Ensuring Maritime Security

For Japan, a major maritime state, strengthening order on the seas based on such fundamental principles as the rule of law and the freedom of navigation, as well as ensuring safe maritime transport, is a foundation of its peace and prosperity, which is extremely important. In cooperation with the relevant countries, the MOD/SDF engages in anti-piracy operations, as well as promotes various initiatives including assistance for capacity building in this field for coastal states, and making the most of various opportunities to enhance joint training and exercises in waters other than those in the immediate vicinity of Japan.

Counter-Piracy Operations

Piracy is a grave threat to public safety and order on the seas. In particular, for Japan, which depends on maritime transportation to import most of the resources and food necessary for its survival and prosperity as a maritime nation, it is an important issue that cannot be ignored.

1 Basic Approach

The Japan Coast Guard (JCG), one of the law enforcement agencies in Japan, is primarily responsible for coping with piracy. However, in cases where it is deemed extremely difficult or impossible for the JCG to cope with piracy by itself, the SDF is to take action as well.

2 Circumstances Surrounding Incidents of Piracy and Initiatives by the International Community

For Japan and the international community, the waters off the coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden are extremely important, connecting Europe and the Middle East with East Asia. Regarding the waters in this area, successive United Nations Security Council resolutions were adopted, such as United Nations Security Council Resolution 1816, which was adopted in June 2008 in response to the frequent occurrence of and rapid increase in the piracy incidents with the purpose of acquiring ransoms by detaining hostages caused by pirates, who are armed with machine guns and rocket launchers. These resolutions have requested that various countries take actions, particularly the dispatch of warships and military aircraft, to deter piracy in the waters off the coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden.

To date, approximately 30 countries, including the United States, have dispatched their warships to the waters off the coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden. As part of its counter-piracy initiatives, the European Union (EU) has been conducting Operation Atalanta since December 2008, in addition to the counter-piracy operations conducted by the Combined Task Force 151 (CTF 151) that was established in January 2009. Meanwhile, other countries have been dispatching their assets to the area. The international community continues to have a critical interest in and take actions to tackle the acts of piracy off the coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden.

As these initiatives by the international community have proved to be effective, the number of acts of piracy

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2 The Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), the headquarters of which is located in Bahrain, announced the establishment of the CTF in January 2009 as a multilateral combined task force for counter-piracy operations.
occurring in the waters off the coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden has currently hovered at a low level. However, the assumed root causes of piracy such as terrorism and poverty in Somalia have still remained unsolved. In addition, considering the fact that Somalia’s capability to crack down on piracy is also still insufficient, if the international community reduces its counter-piracy efforts, the situation could be easily reversed. Therefore, there is no great change in the situation in which Japan must carry out its counter-piracy operations.

3 Japanese Initiatives

(1) Legislation Concerning Counter-Piracy Operations
In March 2009, following the order for Maritime Security Operations for the purpose of protecting Japan-affiliated vessels from acts of piracy in the waters off the coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden, two MSDF destroyers began providing direct escort to Japan-affiliated vessels, while MSDF P-3C patrol aircraft also commenced warning and surveillance operations in June the same year.

In view of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, Japan subsequently enacted the Anti-Piracy Measures Act\(^3\) in July the same year in order to deal appropriately and effectively with acts of piracy. This act made it possible to protect the vessels of all
nations from acts of piracy, regardless of their flag states. Moreover, it also enabled the use of weapons to a reasonable extent, if no other means were available, in order to halt vessels engaging in acts of piracy, such as approaching civilian vessels.

Furthermore, the Act on Special Measures concerning the Security of Japanese Flagged Vessels in Areas that Are Highly Susceptible to Acts of Piracy came into force on November 2013, which made it possible to have security guards on board a Japanese ship provided certain requirements are met, enabling them to carry small arms for the purpose of security operations.

(2) Activities by the Self-Defense Forces

a. Deployment Surface Force for Counter Piracy Enforcement

The Deployment Surface Force for Counter Piracy Enforcement (DSPE) is a unit that conducts counter-piracy measures using MSDF destroyers. The DSPE strives to ensure the safety of ships navigating in the area in two different manners – direct escort of private vessels across the Gulf of Aden, and zone defense in allocated areas in the Gulf of Aden. In addition, there are JCG officers aboard the MSDF destroyer.⁴

In recent years, while there are still ongoing requests for escort from vessels that are vulnerable to piracy such as tankers with relatively low speed and low broadside, the demand for direct escort has been decreasing. This is partly due to the existence of other initiatives for self-defense of private vessels involving the boarding of private armed security guards.

As this trend was expected to continue, the Government of Japan determined that the SDF would decrease the planned number of direct escorts and carry out zone defense during the period when direct escort is not conducted. Accordingly the Government of Japan changed the number of the deployed MSDF destroyers from two to one for operations off the coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden from December 2016: (1) based on the number of destroyers in recent years, the planned number of direct escorts in a month would be decreased, and at the same time, (2) during the period when direct escort is not conducted, zone defense would be carried out instead.

b. Deployment Air Force for Counter Piracy Enforcement

The Deployment Air Force for Counter Piracy Enforcement (DAPE) is a unit conducting counter-piracy activities using the MSDF P-3C patrol aircraft (two aircraft dispatched). The unit conducts warning and

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⁴ Eight JCG officers are onboard and conduct judicial law enforcement activities, including arresting and interrogating pirates, as required.
surveillance operations in the flight zone that is determined in coordination with the CTF 151 headquarters and confirms any suspicious boats. At the same time, the unit also provides information to the MSDF destroyers, the naval vessels of other countries and civilian vessels, responding by such means as confirming the safety of the surrounding area immediately, if requested. The information gathered by SDF P-3Cs is constantly shared with other related organizations, and contributes significantly to deterring acts of piracy and disarming vessels suspected of being pirate ships.

c. Deployment Support Group for Counter Piracy Enforcement

In order to improve the operational efficiency and effectiveness of the DAPE, the Deployment Support Group for Counter Piracy Enforcement (DGPE) carries out activities such as maintenance of the facility set up in the northwest district of Djibouti International Airport. The Ministry decided to lease adjacent land on the eastern side of the site that does not have a structure and is empty, in addition to the site itself, from November 2017 from a standpoint of strengthening security.

d. Transport Unit

The Airlift Squadron regularly operates ASDF transport aircraft to carry out air transport of materials required by the DAPE and the DGPE.

e. Combined Task Force 151 (CTF 151) Deployed unit at the Headquarters

In order to strengthen coordination with the units of other countries engaged in counter-piracy operations and enhance the effectiveness of the SDF’s counter-piracy operations, the MOD decided to dispatch SDF personnel serving as the CTF 151 commander and the headquarter staff in July 2014, and has dispatched SDF personnel to the CTF 151 Headquarters where an officer from other countries serves as the commander since August 2014. During the period from May to August 2015, the SDF also dispatched a CTF 151 commander for the first time, while between March and June 2017 and March and June 2018 a CTF 151 commander as well as staff were also dispatched to the Headquarters.

f. Achievements

As of May 31, 2018, the DSPE has escorted 3,826 vessels. Under the protection of the SDF destroyers, not a single vessel has come to any harm from pirates and these vessels have all passed safely across the Gulf of Aden.

As for the DAPE, it commenced the counter-piracy operations in June 2009. As of May 31, 2018, the DAPE has conducted the following activities: aircraft have flown 1,951 missions with their flying hours totaling 14,910 hours; and information was provided to vessels navigating the area and other countries engaging in counter-piracy operations on around 13,160 occasions. The activities conducted by the DAPE account for approximately 70-80% of the warning and surveillance operations carried out in the Gulf of Aden by the international community.

4 Praise for Japan’s Endeavors

The counter-piracy operations by the SDF have been highly praised by the international community. For example, national leaders and others have expressed their gratitude and the SDF has also been repeatedly well-received by the United Nations Security Council Resolution. Moreover, the MSDF destroyers, which are engaging in counter-piracy operations off the coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden, has received many messages from the captains and ship owners of the vessels that its units have escorted, expressing their gratitude that the ships were able to cross the Gulf of Aden with peace of mind and asking them to continue escorting ships there. Additionally, The Japanese Shipowners’ Association and other groups expressed appreciation for protection of Japan-related vessels and asked for continuation of efforts in fighting against piracy.

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5 In addition, DAPE has been participating in CTF 151 since February 2014. This participation enabled the force to acquire information that was previously not accessible. Moreover, it became possible to conduct more flexible warning and surveillance activities. For example, aircraft can be deployed as needed even to areas that are highly susceptible to acts of piracy, and as a result, coordination between other countries’ units was further enhanced.

6 No member of the SDF had ever served as a commander of a multinational force since the foundation of the SDF.
Contribution to the Maintenance of Public Safety and Order on the Seas through Maritime Training

The SDF’s deployed unit and counter-piracy unit of EU and others have conducted various exercises in the Gulf of Aden with the objective of enhancing their mutual cooperation and tactical skills required for counter-piracy activities.

These training exercises have an essential significance in that they strengthen the cooperation between the SDF and counter-piracy teams from various countries and regional organizations, and contribute to the maintenance of public safety and order on the seas.

Participation in the U.S. Hosted International Maritime Exercise and Other Exercises

The MSDF has participated in every multilateral mine countermeasures exercise in the waters around the Arabian Peninsula hosted by the U.S. Navy since its first exercise in 2012. This exercise was renamed International Maritime Exercise since May 2017 and items for the exercise was increased. Participating in these exercises assists in the enhancement of the tactical skills of the MSDF and the strengthening of trust among the participating countries. At the same time, the exercise also contributes to the maintenance of maritime security, while also contributing to the improvement of the global security environment.

Strengthening of Cooperation in Maritime Security through Joint Training, etc.

Through the participation in multilateral joint exercises, the MSDF improves its tactical skills as well as advancing mutual understanding and strengthening of trust relationships with other participating countries. It implemented Malabar 2017, a joint training exercise by Japan, the U.S., and India, in India’s eastern waters and carried out joint cruise training by Japan and the U.S., Japan and Australia, and Japan, the U.S., Australia, and Canada in the South China Sea.

Strengthening cooperation with other countries through these joint exercises contributes to the maintenance of maritime security, which has extremely high significance.

Initiatives in the Asia-Pacific Region

The National Security Strategy and the National Defense Program Guidelines state that Japan will play a leading role in maintaining and developing “Open and Stable Seas,” including maritime security cooperation with other countries.

Accordingly, the MOD/SDF implements capacity building assistance in maritime security for Myanmar, Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam, Indonesia and Philippines, thereby assisting countries such as coastal states enhance their capabilities, and strengthening cooperation with partners that share the same strategic interests as Japan.

The Basic Plan on Ocean Policy, which was approved by a Cabinet decision in May 2018, calls for strengthening cooperation related to maritime security with various countries through security dialogue and defense interaction among defense authorities at bilateral and multilateral levels with the aim of maintaining and advancing “free and open seas” supported by a maritime order defined by laws and rules. In response to this, the MOD has been working on cooperation for maritime security within regional security dialogue frameworks such as the ADMM Plus and the Inter-Sessional Meeting on Maritime Security (ISMMS).

7 The exercise took place in May 2017, and command post exercises were carried out.