorted vessels since the start of operations under Japan’s Anti-Piracy Measures Law; hereinafter the same)

[Breakdown]

Japanese-registered ships: 0 (Accumulated total: 15)
Foreign ships operated by Japanese shipping companies: 9
Foreign ships other than above: 94 (Accumulated total: 2,347)

*The above record does not include the 1st – 41st escort operation performed as Maritime Security Activities.

A1. These are aircraft owned by the Ministry of Defense (MOD) for use in the transport of VIPs such as the Emperor and the Imperial Family as well as the Prime Minister when visiting overseas. They are also used for the transport of Japanese nationals in cases of emergency and as a means of transportation in international peace cooperation activities.

The MOD currently owns two of them. These aircraft are a variant of the Boeing 747, which is installed with winglets (i.e., small extensions) on the tips of the main wings, which contributes to a great improvement in aerodynamic performance.

When transporting VIPs such as VIPs, thorough measures are taken to prevent negative effects on diplomatic schedules due to contingencies such as the malfunction of the aircraft. Such measures include another Air Force One traveling together as a backup and Self-Defense personnel in charge of maintenance accompanying the trip. The plane interior is designed based on special specifications consisting of areas such as an office/work area and conference room, enabling a group of reporters to travel together and hold a press conference in the plane. Concerning the transport of Japanese nationals, when an incident occurred in Algeria in January of this year in which Japanese nationals were taken as hostages, one of the government aircraft traveled between Algeria and Japan in order to transport those who were affected by the incident back home.

Q2. Could you provide details on the circumstances concerning the introduction of the Japanese Air Force One?

A2. In light of Japan’s role in the international community, and in order to contribute to the further advancement of internationalization, the Japanese Government, following the example of other countries, decided to introduce two Boeing 747-400 as government aircraft in 1987, mainly as means for transporting the Prime Minister. In February 1991, the preparatory office was established in the Prime Minister’s Office (currently the Cabinet Office), and the first and the second aircraft were received from the Boeing in September and November of the same year, respectively.

Q3. Why are the Self-Defense Forces operating the aircraft?

A3. After the acquisition of the aircrafts by the Prime Minister’s Office (present Cabinet Office) in 1991, the government aircraft review committee decided to shift the planes’ ownership to the Defense Agency (present MOD) from April 1, 1992. Since then, the MOD is maintaining and managing these aircrafts.

When the ownership was shifted, a provisional Special Airlift Group was formed at Chitose Air Base and completed servicing for basic operational preparation after spending about one year conducting operational tests. Then in June 1993, the Special Airlift Group was formed and has been operating the aircrafts as its duty.

Q4. Could you provide details on the Special Airlift Group?

A4. The Special Airlift Group belongs to the Air Support Command in the Air Self-Defense Force, and consists of three organizations: the headquarters, 701st Squadron and maintenance unit. Its duties include the transport of national guests and others by government aircraft, and the provision of education to train airlift staff (equivalent to cabin crew of commercial airlines).

In addition, the Special Airlift Group takes part, as necessary, in international peace cooperation activities, the transport of Japanese nationals and others in cases of emergency and international disaster relief operations. In order to prepare for such unpredictable missions caused by sudden changes in domestic as well as overseas situations, all crew members of the government aircraft including pilots consist of Air Self-Defense Force personnel.

Introduction to a historical building

MSDF Maizuru District Building No. 1

This building was built in 1930 in Maizuru City, Kyoto Prefecture as the Maizuru Naval Academy headquarters. It is a steel-framed brick structure.

The entrance porch features steel circular columns. The roof panel is affixed with a simple cornice and ribbed engraving. The entrance frame is comprised of ornamented, slightly thick composite columns.

The overall design is simple and is in an Art Deco style.

Today, the building is used as the MSDF Maizuru District Building No. 1.
On March 31, a returning ceremony of the 11th Squadron (Blue Impulse) at ASDF Matsushima Air Base, attended by the Defense Minister Onodera.

The Blue Impulse squadron based at Matsushima Air Base had moved to and trained at ASDF Ashiya Air Base in Fukuoka Prefecture, after the Matsushima Air Base suffered massive damages due to the Great East Japan Earthquake tsunami, including the flooding of facilities and the sinking of the aircraft.

Before the ceremony commenced, everyone in attendance offered a silent prayer to express condolences to all victims of the disaster and to pray for the repose of their souls.

At the ceremony, the head of the 11th Squadron declared the return of the squadron to Mr. Onodera. He then delivered an address to the returning personnel, expressing his gratitude for their efforts over the past two years who had to leave Matsushima Air Base. He also expressed his appreciation to the local municipalities and to the many residents that passionately requested the squadron’s return. To meet the expectations of the local people and the people across Japan, Mr. Onodera encouraged the personnel to unite under the captain’s direction in engaging in daily trainings and showcasing the high-level skills that they acquired to people all over Japan.

The MOD and SDF are sincerely pleased that the Blue Impulse squadron has returned – what is also a symbolic event that demonstrates Japan’s steady recovery from the disaster.