

Briefing Memo

The Establishment of the Japan Air Self-Defense Force

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Introduction

In August 1950, the history of post-war Japanese defense, which began as the National Police Reserve, had already existed for a number of years and was comparable to the history of the Japanese Imperial Army and Navy. Considering that the Japan Air Self-Defense Force (JASDF), the last of the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) to be founded, is currently on the verge of being evolved into the Japan Aerospace Self-Defense Force,¹ it seems reasonably meaningful to revisit its origin in discussing its future. However, while the outcome of studies on the Ground and Maritime Self-Defense Forces (JGSDF and JMSDF), including their predecessor, has gradually accumulated, there has been little empirical research concerning the early period of the JASDF. Furthermore, most of such research has relied on materials from the U.S. side. This paper reviews and describes the early period of the JASDF from the Japanese perspectives, based mainly on the historical materials transferred from the Japan Defense Agency (the present Ministry of Defense) to be added to the collection of the National Archives of Japan, which recently became available to the public.

Aerial rearmament studies by the Imperial Japanese Army/Navy personnel (submission of a written opinion jointly prepared by the Imperial Japanese Army and Navy)

While it is widely known that the former military personnel of the Imperial Japanese Army and Navy engaged in rearmament studies shortly after WWII, the Imperial Japanese Army Air Service personnel were also conducting rearmament studies specialized with a focus on aerial rearmament.

The Imperial Japanese Army began conducting aerial rearmament studies in the 1950s. With an air defense-based independent air force in mind, they aimed to develop an air force that would have the capacity to cover the vital area in Tokyo, followed by the entire mainland, based on the premise of U.S. military assistance.

Meanwhile, in the Imperial Japanese Navy, rearmament studies were conducted by the so-called “*Wai Iinkai*” (Y Committee), which was formed to work on preparations to receive a loan from the U.S. military fleet. Simultaneously, the “*Kaiku Gijutsu Kondankai*” Advisory Panel on Sea and Air Technology) was established in July 1952 as a forum for the aerial rearmament studies. This Advisory Panel’s real work was to conduct studies on the general art of war, in addition to the

¹ “Evolution to the Aerospace Self-Defense Force is no longer a dream.” Excerpt from the 53rd Meeting of the Ministry of Defense and Self-Defense Force Senior Personnel and Prime Minister Abe’s Address at the Meeting (September 17, 2019). “Speeches and Statements by the Prime Minister.” Prime Minister’s Office of Japan. <http://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/98_abe/statement/2019/0917kunji.html> (Accessed on September 14, 2020).

promotion of the sea and air technology. What the Panel consistently aimed to achieve was the establishment of an air force that could act as one with the Navy's surface force, which would have the same excellent maritime operation capabilities as the Imperial Japanese Navy Air Service and a focus on antisubmarine operations to cover up to the maritime traffic line in the future.

Thus, the personnel of the Imperial Japanese Army and Navy Air Services were heading to significantly different destinations of their own. However, in November of 1952, the Imperial Army and Navy jointly submitted a written opinion to then Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida. The written opinion contained some points in common with the written opinion submitted independently by the Imperial Japanese Army Air Service personnel to the Prime Minister and others approximately four months prior to the joint opinion. Those common points included a matching summary of the text, a two-stage development vision, and the number of fighters forming the basis. Considering these coincidences, it is assumed that the joint written opinion was prepared based on the written opinion submitted by the Imperial Japanese Army personnel.

Although the Imperial Japanese Army and Navy sought different ideal forms of the air force, they held in common a keen awareness, based on the experience of the two world wars, that an air force would be key to Japan's defense, in a situation in which the organizations for the defense of post-war Japan were being established sequentially including the National Police Reserve (Army) in 1950 and the Coastal Safety Force (Navy) in 1952. As a result, the Imperial Army and Navy's growing frustration meant that they would no longer allow delays in reconstructing the air defense capabilities, and therefore, both parties prepared the final draft of their plans within a short time, and submitted the results of the aerial rearmament studies to Prime Minister Yoshida as a joint written opinion.

The momentum for the establishment of the JASDF (intensification of airborne threats)

Despite the aerial rearmament studies having been conducted by the former military personnel, according to the people engaged in those studies, they did not lead directly to the establishment of the JASDF. Some of them testified that even the officials involved in the task force to establish the JASDF, called the "*Seido Chousa Iinkai Besshitsu*" (Institutional Investigation Commission Special Team) established within the National Safety Agency (the predecessor of the Ministry of Defense), were not aware of the existence of such studies themselves. This leads to the question of what provided the momentum for the establishment of the JASDF. There is no doubt that one of the major factors was the airborne threat posed by the Soviet Union.² According to some newspaper reports in 1951 and 1952, the recorded number of aircraft of unknown nationality flying to northeastern Hokkaido in both years was significantly more than 100,³ of which approximately 30-35% of the aircraft confirmed in 1952 were thought to be Soviet aircrafts. In addition, the number of cases that involved not only flying over the area but also the resulting violation of territorial airspace was believed to be more than 40 in the six months between July 1952 and January 1953. In particular, an

² A threat in the sky. Examples include aircraft, missiles and in recent years also include drones.

³ In 1951 and 1952, 171 aircraft and 142 aircraft respectively.

incident involving the disappearance of a U.S. Air Force's B-29 aircraft over the Sea of Japan in the northeastern Nemuro area on October 7, 1952, critically heightened the sense of vigilance of both the Japanese and the U.S. sides with regard to the airborne threat from the Soviet Union.

In response to this situation, on October 25, the commander of the U.S. Army Far East Command, General Mark W. Clark, proposed to the Department of the Army in the U.S. that permission to engage in fighting against the aircraft of the Soviet Union and its allied nations, which would be a violation of the Japanese territorial airspace, be given to the U.S. Air Force, to which the U.S. Department of State replied that the approval for the commander's request had been issued and addressed to the U.S. ambassador in Japan. On December 17, General Hoyt Sanford Vandenberg, the chief of staff of the U.S. Air Force, sent a memorandum to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in which he advised that the core of the Japanese Air Force be established as soon as possible in line with the report by General Clark.

Furthermore, the Japanese and the U.S. governments held a meeting with Prime Minister Yoshida and the U.S. ambassador to Japan Robert D. Murphy and, in January 1953, the Japanese government announced the decision that it would take the necessary measures to eliminate anyone who violated the Japanese territorial airspace with the cooperation of the U.S. military forces in Japan if such violations should occur in the future. At almost the same time, the U.S. Army Far East Command also made a statement indicating that it had ordered its commander take every measure necessary. In February, another violation of the Japanese territorial airspace by a Soviet aircraft occurred off the coast of Nemuro, Hokkaido. In response to this incident, U.S. military aircraft repelled the Soviet aircraft by firing at it. Thus, the U.S. Military Forces demonstrated that they would actually show force in such cases.

This series of events made both Japan and the U.S. keenly aware of the necessity of establishing Japan's own air defense capabilities. Reflecting such awareness, in June, the "*Seido Chousa Inukai*" (Institutional Investigation Commission) at the National Safety Agency formulated "*Keibi Gokanen Keikaku Dainijian*" (the Second Draft of the Five-year Security Plan), and following this, Tokutaro Kimura, Director General of the National Safety Agency, suggested the establishment of air forces in an interview with the press.

In October, an organization that would conduct studies on the establishment of air forces was set up as a "*Seido Chousa Inukai Besshitsu*" (Institutional Investigation Commission Special Team). As if in response to this move, in November, the U.S. Military Advisory Group also established an aviation team to reinforce the condition to support building Japanese air forces. In the same month, the U.S. Department of Defense presented the Japanese National Safety Agency with the "*Nihon Kugun Kensetsu Shien Keikaku*" (Support Plan for the Establishment of the Japanese Air Force) (so-called the Brown Book), which was drafted by the U.S. Department of the Air Force. Based on the Brown Book, the "*Seido Chousa Inukai Besshitsu*" (Institutional Investigation Commission Special Team) conducted a review and revision to make this plan a framework for developing the formation of the JASDF.

In reaction to the intensifying airborne threat from the Soviet Union, Japan and the U.S. shared threat awareness; Japan decided on the elimination of the threat in cooperation with the U.S. military forces in Japan, and the U.S. military forces demonstrated that they would actually take action. Furthermore, about one year after the case in which the U.S. military aircraft was shot down, Japan established a task force to establish the air force. In the following month, the U.S. Military Forces launched an organization to support the Japanese task force and presented the overall plan.

Challenges encountered at the time of the establishment of the JASDF

While the foundation of the JASDF was driven by the airborne threat posed by the Soviet Union, the path to its establishment had never been smooth. At the time, nearly a decade had already passed since the complete disarmament of the Imperial Japanese Army and Navy led by the U.S., and the aircraft design was in transition from propellers to jet engines. For example, Japan had to rely on the U.S.'s capabilities to accept the concepts that were new to Japan, such as the manoeuvring, air warnings, and control. For those who had experience operating the aircraft of the Imperial Japanese Army and Navy, language issues were the first obstacle in the education retraining to upgrade their skills. Many of the Imperial Japanese military personnel were forced to drop out of the pilot training course offered in English by the U.S. Military Forces several times, and not a few ultimately abandoned the idea of becoming pilots.

Securing air service personnel was the first and most urgent issue facing the new establishment of the JASDF. The preceding organizations of the JGSDF and JMSDF were launched as the National Police Reserve in August 1950 and the Coastal Safety Force in April 1952, ahead of the establishment of the JASDF. One of the main elements of human resources comprising these organizations were the former personnel of the Imperial Japanese Army and Navy, naturally including those who were previously engaged in air service-related tasks at the Imperial Japanese Army and Navy. Therefore, it was reasonable for the late-established JASDF to seek cooperation from the National Police Reserve and the Coastal Safety Force,⁴ which already had personnel from the Imperial Army and Navy, in order to gather human resources.

Yasuhiro Ueda, a former member of staff at the Imperial Japanese Army Air Service and who later served as Chief of Staff at the JASDF, looked back on his experience of securing personnel as follows: Initially, the JMSDF appeared to be quite cooperative; however, as they were strongly hoping to own their own powerful air force, we had to say that the number of air service personnel actually offered was low compared to the JGSDF.

On the other hand, Yoshimori Terai, who was a former Imperial Japanese Navy staff member who later served as the first Director General of Operations and Plans Department at the Maritime Staff Office, apparently had a thought that as many competent crew members from the Imperial Navy as possible should be sent to the JASDF that was to be newly established. While the possible

⁴ On October 15, 1952, the name of the National Police Reserve was changed to the National Safety Forces, while the name of the Coastal Safety Force was changed to the Safety Security Force.

maximum number of personnel, mainly fighter pilots in the Imperial Japanese Navy who had the ability to adapt to air defense fighters, the main aircraft of the JASDF, were selected and dispatched promptly, large aircraft crews were secured as JMSDF Air Service personnel. However, the personnel contribution policy stated that the JMSDF should be prepared for some problems in supplementing JMSDF Air Service personnel in the future due to these measures. As a result of calling for volunteers at the Safety Security Force from the beginning of 1954 based on this policy, even those who seemed to have a greater aptitude for the JMSDF than for the JASDF were said to have rushed to apply to join the latter.⁵

The reason for such a divergence resulting in the recollections of the two parties seems to stem from the difference in the scale as a supply source of human resources between the JGSDF and the JMSDF at that time. Of the initial staffing capacity of 6,765⁶ at the time that the JASDF was established, the actual numbers of personnel transferred from the JGSDF and the JMSDF were 3,129 and 558, respectively. Indeed, picking up these numbers only, that of the JMSDF stays only approximately 18% of that of the JGSDF. However, looking at the staffing capacity of the JGSDF and the JMSDF at the time of the founding of the JASDF, the former changed from 110,000 in the National Safety Force to 130,000 in the JGSDF, while the latter changed from 10,323 in the Security Unit to 15,808 in the JMSDF. In terms of the percentage, the JMSDF was only 9% to 12% of the JGSDF. These data suggest that, from the perspective of the staffing capacity, the JMSDF played a larger role as a supply source of human resources than was appropriate.

The JASDF resolved the issue of securing personnel, which was one of the challenges faced in its early days, by receiving cooperation from both the JGSDF and the JMSDF.

Conclusion

Prior to the preparations for the establishment of the JASDF going into full swing, studies on rearmament were conducted by the Imperial Japanese Army and Navy Air Service personnel. Despite the history of repeated serious conflicts between the Imperial Japanese Army and Navy, Air Service personnel at both institutions agreed to submit a joint written opinion within a very short period, due to the understanding based on the lessons learned from the world wars that an air force would be the key to the future defense of Japan, and growing frustration that its development might fall behind further than the development of the JGSDF's and the JMSDF's military capabilities.

Meanwhile, the major trigger for the foundation of the JASDF was the intensification of the airborne threat posed by the Soviet Union, which increased the crisis awareness of both Japan and the U.S., and the two countries advanced full-scale preparation for the establishment of the JASDF.

Although the personnel of the Imperial Japanese Army and Navy cooperated with each other when reaching out to the political leaders regarding the importance of establishing the Air Force, the

⁵ For the reason that many of the Air Service personnel of the JMSDF applied to join the newly established JASDF, Terai indicated the anxiety among those personnel about the possibility of no aircraft to be assigned to the JMSDF, and that Terai and other high-level personnel did not have conviction that could dispel the anxiety and convince the personnel.

⁶ It was later amended to 6,738 people.

recollections of the views from the two parties during the early days of the JASDF differed. A prime example of this is the conflicting recollections expressed by Ueda and Terai, former members of staff at the Imperial Japanese Army and Navy, respectively, concerning the issue of securing Air Service personnel in the process of establishing the JASDF.

In addition to these issues, there was another problem as to whether all the aircraft would be assigned to the JASDF at the time of its establishment, or whether they would be separately assigned to the three JSDF services as needed for missions. As far as I researched, this issue found in existing literature is described based on the recollection of Ebihara, a former defense bureaucrat. However, reading through the historical materials of the Japan Defense Agency held at the National Archives of Japan reveals that this is not a simple issue and cannot be discussed only by looking at Ebihara's recollection (due to the limited space available for this paper, this issue will be discussed in another paper).

As stated in the beginning of this paper, the Ministry of Defense and the JSDF have existed for a long period of time, which is almost comparable to the history of the Imperial Japanese Army and Navy. There are, however, still untouched areas spreading in the history of these organizations, particularly that of the JASDF. In other words, the history of these organizations is still talked about in a completely opposite manner, or described only by relying on a limited number of narrators. What we need to do to explore these uncovered areas is as follows: "The cure to misunderstanding history is to read more, not less."⁷

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⁷ Joseph S. Nye, Jr., David A. Welch, *Understanding Global Conflict & Cooperation: Intro to Theory & History* [Ninth Edition] (Essex: Pearson, 2014) / *Kokusai Funso – Riron to Rekishi* (Original Book - Ninth Edition), Translated by Akihiko Tanaka and Koji Murata, Yuhikaku Publishing, 2013, p.31.

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