

American Base Town in Northern Japan. US and Japanese Air Forces at Misawa Target North Korea

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Saito Mitsumasa

Translated by John Junkerman

A Base-Dependent Town

Everyone sat, eating cheese rolls in silence. Cheese wrapped in gyoza skins and deep-fried, cheese rolls are a local “B-class gourmet” food. The piping hot rolls seemed to warm the chilled, rain-drenched bodies of the customers.

The shop was the Noodle House, on the main street of the city of Misawa, Aomori Prefecture in northern Japan. As the name suggests, one can get all kinds of Japanese noodles at the restaurant. But it is not noodles but these cheese rolls that are hot sellers. They’re a favorite among the airmen from Misawa Air Base and their families, who make up some 90 percent of the customers.

“Coming here to Misawa, what I’ve been most surprised to see is how totally different the atmosphere is from Okinawa. Why is there no anti-American, anti-base sentiment here?”

Filling his mouth with a ketchup-covered cheese roll, the man shook his head in wonder. Those around him nodded in confirmation. It was May 24, and some 70 legal activists from around Japan had descended upon the Noodle House en masse.



The group was part of a Misawa base observation tour that was organized by the Tokyo-based Japan Lawyers Association for Freedom. For the group of lawyers working for peace and human rights, the American bases in Japan are a critical issue.

At the time of their visit, the tidal wave of anti-base sentiment generated by the controversy over the relocation of the Futenma Marine air base in Okinawa was surging from the southernmost region of Japan toward the mainland, so there was interest in knowing the situation around the base in Misawa, at the northern tip of Honshu.

But the Misawa they observed was the very picture of tranquility. The roar of jet fighters shook the air just as it does in Okinawa, but everywhere they went, the citizens they met had only positive things to say about the base.

Hearing these restrained, pro-base comments was something of a culture shock to the

members of the group, who had previously only encountered the negative image that equates bases with sound pollution and crime.

Why were the citizens of Misawa so tolerant of the base? Didn't it represent a burden? Queried by a succession of people from the lawyers' group, Noodle House owner Sato Kazuo responded as follows:

"It's important to understand that the origin of the base in Misawa is totally different from those in Okinawa. As I understand it, land in Okinawa was forcibly confiscated from residents by the American military, and the bases were built there. And that resulted in anti-base sentiments. But Misawa is the opposite. There was a base here that drew people to it, and that's how the town formed. The base came first."

Therefore..., he paused for a breath and seemed to firm his resolve: "We don't say so openly, but I'd guess more than 90 percent of the citizens favor the status quo, they support the continued presence of the base."

The reluctance to speak openly is due to the recent flood of reports on television and in newspapers of opposition to American bases, sparked by the Futenma controversy. In that context, the people of Misawa don't want to be misunderstood as "base-lovers."



The base is a sensitive issue to the local citizens. This is partly a consequence of how deeply and complexly the base is intertwined with the local economy. Of course, Sato hates the noise and the crimes of the American forces. But this is not enough to push him into opposing the base. The issue is not so black-and-white.

In fiscal 2008, the city of Misawa received ¥6.2 billion (then, approx. \$60 million) in defense-related subsidies and grants. Leaving aside complicating factors, this amount represented about one third of the city's annual budget. In addition, there's the money that 10,000 military personnel and dependents spend in various ways. This is not an insignificant sum in a city of 40,000 people.

For this reason, Sato distrusts the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ)-led government. Coming to power in the fall of 2009, the administration boasted it would move the Futenma base outside of Okinawa, but ended up accepting the status quo. This only served to agitate Okinawa, pouring oil on the flames of anti-base sentiment, Sato says.

This opinion is shared by a 47-year old man who lives in Misawa and works on the American base. The wages of base workers are covered by the "sympathy budget" that the Japanese government provides in support of American bases. As such they were a target of the DPJ administration's budget-trimming campaign, the worker notes, because the wages are higher than prevailing rates in the area.

"Budget-cutting? That's just grandstanding, to please the people. Aren't there more fundamental things the government should be paying attention to?" the worker remarks, without concealing his displeasure. "There are 1,400 base workers in Misawa. Isn't the DPJ ignoring the fact that cutting all of their wages is going to depress the local economy?"

A fellow worker continues, “What we saw with Futenma is that, when it comes to the base issue, there’s no difference between the DPJ and the LDP (Liberal Democratic Party). They’re both beholden to the US military, they’re both hopeless.”

One who has been observing the people of Misawa with interest through American eyes is the Tokyo-based poet and essayist Arthur Binard. Raised in Detroit near a base of the Michigan National Guard, Binard has long been concerned about the economic impact of bases. That interest deepened after he began making regular monthly appearances for a radio station in Aomori, and he has taken up the issue in his program.

“I certainly understand the thinking of people in Misawa,” he says. “It was the same in the area I grew up in. But here’s what I think. At the same time you obtain economic stability through dependence on a base, it becomes a limitation, and it prevents economic growth in other areas. The existence of the base restricts the character of Misawa, and it eliminates other possibilities.”

Today, a vague anxiety hangs over many people in Misawa. This is the fear that some day American planes might disappear from the scene. There are 40 F-16 jet fighters assigned to Misawa, but around 10 of them have been dispatched to Iraq, and 15 others were temporarily dispatched to South Korea in May. Fewer than half of the planes remain in Misawa. Of course, this reduction has had an impact on the local economy.



USAF F-16 Fighting Falcons over Iraq on Feb 17, 2009 (US Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. James L. Harper Jr.)

Sato notes, “A reduction of one F-16 means a reduction of 20 to 30 troops, including the pilot of course and all the maintenance personnel and support staff. So the absence of more than half of the planes is a big blow.”

As if in response to these words, a city hall official sighs, “If the F-16s continue to disappear... The thought puts me in a cold sweat. If the base is eliminated, Misawa will fall into ruin. I wonder if the central government understands this.”

The Plan to Withdraw the F-16s

In fact, there’s a reason people raise this concern. It stems from September 2009, when reports appeared in some of the Japanese media of plans to withdraw the F-16s from Misawa as early as the end of the year. It turned out that this was simply one scenario under consideration by the American government, but the reports sent shockwaves through the base-centered town.

Is it really possible that the F-16s, which represent the sole aerial attack force of the US Air Force in Japan, would soon vanish from the scene? Seeking an answer, I queried sources in the US departments of state and defense, the

US military in Japan, the Japanese ministries of defense and foreign affairs... everyone I know who was connected with US-Japan relations.

But the answer was “No.” One person connected to the US base in Misawa stated his total denial in the following terms:

“At present, we have heard absolutely nothing about such a plan. There is a standing plan to upgrade the aging F-15s at Kadena with cutting-edge F-22 Raptors, but the F-16s are not going to be withdrawn.”

Still, news of the plan to withdraw the F-16s caused a sensation. At the Misawa city hall, which is committed to coexistence and co-prosperity with the base, city officials raised what amounted to screams: “Withdrawal of the F-16s will impact base subsidies and throw the city’s fiscal planning into disarray.” “We’ll end up in fiscal ruin, like the city of Yubari in Hokkaido.”

The ministries of foreign affairs and defense tried to quell these fears over the future viability of the city by denying the plan to withdraw the F-16s. But the news reports left lingering, deep-seated suspicions such as those mentioned above.

Then, why did news of such a plan emerge, all of a sudden? One military affairs expert explains the context this way:

“I’ve been told that this withdrawal plan was one of numerous options that were prepared as draft proposals. It was prepared by a government-contracted think tank. It’s probable that a preliminary proposal like this got into the hands of one sector of the media as

a result of a deliberate leak by the previous ruling party—the LDP—and people associated with the US government who had cast their lot with the LDP over the reorganization of American forces in Japan. The purpose, of course, was to cause a political shock to the DPJ-led government.”

At the root of this maneuver was the dispute over the relocation of the Futenma Marine air base, which had become a political problem between the US and the former Hatoyama government and remains pending. “The real aim of the leak was likely to get the government to comply with the existing agreement to move the base to the shore along Camp Schwab (in the waters off Henoko in Nago City).”

In other words, do as the US wishes or American forces will pull out of Japan, leaving the country to face North Korea and its ballistic missiles on its own. The LDP camp and the US were posing this forceful challenge: Is Japan—the DPJ—prepared to do this?

The F-16s were stationed at Misawa in 1985 as a forward presence in the strategy of containing the Soviet Far East military. In the event of a conflict, their mission was to destroy Soviet air bases on Sakhalin and Etorofu Island to facilitate US Navy and Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force patrols for nuclear submarines.



After the end of the Cold War, North Korea became the hypothetical enemy. The F-16s are poised to deliver the first wave of surgical strikes, targeted at strategic installations such as anti-aircraft systems, missile-launching bases, and nuclear facilities. From the North Korean perspective, they are knives pointed at the country's throat.

For this reason, the impact on North Korea of the plan to withdraw the F-16s from Misawa cannot be overlooked. Senior Fellow John Park of the government-funded US Institute for Peace offered an analysis along the following lines: The withdrawal plan could send an erroneous message to North Korea, since the North Koreans watch every move the American make. If the F-16s are withdrawn, North Korea could mistake this for a signal from the US and see it as a chance to drive a wedge between Japan and the US.

Over the past quarter century, the US military has transformed Misawa into a permanent stronghold for launching attacks against the Soviet Union and North Korea. The military affairs analyst Ogawa Kazuhisa has described it as the "Misawa fortress."

Is the Misawa fortress actually changing its make-up? One intriguing response to this question was provided by the base commander, Colonel David Stilwell, in a comment in the February 2010 edition of the magazine *Kōkū Fan* (Aviation Fan):

"Under present conditions, I know of no concrete plan to withdraw the F-16s from Misawa. ... Closing a base or moving a unit requires a great deal of work and takes a lot of time."

The comment can be read as a denial of the withdrawal plan. In fact, "the American military can move planes or ships surprisingly easily, as strategy shifts or to meet their own needs. In the space of a month, they can move a unit of jet fighters," according to the military affairs journalist Maeda Tetsuo.

In this fashion, the F-16s in Misawa were linked into the debate over the Futenma problem. Is it possible that the F-16s, the most potent aerial attack force in Northeast Asia, will someday leave Misawa? The answer lies behind the curtain of military secrecy.

The Much-Delayed Advanced Fighter

While the American F-16s garner strategic and sometimes political attention, one must not overlook the Japanese Air Self Defense Force (ASDF) that shares residence on the base with the F-16s.

"There are 80 Japanese and American fighters concentrated on one base? That's incredible."

This comment from a university student elicited a collective sigh from the packed classroom. It was a day in June, when I had been invited to lecture to a journalism class at Waseda University.

I had explained that the Misawa airfield is the only one in Japan that is used jointly by the US and Japanese militaries, as well as civilian aircraft. And that the 40 F-16s of the US Air Force 35th Fighter Wing were stationed alongside about 40 F-2s in the ASDF 3rd Air Wing.



After the lecture, most of the students I spoke with expressed bewilderment that Misawa was such an enormous base. They couldn't conceal their astonishment that, with a combined attack force of 80 fighters, Misawa hosts one of the most powerful strike forces of any base in the world.

A written comment from a senior in the department of law expressed these sentiments quite frankly: "Your lecture was shocking. I knew that the Misawa base was there in Aomori Prefecture, but I had never heard that it has one of the most powerful attack forces in the world. I am appalled at myself for living in such ignorance."

Tokyo Woman's Christian University Professor

Kurokawa Shuji, a specialist in US-Japan relations, assesses this type of response from students in the following way:

"This reflects the average level of awareness of the military bases among the Japanese people. It's not necessarily a lack of concern, but they carry on without knowing. Not knowing presents no obstacle in their daily lives. And when they learn the facts for the first time, they're bewildered by the complexity and importance of the bases."

The base may bewilder the Japanese, but on the far side of the ocean, there are others who have focused an intense gaze on Misawa, especially on the advanced F-2 fighter stationed at the ASDF base.

On July 23, 2007, the *New York Times* ran a front-page story on the participation of Japanese F-2s from Misawa in Cope North Guam, a joint training exercise with US forces, in which the fighters engaged in live-bombing drills for the first time. The headline read, "Bomb by Bomb, Japan Sheds Military Restraints."

A B-52 Stratofortress leads a formation of two F-16 Fighting Falcons; two Japan Air Self-Defense Force F-2 attack fighters and two US Navy EA-6B Prowlers Feb. 15, 2010 near Guam during Exercise Cope North. (US Air Force photo/Staff Sgt. Jacob N. Bailey)

The ASDF is constrained from conducting live-bombing exercises within Japan itself, so it regularly dispatches aircraft to Guam for training. The newspaper described the training exercise, and noted especially the capacity of the F-2s to fly the 3,000 kilometers to Guam without refueling. F-2s began to be stationed at Misawa in 2000. The 3rd Fighter Squadron was

later joined by the 8th Fighter Squadron to comprise the 3rd Air Wing, which reached a total complement of some 40 F-2s in March 2010.

As can be seen in its appearance, the F-2 is based on the design of the F-16. It was jointly developed by Japan and the US, with much anticipation as the “Heisei-period Zero Fighter.” However, its development was substantially delayed by Japan’s decision to load the plane with high technology, and the cost of each plane rose dramatically.

At an average unit cost of ¥12.3 billion (about \$145 million), it costs four times as much as an F-16. It is one of the most expensive jet fighters in the world. Because of its high cost, the original production run was reduced by a third, to a total of 94 units.

“It is a multi-role fighter, capable of performing counter-air, -ground, and -ship missions,” a pilot in the 3rd Fighter Squadron explains proudly. However, the F-2 was developed to prevent the landing of enemy ships on the Japanese coast, so it is heavily weighted toward anti-ship attack functions. It is a product of the Soviet threat doctrine of the Cold War-era.

“But, since the end of the Cold War, it has been difficult to imagine a situation like that,” says a high official in the Ministry of Defense, implicitly acknowledging that the F-2 is out-of-date. Among military affairs analysts, it is often said that the F-2 was already obsolete and lacking in capacity at the moment it appeared.

A spotlight was cast on the capacity of the F-2 when the doctrine of preemptive attack on enemy bases was proposed in response to missile launches by North Korea. Then-Defense Minister Ishiba Shigeru of the former LDP-led government stated the doctrine as follows: “If an announcement is made that a missile is to be launched and the fueling of the missile begins, it is legally permissible to strike enemy territory.”

Ishiba’s statement is no more than one interpretation of the constitution. But if in fact the situation developed where a missile base had to be attacked, how would it be done? Most military analysts respond that there is no other option than employing the F-2.

This is why the *New York Times* focused its attention on the live-bombing drills of the F-2, because they demonstrated that Japan has the capacity to attack North Korea. A high-ranking pilot in the 3rd Fighter Squadron described a “new weapon” that has recently been acquired by the F-2s. “These are JDAM (joint direct attack munitions). They enable pinpoint attacks regardless of weather conditions.”

JDAMs are precision guided weapons that utilize GPS signals to achieve a target accuracy of several meters. But the military affairs journalist Maeda dismisses the doctrine: “It would mean dispensing with the exclusive self-defense doctrine, which is a pillar of the constitution.”

An officer in the ASDF explains why preemptive attacks on enemy bases are unrealistic.

“The missiles that North Korea targets at Japan are Rodong missiles (estimated range: 1,300 kilometers). The Rodong is mounted on a launcher and is therefore mobile, and the missiles are hidden in secret tunnels in mountainous areas. There are more than 100 of them. If you wanted to attack them, the only way would be to detect the missiles with a surveillance satellite the instant they emerged from the tunnels, and to pick them off one at a time, like playing whac-a-mole. Would that be possible?”

Above all, to ensure that the attack planes were not shot down, the

enemy’s radar and anti-aircraft missiles would have to be destroyed first. The ASDF doesn’t have the armaments or skills to do this.”

According to the Ministry of Defense, first-line armaments are now under a process of review, in light of the end of the Cold War. As the SDF is reorganized, the F-2 is seen as too expensive for the capacities it delivers. Having arrived late on the scene, where is this advanced fighter headed?

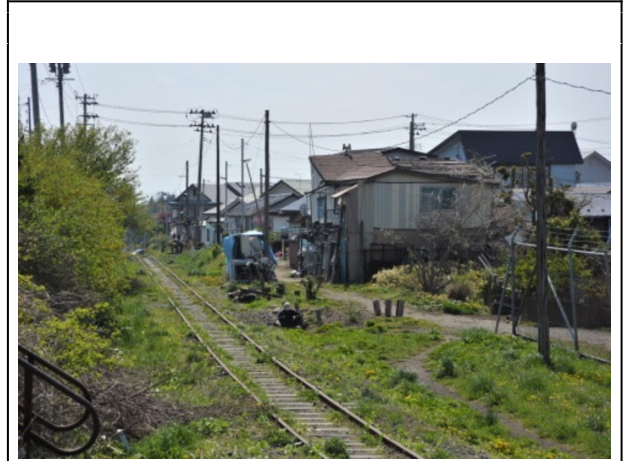
The ¥200 Billion “Sympathy Budget”

Neatly trimmed lawns, shining green in the sun. The expansive gardens are equipped with barbecue sets for the residents’ days off.



“This is just like a pocket of America itself.” This is how the scene struck Iijima Shigeaki, associate professor at Nagoya Gakuin University, when he visited Misawa to survey the American military housing that lines the streets outside of the base. What surprised Iijima was the deeply discomfiting view of what appeared to be an American town transplanted intact into Japan, as well as the gap between that scene and the ramshackle,

tin-roofed Japanese homes that stood nearby. The size of the homes and their luxuriousness were worlds apart.



Japanese housing in Misawa

Iijima, a specialist in constitutional and peace studies, has been conducting fixed-point observation in Okinawa and Aomori, at the northern and southern extremes of the Japanese archipelago, as a way of examining the continued presence of the American military in Japan. One aspect of his study is the “sympathy budget” that the Japanese government pays to support the base presence. The American military housing before his eyes was a product of that very sympathy budget.

“The taxes used to pay for the sympathy budget are, of course, paid by Japanese citizens. That American soldiers live in better houses than the Japanese taxpayers is head over heels.”

Through the sympathy budget, the Japanese government bears the cost of stationing American troops in Japan. This includes housing outside of the base, as well as the costs of the buildings and utilities on the base, and the wages of Japanese base workers. The system began in 1978, after Defense Agency Director-General Kanemaru Shin declared “We want to deal with the US military from a

standpoint of sympathy.”

At the beginning, the Japanese share of costs amounted to only ¥6.2 billion (approx. \$27 million at then current exchange rates). In response to repeated requests from the US military, the budget grew by leaps and bounds until it reached ¥275.6 billion (approx. \$2.5 billion) in 1999. Fiscal constraints have led to some reduction in the budget, but it still amounted to ¥192.8 billion (approx. \$2.1 billion) during the last fiscal year. [1]

Iijima comments,

“Last year, the tremendous sum of nearly ¥200 billion was used for the maintenance of another country’s military. Even more problematic is the content. Off-base housing that is more luxurious than the Japanese enjoy is part of it, but the wages of cake decorators, bowling alley managers, and the maintenance workers at golf courses are also included. The taxes paid by Japanese people cover the costs of off-duty leisure activities of American soldiers. It is a truly remarkable phenomenon.”

If you liken the American bases to a house, in this peculiar arrangement the Japanese government is lending out a mansion complete with maid service at no cost, not even charging for water and electricity. The Americans fully understand how comfortable this arrangement is. For example, Rep. Stephen Solarz, then chairman of the Asian subcommittee of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, told the Japan National Press Club in 1991 that the US “should be grateful” to Japan for welcoming American troops on its soil and bearing more of the costs than any other ally, despite the fact that the US military’s primary mission was a

regional one, to deter aggression against countries in the region other than Japan.

While some countries charge the American military fees for hosting US bases, very few have agreed to share the costs of those bases. Japan and Germany are among them. Many military affairs analysts point to this as one reason the US has been reluctant to reduce its presence in Japan.

Another reason is Japan’s strategic location. It was positioned to block expansion into the Pacific by America’s hypothetical enemies after World War II: the Soviet Union, China, and North Korea.



Former Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage was once asked about the importance of Okinawa, and he nearly shouted his reply: “Location, location, location!” These words can be applied to the entire Japanese archipelago. In the words of military analyst Ogawa, “As a strategic base, the Japanese islands buttress half of the globe, from Hawaii to the Cape of

Good Hope. If the US were to lose Japan, it could no longer remain a superpower with a leadership position in the world.”

An interesting document provides support for this perspective. It is the US Department of Defense *Base Structure Report*, which lists the property value of the American military’s foreign bases. The value is calculated as the cost of building the same base from scratch, which is termed “plant replacement value.”

**Large US Military Bases Overseas
(Department of Defense *Base Structure Report*, 2006)**

(PRV=Plant Replacement Value, in billion US\$)

Rank	Base	Location	PRV
1	Yokosuka (Navy)	Kanagawa, Japan	3.88
2	Kadena (Air Force)	Okinawa, Japan	3.82
3	Misawa (Air Force)	Aomori, Japan	3.71
4	Ramstein (Air Force)	Germany	3.29
5	Yokota (Air Force)	Tokyo, Japan	2.99
6	Thule (Air Force)	Greenland	2.43
7	Diego Garcia (Navy)	British Indian Ocean Territories	2.36
8	Keflavik (Navy)	Iceland	2.33
9	Kwajalein Atoll (Army)	Marshall Islands	2.19
10	Osan (Air Force)	South Korea	2.08
11	Sasebo (Navy)	Nagasaki, Japan	1.91
12	Guantanamo (Navy)	Cuba	1.89
13	Camp Foster (Marine)	Okinawa, Japan	1.68
14	RAF Lakenheath (Air Force)	United Kingdom	1.67
15	Spangdahlem (Air Force)	Germany	1.62
16	Iwakuni (Marine)	Yamaguchi, Japan	1.54
17	Yongsan Garrison (Army)	South Korea	1.37
18	Kunsan (Air Force)	South Korea	1.32
19	Atsugi (Navy)	Kanagawa, Japan	1.32
20	Camp Kinser (Marine)	Okinawa, Japan	1.29
21	South Camp Vilseck (Army)	Germany	1.25
22	Incirlik (Air Force)	Turkey	1.15
23	East Camp Grafenwoehr (Army)	Germany	1.14
24	RAF Mildenhall (Air Force)	United Kingdom	1.14
25	Camp Casey (Army)	South Korea	1.08
26	Smith Barracks (Army)	Germany	1.01
27	Sigonella (Navy)	Italy	0.98
28	Camp Hansen (Marine)	Okinawa, Japan	0.94
29	Camp Zama (Army)	Kanagawa, Japan	0.92
30	Lajes (Air Force)	Portugal	0.89
31	Aviano (Air Force)	Italy	0.88
32	Naples (Navy)	Italy	0.84
33	Rhine Ordnance Barracks (Army)	Germany	0.79
34	Kadena Ammo Storage Annex (Air Force)	Okinawa, Japan	0.79
35	Sagami General Depot (Army)	Kanagawa, Japan	0.74
36	Wamer Barracks (Army)	Germany	0.73
37	Vogelweh Housing Annex (Air Force)	Germany	0.70
38	Futenma (Marine)	Okinawa, Japan	0.69

According to the 2006 report, 14 of the 38 most valuable large bases in the world are concentrated in Japan. This includes the top

three: the Navy base at Yokosuka, home port for a nuclear aircraft carrier (\$3.88 billion); the Air Force base at Kadena, the largest air terminal in Asia (\$3.82 billion); and the airbase at Misawa (\$3.71 billion).

There is little difference in the value of these three bases, so it can be said that Misawa is one the most valuable American bases in the world. It goes without saying that this value is supported by the sympathy budget.

Analyzing this document, US-Japan relations expert Niihara Shoji comments, “The abnormal prominence of the American bases in Japan and Japan’s status as an American base state are vividly in evidence.” Niihara goes so far as to say, “Without Japan, there is no American military.”

Facing this massive base presence, Associate Professor Iijima poses the following question: “As we can see in the incidents and accidents that occur in Okinawa, even in peacetime the American military gives priority to its own interests, and conducts a whole range of exercises without regard for any harm done to the Japanese. Under emergency conditions in a conflict, would such an organization defend the Japanese people?”

One response was provided by Gregory Clark, president emeritus of Tama University and a commentator on international and economic affairs:

“Many Japanese consider the American bases indispensable for the defense of Japan, but the US gives little thought to defending Japan. The US government signed the security treaty with Japan because it needed to have bases in the security stronghold of the Japanese islands. It is no more than an extension of post-World War II occupation policy.

Unfortunately, if the US is going to protect anything it is the American bases in Japan, not Japan itself.”

The Transformation of the US-Japan Alliance

“We completed our mission without having any contact with the pirates. I am proud that we were able to contribute to the national interest and to respond to the expectations of international society.” Captain Nakahata Yasuki, commander of the 4th Escort Division of the Maritime Self Defense Force (MSDF), proudly delivered these remarks on March 20, 2010, on a wharf crowded with welcoming families and fellow seamen at Ominato base in the city of Mutsu, Aomori Prefecture.

The 3,550-ton destroyer *Hamagiri*, with a crew of 150, had just returned to its homeport after a 5-month absence, having been deployed to the sea off of Somalia and the Gulf of Aden under the Anti-Piracy Measures Law. There was excitement in the air at the return of the ship, carrying the aura of the distant Arabian Sea.



Hamagiri

The *Hamagiri* had been paired with the

Yokosuka-based 4,650-ton destroyer Takanami to form the third surface force dispatched to the region, where it provided escorts for commercial shipping for three and a half months from November 2009. The ships performed 34 escorts, protecting a total of 283 ships, including those of foreign countries.

On February 3, more than a month before the *Hamagiri* returned, two P3C patrol planes left the MSDF Hachinohe airbase (also in Aomori), headed for the same region. They were the third aerial force to be dispatched under the same law, for a four-month tour of duty. Based at the Djibouti International Airport, the planes conducted observation and information gathering, providing intelligence about the pirates to the destroyers guarding the commercial ships.

Strangely, these ships and planes based in Aomori were, in quick succession, performing duties off of Africa and the Middle East. To repeat, the main mission of the MSDF’s Ominato naval base and Hachinohe airbase was, along side the US military, to contain the Soviet Union during the Cold War. But the Cold War has been over for 20 years. These forces now headed, not to the northern seas covered with snow-white ice floes, but to the Middle East and Africa, where yellow clouds of sand dance across the land. Why? The answer is simple. Because the status of US-Japan alliance has been broadened in its interpretation.

Prime Minister Sato Eisaku (in office, 1964-72) once said, “With our constitution, Japan will absolutely never go outside the country.” He made that statement before the Lower House budget committee in 1969, and at the time it was thought that the peace constitution prohibited the Self Defense Force from going overseas. Now, 40 years later, escort ships and surveillance planes from the SDF have unfurled the rising sun flag in the Middle East—the world’s powder keg—and in the chaos of Africa. The two eras are worlds apart. But some have

raised objections to these activities.

Nagoya Gakuin's Iijima: "Under the Anti-Piracy Measures Law, the SDF can be sent anywhere in the world in the name of 'anti-piracy measures.' Moreover, these can be places where conflict could occur, and the SDF is able to attack first in some cases." Iijima points out that the 2001 law that enabled the SDF to provided refueling services in the Indian Ocean in support of the war in Afghanistan and the 2003 law that authorized the dispatch of the SDF to Iraq were both time-limited and specified the period of the troop dispatch, "but under the Anti-Piracy Measures Law, the SDF can be sent anywhere, anytime [2], at the sole discretion of the government. It has to be said that this is a very serious violation of the constitution."

The US-Japan security treaty is an agreement that requires the US to defend Japan in the event of an enemy attack. Japan is under absolutely no obligation to defend the US. However, the world situation after the end of the Cold War—or more to the point, the US—would not allow Japan to remain within the narrow confines of East Asia.

A succession of laws have expanded the role of the SDF: the 1999 law on emergency situations near Japan, the 2001 anti-terrorism law, the 2003 Iraq War law, and now the anti-piracy law. As Iijima says, "Japan has become a country that can dispatch the SDF anywhere, anytime." Each step in this process has been taken under intense pressure from the US.

One military affairs expert raises the following question, regarding this rapid change in the character of the US-Japan alliance: "The present security treaty framework has become globalized, far surpassing the two-country agreement on defense cooperation that it was at the start. It is still undergoing transformation at the present, and I wonder how many Japanese citizens really grasp the status of the security treaty/US-Japan

alliance?"

As the Futenma controversy has made clear, the Japanese government will, under pressure from the US, muzzle the people's voice. This is because it has no options other than the US-Japan alliance to ensure the security that will determine the fate of the country. At the mercy of successive governments with no vision, it is always the Japanese people who get the short end of the stick.

Notes

[1] Editor's note: The sympathy budget is only part of the total cost to Japan of hosting American bases. When indirect costs (such as land rental fees), special assessments for Okinawa, and costs of the base realignment plan are included, the total came to ¥469.6 billion (approx. \$5.5 billion) for the 2010 fiscal year. These figures are from the [Ministry of Defense](#). Thanks to Norimatsu Satoko for this information.

[2] Editor's note: The Anti-Piracy Measures Law went into effect in July 2009 and was extended for another year in July 2010. It does not specify when or where forces will be dispatched for anti-piracy operations, which can be ordered without prior approval of the Diet.

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