

Defense Diplomacy of Japan Air Self-Defense Force

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About the Author

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Born in Miyazaki prefecture in 1961, Lt Gen. Araki currently works as a strategic advisor for Kawasaki Heavy Industry. After graduating from the National Defense Academy in 1983, he joined the JASDF. Since then, he served numbers of operational positions, and in 2008, he was promoted to Major General and appointed as the 7th Wing commander as well as the Hyakuri Air Base commander. After being promoted to Lieutenant General in 2014, he was assigned as commander of the South Western Composite Air Division, currently reorganized as South Western Air Defense Force. He retired as the commander of the Air Training Command in 2018. He was commanding pilot with more than 3000 hours of flying, F-15, C-130, and other training aircrafts. He worked at the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs as an exchange officer for two and half a years. He earned a master's degree of international security from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University.

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1. Introduction

In less than a century since the Wright Brothers first succeeded in powered flight, air power has evolved into a decisive military power indispensable to a nation, equivalent to land and naval power with a long history.¹ In the early days of air power, its theoretical potential for winning a war was overly emphasized, and neither aeronautical engineering nor the operational concept had made it a reality. However, in Operation Desert Storm, coalition forces gained air superiority over Iraq in just 100 hours from the start of the air offensive, and this determined the outcome of the entire operation. It showed that air power could also be applied for “strategic” purposes that directly contributed to the outcome of a war.² The quality and quantity of air power that each nation possesses depends on national power based on its economy, technology, and industry because air power consists of advanced science and technology. Despite the fact that its true value is demonstrated mainly in offensive use, each nation utilizes air power in a different manner according to its security environment and its national strategy.³

Japan’s air defense capability has been strictly regarded as a military portion of air power. Because of “the exclusively defense oriented policy,” air defense capability has been developed for the primary mission of defensive counter-air operations within Japan’s vicinity and alert mission to prevent violation of territorial airspace during peacetime. From the establishment of the Japan Air Self-Defense Force (ASDF) to the end of the Cold War, the idea of using air defense capabilities as a diplomatic tool was not imagined not only because of the ASDF’s limited capabilities but also because of political restraint that did not allow the deployment of the Self-Defense Forces to a foreign country. With the exception of relations with the U.S. Air Force, the ASDF’s relationship with other foreign air forces was limited to personnel visits to promote mutual understanding and mutual trust through dialogue. Later, in 1992, the International Peace Cooperation Law came into effect, which allowed Japan’s defense forces to operate overseas for the purpose of contributing to international peace and stability. As a result, the ASDF became involved in these activities by providing air transportation by C-130s. Subsequently, in the

“National Defense Program Outline for FY 1996 and Beyond” decided by the Security Council and the Cabinet on November 28, 1995, international peace cooperation activities, international disaster relief activities, and defense exchange were defined as “new roles of defense capabilities.”⁴ Since then, opportunities for the ASDF to engage in defense diplomacy have gradually increased. After the formulation of the National Security Strategy in 2013, the ASDF’s involvement in a wide range of defense diplomacy⁵ has been proactively and aggressively promoted. The number of ASDF’s defense diplomacy activities in 2019 was three times more than that in 2013. The quality and quantity of the ASDF’s defense diplomacy activities have expanded and diversified as the opportunities for defense diplomacy increased.

Defense diplomacy in Japan has developed and expanded progressively in response to changes in the security environment. It has further potential as an effective tool for contributing to Japan’s national security as well as diplomacy directly.⁶ In this section, we will review the history of the expansion and development of the ASDF’s defense diplomacy and discuss current challenges and future possibilities.

2. Characteristics of Air Defense Capability⁷ and Defense Diplomacy of Air Arms

(1) Characteristics of air defense capability

In comparison with land and naval power, air power, which excels in speed and distance, is generally considered to possess the following characteristics. Its advantages include: (1) readiness (the ability to quickly apply power at the time and place required), (2) mobility (the ability to quickly assemble and disperse), (3) flexibility (the ability to respond to various situations), (4) vast range of action, (5) striking power (powerful destructive power using onboard weapons), and (6) breakthrough capability (unaffected by terrain or ocean). Disadvantages include: (7) physical vulnerability (no power on the ground, heavy reliance on bases) and (8) lack of occupation capability (limited time in the air, inability to stay in one place, difficulty in continuous occupation unlike land power).⁸ Other characteristics include: (9) the airspace is affected by meteorological conditions, (10) air power is highly secretive and expensive because it is based on advanced science and technology, (11) it takes a long time to train specialists and to develop equipment, and (12) aircraft used by the government (military aircraft, etc.) cannot enter the territorial

airspace of other countries without permission.⁹

Since the ASDF's air defense capability has been developed as the minimum necessary force for self-defense, its characteristics related to (4) range of action, (5) striking power, and (6) breakthrough capability of ordinary air power have not been considered as its nature, while readiness, mobility, and flexibility are regarded as its main characteristics. Disadvantages and other characteristics are the same as those of ordinary air power.

(2) Characteristics of defense diplomacy through air defense capabilities

Since the force structure of the ASDF is composed of fighter units, warning and control units, and Surface to Air Missile (SAM) units, air transportation units involved in international peace cooperation activities are limited in terms of manpower and the number of aircraft due to their supporting role.¹⁰ In addition, because of the limited characteristics mentioned before, air defense capability is not well suited for overseas activities. It is unlikely to be the main actor for international peace cooperation activities. Furthermore, aircraft, which were built before international peace cooperation activities were positioned as the SDF's primary mission, were not designed for overseas operations, and therefore, have limited range, no satellite communication capability, and no GPS navigation system. In addition, little experience in operating outside of Japan¹¹ restrained the operational capacity of the ASDF. Starting with its involvement in UN peacekeeping operations (PKO) in Cambodia in 1992, the ASDF has gradually improved its overseas operational capabilities in terms of both hardware and software. In the nearly 30 years of experience since then, the time required to prepare for a new mission has been reduced from weeks to a few days. However, for an activity with "first time" elements such as purpose and country/airport of call, it is necessary to study the feasibility not only from a legislative perspective but also from a capability perspective. A certain amount of time is still required for the necessary review and coordination prior to a new mission. The ASDF's process of getting involved in defense diplomacy seems to be entirely different from that of the U.K. and U.S., which have redefined the activities long conducted by their Air Force as "defense diplomacy."¹²

The following features can be pointed out regarding the use of air defense capabilities in defense diplomacy. First, the number of assets and personnel available for defense diplomacy is limited because air defense forces are relatively expensive and limited in number. Even during peacetime, demand for air assets is relatively high in Japan, making it necessary to find an appropriate balance

between training of units and personnel and use of defense diplomacy. Second, when utilizing military aircraft for overseas activities, it is necessary to obtain permission from the countries along the flight route to pass through their territorial airspace. Therefore, there should be justifiable as well as acceptable reasons for flying through territorial airspace, and a relationship of mutual trust with overflight countries is required. Third, aircraft must have operational support, such as ground handling, refueling, and maintenance support. Operational support arrangements at the airport of call are an important requirement for overseas operations. Fourth, the positioning of the air force among the other armed services varies by country. Therefore, the needs and opportunities for defense diplomacy by air force are diverse. It is necessary for the ASDF to find out the real needs of other countries for units exchange, combined training, and capability building support with consideration given to what the ASDF can provide. The total effects of defense diplomacy combined with other measures have to be considered for effective defense diplomacy.

3. History and Current Status of Defense Diplomacy Conducted by the ASDF

(1) Defense exchange

Throughout the Cold War period, high-level and working-level personnel exchanges were conducted as the primary defense exchange program. Opportunities for bilateral and multilateral defense exchanges are recently increasing and expanding. During the Cold War, the main aim of defense exchanges was to learn from advanced air power countries. However, as defense exchanges progressed, the aim has shifted to contributing to more diplomatic purposes, such as enhancing mutual understanding and developing mutual trust with Asian countries. In recent years, exchanges of views and coordination on defense cooperation and capacity-building support have evolved, and the results of defense diplomacy are becoming visible in the form of progress in various projects. With regard to exchanges at the unit level, exchanges of transportation aircraft that can easily go to and from countries are still the main form of unit exchange, rather than exchanges of fighter aircraft units that involve large-scale transport of support equipment and personnel. It is necessary to change the aircraft types and units according to the needs of defense diplomacy, and to consider the balance with other missions as well as training. Recently, taking advantage of foreign interest in the C-2 transport aircraft, the ASDF has been exploring the

possibility of strengthening relationships and transferring C-2 by organizing exchanges between units at airports of call on the occasion of participating in air shows held in other countries.

(2) International peace cooperation activities

In past PKO activities and international disaster relief operations, the ASDF was involved by airlifting personnel and equipment on C-130s as well as KC-767s. Compared to the beginning of its participation in international peace cooperation activities, the ASDF can respond quickly to even international disaster relief operations due to accumulation of experience and know-how in overseas operations. Most of the ASDF's transportation missions were infrequent, periodical supports for the Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF). However, in the humanitarian and reconstruction assistance activities in Iraq, two C-130s and approximately 200 personnel were deployed to the base airport in Kuwait. The mission of providing airlift on a daily basis for more than four years was a first for the ASDF. While it was a big challenge for the ASDF, various important lessons were learned from the continuous overseas operations. Because the 1st Tactical Airlift Wing was the only air wing operating C-130s, the unit was placed under a heavy burden and had difficulties overcoming fewer opportunities for unit and individual training, decline in readiness, and concerns over losing full mission capabilities. The need for air transportation tends to increase with the expansion of security cooperation and combined training as means for defense diplomacy. Since the ASDF's force structure does not envision long-term, continuous overseas missions nor high frequency commitment to defense diplomacy, it is necessary for the ASDF to properly balance the needs for defense diplomacy and the demands for training. In addition, the ASDF must re-organize its force design and its way of training in response to the increasing demand for defense diplomacy. Recently, the program to replace C-1s with C-2s has been smoothly progressing, and introduction of new KC-46s has just started as planned. The development of the airlift capability of the ASDF will certainly contribute to more proactive commitment of the ASDF to defense diplomacy.

(3) Capacity building support

With air defense capabilities, which are more asset-oriented and have less human involvement than land capabilities, it is difficult for the ASDF to take the lead in defense diplomacy activities, such as international peace cooperation activities. Therefore, capacity-building support, which

requires person-to-person engagement, is more difficult with air defense capabilities than other defense capabilities. In addition, the Asian countries that are the target of capacity-building support are basically land power countries, and the equipment and capabilities of their air forces are very limited. It is necessary to focus more appropriately on the needs of Asian countries and the capabilities that the ASDF can utilize for capacity building purposes rather than simply pursuing combined training or flying units exchange. It is relevant for the ASDF to shift its efforts in capacity building support to the areas of aeronautical meteorology, aeromedicine, and flight safety, which are the basis of air operations and where the ASDF has advanced skills. The ASDF should consider playing a positive role in serving as a bridge between the most sophisticated air force, the U.S. Air Force, and the air forces of Asian countries with limited capacity. Before building specific capabilities, it is also important to create a shared understanding of international norms and procedures for maintaining them in the skies.¹³

(4) Combined training and exercises

With the exception of bilateral training with the U.S. Air Force, the ASDF's participation in combined training with foreign air forces has been mainly in the areas of airlift and air rescue for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) operations. After the enactment of the Peace and Security Assurance Act that clarified the legal basis of combined training with foreign countries by allowing exercises as a part of the right of collective self-defense, the conditions for planning combined training with foreign air forces are becoming more favorable. The conclusion of the Acquisition and Cross Servicing Agreement (ACSA) with Australia, the U.K., and other countries allows logistical support to be provided more easily. Combined training with the Royal Air Force and the Royal Australian Air Force has also been expanded and enhanced in recent years, including the commencement of combined training by fighter units in Japan to improve tactical skills. With the Indian Air Force, combined training and exchanges between air transportation squadrons have also been initiated. In addition, the four countries of Japan, the U.S., Australia, and New Zealand are conducting a combined HA/DR training exercise in Micronesia called "Christmas Drop," which provides foods and supplies to the people on islands by air drop. The U-4 Multipurpose Support Aircraft also participated in the exercise marking the 25th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations with the Republic of Palau and Japan, taking advantage of the opportunity of the annual overseas navigation training of U-4s.

Cooperating with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the ASDF's C-130, which participated in the annual training at the U.S. Advanced Tactical Airlift Training Center, transported medical materials for dengue fever to the Republic of the Marshall Islands on its way to the North American Continent. In order to further utilize opportunities for combined training with aircraft and multilateral training related to HA/DR, cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other related ministries will become more important. In addition, it should be noted that the potential of simulated or virtual training can be an effective tool for not only training purposes but also from defense diplomacy points of view. Training and exercises for air forces require huge airspace and operational support at the airport of call, and those are usually the primary factors behind which the receiving country has difficulties making arrangements, coupled with local politics as well as public opinion.

(5) Defense equipment and technology cooperation

Based on the principles on transfer of defense equipment and technology revised in 2014, defense equipment and technology cooperation has been gradually expanding. The parts of the retired UH-1 helicopter of the GSDF were transferred to the Philippines at no cost. The surveillance and warning radar of the ASDF was exported to the Philippines as the first export of a completed system. The transfer of the surveillance radar is particularly significant because it will improve the Philippines' ability to monitor the surrounding airspace and may enable the sharing of information about China's air activities in the South China Sea. There are possibilities of multinational information sharing about air activities of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) around the South and East China Seas. On the other hand, negotiations with countries with interests on introducing C-2 transportation aircraft are not only defense diplomacy matters but also comprehensive industrial policies. Therefore, it is essential for the government of Japan to have a designated function with authority to coordinate and promote defense equipment and technology cooperation. In particular, the current laws and regulations related to defense equipment and technology cooperation were established at a time when exports of weapon systems were strictly prohibited. In order for equipment transfer and technology cooperation to contribute more effectively to Japan's security, the government of Japan as a whole is required not only to apply those existing legal frameworks more flexibly but also to revise them for greater contribution to the purpose of defense diplomacy.

4. Conclusion

Defense diplomacy conducted by the ASDF began with defense exchanges that focused on dialogue, and has gradually expanded and developed as the ASDF gained experience and expertise through provision of airlift capability in peace cooperation activities and international disaster relief operations. After international peace cooperation and other activities were defined as one of the primary missions of the SDF in 2007, the ASDF has been engaging in defense diplomacy activities in a more proactive and dynamic manner. With the enactment of the Peace and Security Law in 2016, the scope of defense diplomacy has further expanded. The expansion and enhancement of the ASDF's airlift capabilities is also enabling more efficient and effective engagement in defense diplomacy. In addition, the advancement of defense equipment and technology cooperation is expanding the possibilities for further defense diplomacy.

In any case, in order to make defense diplomacy with air defense capabilities more meaningful for Japan's national security, it is firstly necessary to clarify the position of defense diplomacy in the national security strategy. This will facilitate cooperation with related ministries and agencies and enable more effective engagement while maintaining a balance with the other original mission. In doing so, it should pay more attention than ever to improving synergies through cooperation with other SDF services and related agencies, since there is a natural limit to what the ASDF alone can contribute to defense diplomacy due to its limited force structure and the nature of air defense capabilities. In general, air power, in a broad sense, refers to the overall capabilities of a nation, such as economic, industrial, and technological capacities that can maintain and expand air defense capabilities. More effective use of air defense capabilities in defense diplomacy is nothing less than Japan's intention to utilize air defense capabilities as air power.

¹ Tomoyuki Ishizu, Kyoichi Tachikawa, Tokunari Michishita, and Katsuya Tsukamoto (eds.), *Air Power: Its Theory and Practice*, Fuyoshobo Publishing, 2006, pp. 13-40.

² Tomoyuki Ishizu, "The Usefulness of Aero-Space Power," in Tomoyuki Ishizu and Aihito Yamashita (eds.), *Air Power: Strategic Original Theory of Sky and Space*, Nikkei Publishing Inc., 2019, pp. 46-51.

³ Masao Shinozaki, "Britain as 'Empire of the Skies': British Imperial Defense and Air Power, 1918-1968," *Air Power Studies* (No. 5), pp. 76-78. Until the late 1960s, the British used air power as a means of "air control" to defend their colonies, which stretched from the Middle East to Asia, and to

maintain imperial security.

⁴ “Contribution to the Creation of a More Stable Security Environment” was clearly stated as a new role of the defense forces in the FY1997 National Defense Program Outline.

⁵ 2020 White Paper on Defense, pp. 341-382.

⁶ Michito Tsuruoka, “The Age of Defense Diplomacy,” NIDS Commentary, No. 35, 2013, p. 3.

⁷ Tokunari Michishita, “The Development and Significance of the Self-Defense Forces’ Air Power,” in Ishizu, *Air Power: Its Theory and Practice*, pp. 168-176. The general concept of air power in a generic sense refers to air-related power manifestly and potentially possessed by a nation, and in a narrow sense refers to air-related power in the military dimension, such as equipment and operational personnel, mainly aircraft and missiles, but not limited to those of air power types. As Michishita discusses, air power of the SDF includes fixed-wing and rotary-wing aircraft owned by the land, sea, and air forces, as well as air-to-air missiles, etc. In this paper, air power owned and operated by the ASDF is referred to as “air defense capability.”

⁸ Tomoyuki Ishizu, “The Usefulness of Aero-Space Power,” in Tomoyuki Ishizu and Aihito Yamashita (eds.), *Air Power: Strategic Original Theory of Air and Space*, Nikkei Publishing Inc., 2019, pp. 46-47.

⁹ The Convention on International Civil Aviation (commonly known as the “Chicago Convention”), enacted at the Chicago Conference in 1944, expressly states airspace sovereignty (“full and exclusive sovereignty”). While civil aircraft are allowed to freely pass through and land in the airspace as long as they comply with the conditions stipulated in the Convention and bilateral agreements, aircraft used by the government (military aircraft, etc.) are not allowed to enter the airspace in principle, except for special reasons.

¹⁰ The Air Defense Command, which accounts for more than half of the ASDF’s personnel (about 45,000) and is primarily responsible for air defense (including missile defense [BMD]), consists of 13 fighter squadrons, a warning and control unit, and an anti-aircraft unit. The Air Support Command, which is mainly responsible for air support functions such as airlift/aerial refueling, weather support, and air traffic control, is about one-fifth the size of the Air Defense Command, with three air transportation squadrons (including only one C-130 operational squadron) and only two aerial refueling squadrons.

¹¹ Prior to the ASDF’s involvement in international peace cooperation activities, the ASDF’s only experience was ferry operation from the U.S. to introduce the C-130 transport aircraft since 1984 (16 aircraft were ferried in 5 years) and participation in the U.S. Air Force Tactical Airlift Competition called “Rodeo” since 1989.

¹² Michito Tsuruoka, “Defense Diplomacy and Defense Engagement in the United Kingdom: Conceptual Changes and the ‘British Military Brand,’” September 2018; Tsuneo Watanabe, “U.S. Defense and Security Cooperation: Great Power Strategy and Changes,” April 2019, The Sasakawa Peace Foundation, Security Projects Group, Civil Defense Diplomacy Research Project Country Case Study Report Series, p. 4. The “Strategic Defense Review” issued in the United Kingdom in 1998 pointed out that the specific activity of “defense diplomacy,” which was listed as one of the missions of the British military, was a new name for activities that had been conducted before.

¹³ In July 2019, based on the 2019 Defense White Paper and the “Vientiane Vision 2.0” for ASEAN-Japan defense cooperation, a “Professional Airmanship Program” was held to exchange views on “Air Security” and “International Aviation Law and Norms.”

Topics - Japan-ROK Defense Exchange:

First Visit by JSDF's C-1 Transport Aircraft to South Korea

The C-1 transport aircraft, which was developed for short range transportation and domestic use only, first flew to a foreign country in October 2002. The National Defense Program Outline of 1995 clearly stated “contribution to building a more stable security environment” as the new role of the defense forces in the post-Cold War era. Seven years had passed since emphasis was placed on defense exchanges with foreign militaries. In 1998, the Japan-Korea Joint Declaration expressed the determination to build a new partnership, and the two countries agreed to enhance defense exchange programs. It also stated that security dialogue and defense exchanges between the two countries would be welcomed and should be strengthened. Although there were the issues of history between the two countries, and domestic politics and public sentiment in South Korea had to be prudently considered, the hurdle for exchange itself was not expected to be too high. The exchange of military bands was proposed by the Japanese side during the Japan-South Korea defense ministers’ meeting in 2000. It began with the participation of the ROK Navy Band in the Self-Defense Forces Music Festival in October of the same year. The C-1s’ visit to Korea in 2002 with the JSDF’s band was expected to be smoothly welcomed by South Korea from the perspective of reciprocity. However, because of Japan’s domestic politics and bureaucracy, it took a long time for the JSDF to send the C-1 to South Korea. It required time and efforts of the related sections of the Japanese government to share the value of defense exchange and to coordinate for clarifying the legal basis of defense exchange. In the end, the mission was successfully accomplished, and the exchange of military bands and mutual visits by military aircraft between Japan and South Korea became a visible achievement of defense exchange. This example conveys the atmosphere of the early days of defense diplomacy in Japan, and it is interesting that such a small achievement has led to the defense exchanges of today.

About This Report

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About the Defense Diplomacy Project (FY 2019-21)

Building on the knowledge amassed through private-sector programs for defense exchange among Japan-China and Japan-Vietnam field officers and Japan-South Korea retired generals, SPF launched a research project in fiscal 2018 to study the policy implications of Japan's defense diplomacy, which has seen a dramatic expansion in terms of both quantity and quality. Reports published under the project include an outline of the aims and activities of defense diplomacy and case studies of initiatives being undertaken by six countries (Australia, Britain, China, France, South Korea, and United States) that are actively promoting defense diplomacy.

Report/Case Studies (in Japanese) <https://www.spf.org/security/programs/V20190143.html>

The project also published a policy proposal “Strengthening Japan's Defense Diplomacy” in 2021.

Policy proposal (in English) <https://www.spf.org/en/security/publications/20220322.html>



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