

Enhance Cross Domain Operations Capabilities: Core of Multi Domain Defense Force

~Orient Shield 21~

1. Introduction

On 26 March, 2021, at his first press conference, as the 38th JGSDF Chief of Staff General Yoshida said, “We recognize the security environment surrounding Japan has become the severest since the establishment of JSDF,” emphasizing “Not only we are going to respond to this sever security environment but also create a resilient JGSDF capable of maintaining the security of Japan and meeting the expectations of the people in a foreseeable future.” He added that “The enhancement of the Cross Domain Operations capabilities plays a central role in achieving the Multi Domain Defense Force in accordance with the National Defense Program Guidelines.”

Under this guidance, Orient Shield, the first bilateral Army exercise this year, was conducted at various locations throughout Japan, including Yausubetsu Training Area in Hokkaido Prefecture and Camp Amami on Amami Island in Kagoshima Prefecture from June 24 to July 9, 2021.

The exercise is focused on the collaboration between the JGSDF’s Cross Domain Operations and the U.S. Army’s Multi Domain Operations, with the participation of some 3,000 JGSDF and U.S. Army personnel members that consist of about 1,400 personnel from the JGSDF and about 1,600 personnel from the U.S. Army including 600 personnel from the U.S. Army Japan, making it one of the largest field exercises conducted in Japan by the JGSDF and U.S. Army. The exercise participants included the JGSDF’s Middle Army along with the Northern Army 4th Field Artillery Group of 1st Field Artillery Brigade and the Ground Component Command’s Central NBC Weapon Defense Unit and the U.S. Army’s 40th Infantry Division HQs, 1st Battalion of 28th Infantry Regiment, 17th Field Artillery Brigade, 38th Air Defense Artillery Brigade, 25th Combat Aviation Brigade, 8th Military Police Brigade, 340th Chemical Company, and 5th Security Force Assistance Brigade.



Bilateral EX commanders in STARTEX ceremony (Camp Itami)

2. Collaboration between the JGSDF's Cross Domain Operations and the U.S. Army's Multi Domain Operations

Since the inception of Orient Shield in 1982, the JGSDF and U.S. Army had used it as a tactical level field exercise with units mainly from the JGSDF's infantry regiments and U.S. Army's infantry battalions conducting training, bilaterally. However, following the shifts in the nature of combat, the exercise has expanded its participants to include major units from the JGSDF's Regional Armies and U.S. Army's Divisions since Orient Shield 19 conducted in 2019, evolving into an operational level exercise that combines command post and field training exercises.

While continuing to evolve, the exercise this year focuses on the collaboration between the JGSDF's Cross Domain Operations and the U.S. Army's Multi Domain Operations, as stated previously. Commanding General of the JGSDF Middle Army Lieutenant General Nozawa, the exercise controller, stated one of his exercise requests "Test and reinforce the collaboration associated with the new warfighting concept." He noted that "Cross domain warfighting is a challenge of the Middle Army needs to address," emphasizing "Try to gain a higher level of interoperability through this exercise by testing the new warfighting concept and learning from each other."

To respond the commander's requests, the two week command post exercise at Camp Itami facilitated the headquarters of both sides to enhance operational cooperation at headquarters level by sharing information and synchronizing understanding on respective operations to solidify the procedures for the collaboration between the JGSDF's Cross Domain Operations and the U.S. Army's Multi Domain Operations.

At Yausbetsu training area, the JGSDF's 4th Artillery Group of 1st Artillery Brigade and U.S. Army's 1st Field Artillery Battalion of 94th Field Artillery Regiment, 17th Field Artillery Brigade, conducted a bilateral live fire exercise for the first time, using the JGSDF MLRS and U.S. Army HIMARS. Both units together established a bilateral command post that enabled the units to closely coordinate on targets and firing procedures and enhance collaboration in the field.



HIMARS live fire by U.S. Army (Yausubetsu Training Area)

On Amami Island where a U.S. Army Patriot missile unit was deployed, the JGSDF's 8th Anti Air Artillery Group and U.S. Army's 1st Air Defense Artillery (ADA) Battalion of 1st ADA Regiment, 38th ADA Brigade, conducted bilateral air defense training, featuring the JGSDF's Chu-SAM and the U.S. Army's Patriot at Camp Amami. The drill was simulated as part of integrated air defense by both sides' air defense units in an A2AD environment scenario and successfully increased the bilateral air defense capability for remote islands.

After observing the bilateral air defense training, General Yoshida, Chief of Staff, JGSDF, and Brigadier General Vowell, Commanding General, U.S. Army Japan held a bilateral press conference. General Yoshida said "it is a great opportunity for us to underscore and demonstrate the strength of the Japan-U.S. Alliance in this region. The security environment surrounding Japan has become increasingly severe; we will continue to maintain our bilateral land components' close collaborative relationship. Thus, we would also like to further strengthen our bilateral deterrence posture and response capabilities based on Japan-U.S. Alliance in order to contribute to the peace and stability of the Indo-Pacific region." For his part, General Vowell stated, "Orient Shield 21 presents the level of our bilateral capabilities against potential threats in the region, and we can project forces to any region in Japan to conduct an integrated defense. Therefore, Japan and US are resolved to jointly defend free and open Indo-Pacific. Additionally, the fact that some 1,000 members deployed from the US mainland are participating in the bilateral exercise across Japan epitomises that the relationship between Japan and US as partners is iron-clad," emphasizing the robustness of the current Japan-US relationship as well as the importance of further cooperation between the two nations and a strong will to defend Japan.



Bilateral press conference by GEN Yoshida, CS, JGSDF and BG Vowell, CG, USARJ
(Camp Amami)

3. Implementation of mutual cooperation guidelines for joint operations and combat at the tactical level

At the Aibano Training Area, the JGSDF's 15th Rapid Deployment Regiment and the U.S. Army's 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Infantry Division conducted joint combat training in attack scenarios that included Military Operations in Urban Terrain (MOUT), air assault, and other tactical events to improve their capabilities for mutual cooperation at the tactical level, mainly in the infantry units. In addition, the JGSDF units such as the 14th Nuclear Biological Chemical unit and the Central Nuclear Biological Chemical Weapon Defense unit and the U.S. Army's 340th Chemical Company carried out the joint decontamination training at the same training area to improve their proficiency in handling procedures when areas and units were contaminated by asymmetric attacks using CBRN weapons and in handling procedures in the event of mass casualties.



U.S. soldiers conducting air assault lifted by JGSDF helicopter (Aibano Training Area)



Japan and U.S. servicemembers coordinating over bilateral decontamination procedure (Aibano Training Area)

At Kyogamisaki Communications Site, the JGSDF's 7th Infantry Regiment and the U.S. Army's 8th Military Police Brigade conducted joint exercises on base defense security and strengthened mutual cooperation by practicing how to deal with suspicious individuals entering U.S. military facilities and how to deal with drones falling into the facilities as well as other contingency activities.



Japan and U.S. servicemembers arresting a stranger tried to intrude the base
(Kyogamisaki Communications Site)

4. Conclusion

Orient Shield 21 was held amid the COVID-19 pandemic. About 3,000 personnel from both sides worked as a team in order to accomplish their missions. Not a single case was confirmed during the exercise through a proper quarantine procedure of U.S. Army soldiers after the entry, implementation of thorough anti-COVID measures as well as a series of PCR tests for both sides' personnel. Orient Shield 21 demonstrated the JGSDF and U.S. Army could integrate Multi Domain and Cross Domain Operations and improved our interoperability at a tactical level. It also significantly increased our viability and reliability of the Japan-U.S. Security Arrangements. About 1,000 U.S. Army personnel participated from the mainland U.S. even though they had to endure mandatory two weeks quarantine upon the arrival. These commitment surely prove our robust and unwavering Japan-U.S. alliance.

It is paramount to pass down a number of lessons learned from this exercise to our successors. Bilateral command post exercise Yama Sakura (YS) is coming up near the year end. The JGSDF will reflect on the lessons learned from bilateral maneuvers during Orient Shield 21 and further boost the effectiveness of our operations and cross domain capabilities.