

The Development of Japan Special Operations Command's Capability:

21st Century Samurai Diplomats

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“Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes.

In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized.”

-Japanese Constitution Article 9ⁱ

Introduction

It has been 71 years since Japan experienced war. After World War II, the Government of Japan (GOJ) proclaimed a new Japanese constitution drafted by the United States General Headquarters in 1946, and enforced in 1947. Article 9 of this new constitution, renouncing the use of force in international disputes, has contributed to the peace of Japan for the last 71 years. However, Article 9 also has supported a reluctance to substantially study military doctrine, strategy, national defense, and complex security environments. These academic and analytical gaps in security studies have created a vulnerability in Japan's security. In January 2013, Al-Qaeda affiliates in Algeria took hostages at In Amenas gas plant, and 37 people, including 10 Japanese nationals, lost their lives.ⁱⁱ In this crisis situation, GOJ displayed an inability to respond to an international hostage crisis. Reflecting on this incident, GOJ revised the Self-Defense Law (SDL) to authorize Self-Defense Forces (SDF) to conduct non-combat ground transportation and evacuation, and it was approved in the same year.

Due to pacifist ideology and lack of substantial security studies, Japan has failed to adapt to the growing terror risk, and to develop responsive military measures, foreign intelligence capabilities to support operations abroad, and interagency coordination in host nations (HN). In early 2015, two Japanese nationals were captured by the Islamic State (IS), and executed in Syria.ⁱⁱⁱ This was six months before Prime Minister Shinzo Abe would pass new security legislation

to authorize SDF to conduct combat-rescue operations overseas. In July 2016 in Bangladesh, eight Japanese from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) mission in Bangladesh were involved in an IS affiliates hostage crisis.^{iv} Seven Japanese workers lost their lives. Even though the new security legislation had passed the Diet, SDF's direct action element was not dispatched to respond to the incident. The SDF lacked tactical and operational foreign intelligence capabilities, and had no international-interagency coordination capability with HN. Instead of SDF, the Terrorism Response Team-Tactical Wing for Overseas (TRT2), a Japanese police investigation team of high ranking government officials was dispatched to assess the situation, negotiate with hostage takers, and report to the Prime Minister. This team was also deployed in the case of Syria in 2015. Along with the rest of the world, Japan faces a growing transnational terrorism threat, yet Japan's military capability and legal framework to counterterrorism remain under development.

Historically, Japan has relied on the U.S. security umbrella in order to fill the gaps in its defenses. However, political developments between the two allies have called this arrangement into question. Considering the new U.S. administration, the significance of Japan's independent responsive capability overseas is very high. The incoming Trump administration has signaled a policy of "America First," hinting at a reduction in U.S. military footprints abroad and a push for U.S. partners and allies to provide for more of their own security.^v Japan will need strategic planning to overcome its over-dependency on the U.S. security umbrella and to hedge against the uncertainty posed by the next U.S. administration. In the case of a hostage situation or a terrorist attack overseas involving Japanese nationals, U.S. forces may not be able to react due to extended distances and limited resources, or they might choose not to due to U.S. foreign policy or domestic political restrictions. Therefore, Japan needs to develop its own capability to respond to the complexities of security environments where Japanese nationals are operating.

The adaptability and flexibility of Special Operations Forces (SOF) make them the best fit to Japan's security needs. Globally, SOF take the lead in many countries on counterterrorism operations across tactical, operational and strategic levels.^{vi} Additionally, they advise policy makers and political leaders on foreign affairs, international relations, and cultural intelligence. SOF also conduct kinetic operations and intelligence support operations. In order to respond to the complex security environment and to save Japanese nationals overseas, the Government of Japan should consider the development of a Japan Special Operations Command (JP-SOCOM). To make this argument, this paper consists of four parts; 1) the case for the establishment of JP-SOCOM, 2) the proposed JP-SOCOM's ideal capabilities, 3) the way to establish JP-SOCOM and addressing 4) the possible outcomes of establishing the command.

The Case for JP-SOCOM

1. Japanese Nationals Overseas are at Risk of Terrorism

Japanese nationals living overseas are at higher risk of terrorist attacks than those on the homeland of Japan. As of October 2015, approximately 1,317,078 Japanese nationals live abroad or approximately 1 percent of the 126,950,000-total population of Japan.^{vii viii} This overseas population breaks down into approximately 50 percent expatriate workers, 20 percent students

and researchers, 3 percent government officials, and 17 percent others.^{ix} In its propaganda magazine, *Dabiq*, the Islamic State (IS) conveyed a declaration of the jihad against Japan and its people based on the Japanese support for the war on terror in 2003.^x This overseas population is much more likely to be the targets of such a jihad. Two Japanese nationals were killed by IS in Syria in February 2015, and seven Japanese nationals were killed in the July 2016 attack in Dhaka, Bangladesh by IS affiliates. In neither of these cases did GOJ dispatch the SDF to respond. For the hostage crisis in Syria, the new security legislation had not yet been passed, so GOJ did not possess the legal authority to conduct rescue operations overseas. For the Dhaka attack, while the new security legislation had been passed, GOJ and SDF were still developing their capability to respond to international crises. Moreover, they were significantly missing the coordination with the government and security forces of the countries where Japanese nationals are located. Japan is also incapable of intelligence gathering from local sources that are necessary to support SDF's direct actions overseas and Japanese leaders' decisions to deploy them. Due to these critical incapacities, Japanese nationals overseas face terror threats.

Why has Japan allowed this incapacity to linger? The answer lies with the pacifist constitution. The constitution has contributed to Japan's peace for the last 71 years. However, at the same time, it has fostered an anti-military and anti-war sentiment. Such a sentiment has led to a reluctance to pursue substantial understanding of the modern complex security environment. With severe opposition to warfare and military organization across Japan, SDF has struggled to develop its own military strategy and doctrines.^{xi} Even if SDF developed a new doctrine, empowering SDF through doctrinal education might be considered as violation of Article 9 in sense of "war potential".^{xii} Japan's pacifist ideology and its environment took away an opportunity to establish military academic foundation for the SDF. Furthermore, the anti-military sentiment in Japan keeps SDF from organizing expeditions or even thinking in outward looking ways. Given the uncertain priorities of the new U.S. regime, SDF needs this outward posture, both to partner and support its ally and to allow further commitment and engagement in countries where there will be small or nonexistent U.S. military footprints. Active engagements with foreign militaries beyond the U.S. forces require SDF's correspondence with and understanding of the modern security environment, networking, and the most importantly military doctrinal education.

Japan Special Operations Command Capabilities

The United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM)'s core activities are direct action, special reconnaissance, countering weapons of mass destruction, counterterrorism, unconventional warfare, foreign internal defense, security force assistance, hostage rescue and recovery, counterinsurgency, foreign humanitarian assistance, military information operations, and civil affairs operations.^{xiii} Although most of these activities are applicable to JP-SOCOM, with some adjustment to fit into the Japanese legal framework, JP-SOCOM should draw the line on foreign internal defense. A study done by the Library of Congress suggests that the internal defense should have great risk to provoke an armed conflict.^{xiv} Japan and a JP-SOCOM's mission should avoid the potential risk of war. With the necessary adjustments and limitations, the potential core activities for JP-SOCOM should include direct action, special reconnaissance, countering weapons of mass destruction, counterterrorism, security forces assistance, hostage rescue and recovery, and foreign humanitarian assistance. Among these activities, counterterrorism should be prioritized as a key function of JP-SOCOM. Reflecting on the security environment of Japan, JP-SOCOM and its SOF are useful as 1) human intelligence (HUMINT)

collectors for its own missions, as well as in support of allies and partners, 2) responders to terror attacks, and in rescue and recovery operations, 3) liaisons with foreign militaries, 4) an SDF educational institute, and 5) advisors to policy makers on foreign military affairs and security cooperation with credible field intelligence and expertise.

1) HUMINT Collectors

SOF are useful to gain access to a local community to collect HUMINT and to best prepare for direct actions. The Hollywood image of special operations teams often illustrate dramatic raids but omit the requisite intelligence support necessary to conduct such operations. Successful direct actions overseas require a native intelligence capability and coordination with the local community.^{xv} These requirements must be satisfied before decision makers can initiate special operations. Key sources to generate intelligence to support operations often exist in local networks.^{xvi} By leveraging the peace time community relationships, built through capacity building, joint exercises for natural disaster response, and cultural exchanges, SOF can establish cooperative and operational networking in the local communities. Additionally, intensive foreign language training with cultural intelligence, not limited to the English language study the SDF currently prescribes, will be a necessity. Japan's peaceful approaches to networking allows them to obtain intelligence that allies and partners cannot. Such intelligence can be used to support Japan's allies and partners, if JP-SOCOM cannot conduct the direct actions due to physical and political restriction.

2) Liaising with Foreign Militaries and Law Enforcements

SOF are useful for liaising with foreign militaries and law enforcements for tactical, operational, and strategic intelligence sharing and support other countries' joint exercises and operations.^{xvii} Today, diplomacy is no longer the sole privilege of foreign ministries, but may also be performed by SOF members.^{xviii} For Japan, this is an era for samurai diplomats. Liaison Officers (LNO) of SOF can coordinate with allies and partners by utilizing their language, cultural intelligence and diplomacy.^{xix} A strong liaison capability will allow JP-SOCOM and its SOF to maximize the effectiveness of coordinating with HN's military and law enforcement in events involving Japanese nationals, or for HN crises such as hostage rescue, recovery missions, or even Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR).

3) Responders to Terror Attacks, Rescue and Recovery Operations

JP-SOCOM should be able to conduct rescue and recovery operations independently or jointly. SDF has been trained to defend Japan's homeland. However, in September 2015, GOJ passed new security legislation which authorizes SDF to conduct rescue operations overseas. Approximately 1 percent of Japanese population stays abroad, and Japan needs to take responsibility for its own people. There remains the possibility that the U.S. military under the new administration may not react to incidents involving Japanese nationals. With sufficient and precise intelligence for the operations, and coordination with HN, SOF can prepare for such counterterrorism operations and react to them in a timely manner. With sufficient and precise tactical and operational intelligence, and special tactics to

conduct the operations, Japan can, at least, have an option to conduct operations overseas. Furthermore, coordination and liaising with HN's military and law enforcement will maximize the effectiveness of the rescue operations. With the cultural intelligence and language skill, SOF can also conduct negotiations with HN as well as hostage takers. With its HUMINT and government liaison requirements met, Japanese can give consideration to direct action.

4) SOF's Expertise and Experience for Self-Defense Forces Education

JP-SOCOM should provide doctrinal education and training for SDF-Conventional Forces (SFDFC). Due to the constitutional restrictions, SDFCF has very narrow military function, and limited opportunity to learn new operational skills through real world tests. JP-SOCOM will be the most likely forces to engage in foreign combat and international crisis situations. Based on their experiences, JP-SOCOM will develop doctrine and strategy to combat terrorism. SOF can draw upon that knowledge to generate doctrine and rules of engagement for SDFCD in future Peace Keeping Operations (PKO), Peacebuilding, and HADR missions under the United Nations. ^{xx}

5) Leveraging SOF's Expertise, Knowledge and Experience with Policymakers

JP-SOCOM and its SOF can leverage their expertise on foreign environments and military cooperation with domestic political leaders and policy makers. Currently, GOJ depends on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA)-based external sources to plan Japanese foreign military and security related policies. However, the quality of the intelligence gathered by MOFA-based diplomatic channels differs from SOF (military-experts)-based channels due to the respective mission settings. With SOF-based intelligence and expertise, SOF can advise GOJ's political leaders and policy makers on certain aspects of international relations.^{xxi} Based on this advice, they can better assess their environment, and they can better plan and execute cooperation with allies and partners.

The Way to Establish JP-SOCOM

1) Critical Thinking, Foreign Language and Intellectual Freedom

JP-SOCOM needs to emphasize critical thinking and foreign language education in order to educate SOF members to be independent and creative thinkers. Considering the current security environment, traditional rote education is no longer effective and less likely to achieve desired outcomes. JP-SOCOM can offer a study abroad program which is fully sponsored by JP-SOCOM and intended to earn bachelor, master or even doctoral degrees for SOF members at public and private universities in the world. Through this program, SOF members can broaden their knowledge beyond their expertise and develop critical thinking through interactions with people from different background. At domestic level, JP-SOCOM should also provide intellectual freedom for SOF members to discuss and debate their academic interest in foreign languages. This opportunity will allow them to develop their critical thinking and foreign language skills. Through these opportunities, SOF members are able to think independently, making a decision where there are no right answers, and responding innovatively and creatively to uncertain situations.

Therefore, JP-SOCOM needs to be able to train SDF members to become flexible, innovative and creative thinkers to prepare for counterterrorism missions with partner countries.

2) The Domestic, Constitutional Opposition

The empowerment of JP-SOCOM needs conditions and limitations. The establishment of JP-SOCOM will likely provoke heavy resistance on constitutional and political grounds. Traditionally, SDF has been trained to defend Japan's homeland and its population from external threats; JP-SOCOM and the consequent development of counterterrorism strategy and doctrinal education for SOF may be considered as an offensive military posture. SOF and its counterterrorism missions will need to be kept explicitly within self-defense measure.

However, there is a very strong case to be made to the Japanese people that counterterrorism and hostage rescue operations are an important part of Japan's self-defense. Japan's incapability to rescue hostages was internationally exposed during its rescue operation in the protection of kidnapped Japanese citizens in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). Japan did not have the capability, and the loss of its people has caused pain for more than 50 years. SOF capability addressed in this paper does not suggest that it should seize the DPRK nor could it deter DPRK nuclear attacks. Yet, it is important for Japan to obtain hostage rescue capability, a core SOF capability, in order not to repeat recent the same failure. Limited empowerment of Special Operations Forces militarily educates SOF effectively, keeps them in safe zone from any impediments, and allows them to conduct their missions. By these limitations and conditions, JP-SOCOM can reasonably get beyond the constitutional opposition.

3) Coordination with the U.S.

USSOCOM can facilitate the establishment of JP-SOCOM. Firstly, USSOCOM can mentor JP-SOF's intelligence gathering training, doctrinal education, and negotiation exercises as well as tactical training in order to operationalize JP-SOCOM's core functions. Secondly, it can assist in the education of SDF commanders, Japanese political leaders, and policy makers to understand the special operations by leveraging the officer exchange program. Lastly, the United States can share their foreign bases with JP-SOF so that Japan can take more responsibility for protecting its own citizens abroad. As JP-SOCOM develops, JP-SOF will be able to undertake a larger share of the burden of Japan's security as well as come to the assistance of the United States in intelligence sharing and support. The more that the U.S. contributes to the development of JP-SOCOM, the more perfectly it will complement the US-SOF abilities.

The Future of a Japan Special Operations Command

The complex security environment and transnational terrorism pose greater risks to Japanese nationals overseas while Japan still does not have sufficient capability to respond to international crisis situations other than through diplomatic approaches led by Ministry of Foreign Affairs. JP-SOCOM is expected to mitigate this risk, to make Japanese nationals overseas more secure. Additionally, it requires its own accessible network for multiple purposes in both peace-time and crisis situations. In order to operationalize JP-SOCOM, it needs to consider critical thinking and foreign language education in order to enable SOF operators for adapting and

responding the complex security environment which requires innovative and creative solutions, to consider balancing between the empowerment of JP-SOCOM and the Japanese constitutional requirements, and finally to consider the ways of cooperate with the U.S. and its SOCOM.

1. MOD and SOF Enhance Domestic Civil-Military Relationship

After the establishment of JP-SOCOM, MOD can engage in civil-military relations by leveraging JP-SOF's diplomacy in order to reduce anti-military sentiment and have the public understand current security trends and the role of MOD. Japan's position toward military organization and warfare is a sensitive issue domestically and internationally especially when involving neighbors. In order to avoid potential confrontation with neighboring countries, Japan should maintain SOF's transparent mission statement which is to counterterrorism, and their mission will never be beyond self-defense. This can also be applicable to Japanese public. The improvement of domestic civil-military relations maintains SOF's transparency and gains popular support from the public. Such interactions help the public to understand the security environment and MOD's role. Thus, JP-SOCOM should take the lead on civil-military relations to secure its transparency of their activities and to gain popular support from the public.

2. Contribute to Global Counterterrorism Effort

With the establishment of JP-SOCOM, Japan can contribute to international efforts to counterterrorism more practically. JP-SOCOM can support domestic political leaders and policy makers for international affairs. Based on this advice, Japan can plan a long-term and practical international strategy with correspondent policies. Moreover, JP-SOF's deep commitment and engagement in counterterrorism overseas would deter terrorism against Japanese nationals.

Endnotes

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