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Fleet reviews—Features of the Imperial Japanese Navy, Maritime Self-Defense Forces, and Foreign Navies

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Introduction

Prime Minister ABE Shinzo is scheduled to conduct a fleet review of Maritime Self -Defense Force in Sagami Bay in October as a reviewing officer.¹ The purpose of a fleet review is originally for the head of state to review the majesty of his own Navy, for example, as introduced on the website of the National Museum of the Royal New Zealand Navy², which states “A Fleet Review is a formal inspection of the fleet of a navy by the monarch.”³ Today, however, its purpose is varied and is conducted to promote international goodwill and defense exchanges,⁴ and to provide a country’s citizens with an opportunity to deepen their understanding of the Navy.⁵ How reviews are conducted are not uniform, and there are differences depending on the era and the country. Thus, it is possible to learn about the naval or maritime policy of a country by comparing the purpose and scope of the fleet reviews of the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) with the Imperial Japanese Navy and other foreign navies to bring to light the features of the JMSDF’s fleet reviews, and compare the characteristics of fleet reviews of other foreign navies. Therefore, this paper uses publicly available information to introduce and explain the features of the fleet reviews of the Imperial Japanese Navy, the JMSDF, and other foreign navies.

1. Fleet reviews of the Imperial Japanese Navy

The first fleet review in Japan is said to be the *Gunkan Eiran*, or “Emperor’s warship review” held in Tempoan,

Osaka in 1868. This review was held 18 times until the final one, the fleet review in *Kigen* 2600 (commemoration of the 2,600th anniversary of the founding of Japan), held in Yokohama in 1940. The occasion for the review was a triumphant and grand state ceremony and great maneuver, which was reviewed by the Emperor, who was the supreme commander of the Army and Navy.⁶ The location where it was held varied depending on the review, and was conducted off the coast of Yokohama, Yokosuka, and Kobe. The fleet review is largely divided into two types,⁷ a review at anchor where the ships on review (naval vessels) are stationary, and a mobile review where the ships on review (naval vessels) are moving (at sail) while being reviewed. The Imperial Japanese Navy mainly held reviews at anchor, and there have been only three confirmed mobile reviews (the first, in 1867 at Tempoan,⁸ the eighth, in 1913 off Yokosuka, and the 10th, in 1916 off Yokohama). This is in contrast to the JMSDF’s fleet reviews that are mainly mobile, as will be described later.

Generally, only major Imperial Japanese Navy units participated, but sometimes foreign naval vessels participated. Participation by foreign naval vessels has been confirmed in the 1st review (1868: 1 French ship), the 4th review (1903: 2 British ships, 1 German, 1 Russian, 1 French, and 1 Italian ship), the 9th review (1915: 1 American ship), and the 14th review (1928: 1 American ship, 3 British, 1 French, 1 Italian, and 1 Dutch ship). Additionally, the Japanese Navy participated in foreign fleet reviews for Queen Victoria’s Diamond

Jubilee in 1897 (attended by the “Fuji”), British King Edward VII’s Coronation Fleet Review in 1902 (attended by the “Kurama” and the “Takasago”), British King George V’s Coronation Fleet Review in 1911 (attended by the “Sakuma” and the “Tone”), and British King George VI’s Coronation Fleet Review in 1937 (attended by the “Ashigara”).

In addition, Imperial Japanese Navy fleet reviews were visited by foreign military officials stationed at their embassies in Japan and were introduced to the public through news reports.

2. Fleet reviews of the JMSDF

The first fleet review in the JMSDF was held in 1957, with this year's review in 2019 being the 29th.⁹ As for the occasion for this year’s review, SDF commemorative events up until 1951 mainly consisted of a review accompanying a commemorative ceremony, and the JMSDF was limited to sending a music corps or other troops to the review and offering public viewing of its ships. But it was so difficult to show features as maritime force by only public viewing of its ships (even when JMSDF sailors were on parade at a review) that some people began to wonder if there shouldn’t be more fitting SDF events with reviews that showed off the presence and weaponry of the JMSDF.¹⁰ Given the circumstances, the “Self-Defense Forces Memorial Event Implementation Procedures” were established in 1957, and these implementation procedures stipulated the holding of fleet reviews as one commemorative event to boost the SDF’s presence and raise the self-awareness of its members, along with deepen public perception.¹¹ Fleet reviews were initially held every year,¹² but due to factors such as the oil shock of 1974 and restrictions on sea areas for its conduct, it was decided that a fleet review would be held when special celebrations¹³ for the state or the Defense Agency were conducted based on the special order after 1975. However, from 1996, the fleet review was held on a rotating basis with the Ground Self-Defense Force’s military review and the Air Self-Defense Force’s air power review as one of the SDF

commemorative events.

As explained earlier, the fleet review is largely divided into two types, a review at anchor where the ships on review (naval vessels) are stationary, and a mobile review where the ships on review (naval vessel) are moving (at sail) while being reviewed. The former does not require the ships on review (naval vessels) to move, so it is relatively easy to make adjustments in advance, while the latter demands higher skills of the participating ships.¹⁴ The 1st (1957) and 2nd (1960) JMSDF fleet reviews were held at anchorage style,¹⁵ but have basically been held at mobile style since the 3rd (1961).¹⁶ The international fleet review that brings together a large number of ships from different countries is generally held at anchorage style,¹⁷ and since the establishment of the JMSDF, its 1st international fleet review, the 23rd (2002) fleet review, was held as the review at anchor. The reviews were initially held in Tokyo Bay, Osaka Bay, and Hakata Bay, but has been held in Sagami Bay since the 15th review.

The number of participating ships and aircraft varies depending on the review, but after the 20th (1994), approximately 40 ships and 40 to 50 aircraft are usually involved. 17 foreign ships participated in the 23rd review, which was held as an international review, but at subsequent reviews that were not international ones, foreign ship have participated since the 27th review (2012) in which there were 3 ships, and 6 ships in the previous review, the 28th (2015). As for the upcoming fleet review, it is scheduled for foreign ships to attend it.

In addition, JMSDF ships have attended foreign fleet reviews, participating in Australia (1988), Indonesia (1995), Russia (1996), the Philippines (1998), South Korea (1998), the United States (2000), India (2001), Singapore (2017), Thailand (2017), Malaysia (2019), and China (2017).¹⁸

3. Fleet reviews of foreign navies

Many countries use special occasions, such as the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Navy,¹⁹ to hold fleet reviews, and there are few countries that

conduct such reviews as regularly as Japan. Russia, Malaysia, and Indonesia are examples of countries that regularly hold reviews. In Russia's case, the last Sunday in July is Day of the Russian Navy,²⁰ where fleet reviews are held at the bases of each fleet, and includes naval fleets from abroad²¹. Malaysia holds its reviews in conjunction with the biennial Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace Exhibition (LIMA),²² and Indonesia holds its review as part of Multilateral Naval Exercise Komodo (MNEK).²³ Some countries, like India, conduct their fleet review as a kind of international exposition,²⁴ where the fleet review is used to rouse the country, while China's reviews have gained the participation of many foreign ships, which make for a mobile review that requires elaborate adjustments and a high degree of skill.²⁵ Although it seems that a fleet review is an opportunity to show off a country's own naval power both domestically and internationally, there are few countries that hold reviews in this manner.

Reviewing officers are often heads of state. In the United States, Russia, and South Korea it is the president; while in China, it is the Chairman of the Central Military Commission; in the Commonwealth realm, it is the Queen; and in Australia and New Zealand, it is the governor general.²⁶ In 2010, Canada's celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Navy was held at two locations on the Atlantic and Pacific Ocean, with the Queen on the Atlantic and the governor general on the Pacific as reviewing officers.²⁷

Most countries hold fleet reviews at anchor,²⁸ and there are few countries that actually hold large-scale, mobile fleet reviews.²⁹ This is thought to be due to the fact that many fleet reviews of foreign countries are held as international fleet reviews which have many foreign navies participating and holding a review at anchor makes it relatively easy to carry out adjustments in advance.

As for where fleet reviews are held, it seems that the sea area considered to be suitable for the review is

selected in consideration of the type of review³⁰ in addition to being held at the fleet's main base or its vicinity. For example, in the United States, it is often at the mouth of the Hudson River in New York;³¹ in China, the 2019 fleet review was held off the coast of Qingdao;³² and in South Korea, the 2018 fleet review was held off Jeju Island.³³

Participating forces vary from country to country, but many countries appear to have designated units that participate in fleet reviews. And it may seem that there are many cases where foreign ships participate. This is thought to be due to the fact that international fleet reviews are often planned as commemorative events.

There is no country that is not completely open to the public, and they make an effort to disseminate fleet reviews through news reports and other media such as on the internet. However, it seems that there are few countries that open their fleet reviews (including pre-runs) to demonstration cruises like Japan as many countries choose to hold reviews at anchor.

Conclusion

The JMSDF fleet review is regularly held as a commemorative event of the Self-Defense Forces, and is generally held as a mobile review. This type of review may appear to be the international standard at first glance, but as mentioned, this type of fleet review is not only different from the Imperial Japanese Navy, but it is also a rare and major feature in the world. Looking at the fleet reviews of other countries, it seems that the trend is to use fleet reviews as a means of international exchange. This is not only an indication that the Navy is an organization operating in an international context, but it can also be said that the role of the Navy, particularly its role in peacetime, has diversified.

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¹ 2019 Fleet review Daily Schedule, Maritime Self -Defense Forces, Ministry of Defense, 2009,

<https://www.mod.go.jp/msdf/fleetreview/2019/schedule.html>

² National museum of the Royal New Zealand Navy, *Origins of Fleet Reviews*, <http://navymuseum.co.nz/origins-of-fleet-reviews-and-man-and-cheer-ship/>.

³ Even the 1930 edition of the “Fleet Review Guide” created by the Ministry of the Navy, introduces it as, “The fleet review is a place where a large number of ships are anchored in a certain mooring area, where the monarch or president boards a ship to review its appearance, and is a most dignified ritual resembling that of an infantry military parade.” The website of the National Museum of the Royal Navy states that the first Royal Review of the fleet on record is by Henry V in 1415. National Museum of the Royal Navy, *Royal Reviews of the Fleet* (Information Sheet No. 062), p.1., <https://www.nmrn-portsmouth.org.uk/sites/files/Royal%20reviews-%20of%20the%20Fleet.pdf>.

⁴ Indian Navy: International Fleet Review – 2016, <https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/content/international-fleet-review-2016-1>.

⁵ “2019 Fleet Review--What is a fleet review?” Maritime Self -Defense Forces, Ministry of Defense, 2009, <https://www.mod.go.jp/msdf/fleetreview/2019/about.html>; Indian Navy, International Fleet Review - 2016 <https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/content/international-fleet-review-2016-1>.

⁶ Article 11, Constitution of the Empire of Japan.

⁷ Defense Agency ed., *Defense of Japan* (2003), p. 240.

⁸ The Emperor watched the first fleet review held at Tempoan in 1868 from land (Emperor’s Tempoan inspection area),

⁹ “2019 Fleet Review--What is a fleet review?” Maritime Self -Defense Forces, Ministry of Defense.

¹⁰ Japan Maritime Self-Defense Forces 50-year History Committee, *50 Years of the Japan Maritime Self-Defenses Force*, Japan Defense Agency Maritime Staff Office, 2003, p. 95.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² However, in FY1959, it was canceled after dispatching disaster relief forces due to a typhoon off the Ise coast, and due to stormy weather in FY1958 and FY1963.

¹³ In 2007, the Defense Agency became the Ministry of Defense.

¹⁴ Defense Agency ed., *Defense of Japan* (2003), p. 240.

¹⁵ *50 Years of the Maritime Self -Defense Forces*, p. 96.

¹⁶ Ibid. There are records showing the 9th review (1968) was a review at anchor. On this topic, see, for example: “50 years of Ocean Protection: The wake of 50 Years of the Maritime Self-Defense Forces,” JMSDF Newspaper, 2003, p. 153.

¹⁷ *Defense of Japan*, p. 240.

¹⁸ Ibid; Junichi Kaneko, “The First Commemorative Fleet Review of the Reiwa Era and its Origins,” *Ocean Newsletter*, No. 457, August 20, 2019, https://www.spf.org/opri/newsletter/457_2.html?latest=1.

¹⁹ For example, the 2013 Australian fleet review and 2010 Canadian fleet review commemorated the 100th anniversary of their respective navies, and the 2005 British fleet review commemorated the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Trafalgar. The United States held fleet reviews to commemorate Victory Day (1945), the 350th anniversary of Jamestown (the first British settlement in North America) in 1957, the 200th anniversary of independence (1976), to celebrate the completion of restoration of the Statue of Liberty (1986), and to celebrate the millennium (2000). In addition, there are cases where it is held not only as a

the Fleet Review Secretariat, Maritime Staff Office, JMSDF and researchers of the National Institute for Defense Studies.

commemorative event in its own country but also as an international commemorative event. For example, in 1969, the fleet review in the United Kingdom was held to commemorate the 20th anniversary of NATO, and in 2017, the fleet review in Thailand was held to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the founding of ASEAN.

Department of Defence, Australian Government, *Navy celebrates centenary with international review*, Annual Report 2013-14, <http://www.defence.gov.au/annualreports/13-14/features/feature-navy-celebrates-centenary-with-international-review.asp>; Christian Bedford, “Centennial summer starts this week,” *Look Out*, June 7, 2010,

<http://www.lookoutnewspaper.com/issues/55/2010-06-07-23.pdf>;

Ben Fenton and Thomas Harding, “Fleet lives up to England’s expectations,” *The Telegraph*, 29 Jun 2005,

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/4196643/Fleet-lives-up-to-Englands-expectations>.

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News_Photos/view/upi/1f3152efbb2edd2425cc1cd8c2a4752f/International-Naval-Review-2000/;

<http://www.axfordsabode.org.uk/pdf-docs/colour69.pdf>;

National Museum of the Royal Navy, *Royal Reviews of the Fleet* (Information Sheet No. 062), p.1; National News Bureau of Thailand (ASEAN Information Center), *Thailand ready to host ASEAN International Fleet Review 2017*, 9 November 2017, http://www.asean thai.net/english/ewt_news.php?nid=2104&file_name=index2017.

²⁰ Order No. 549 of the President of the Russian Federation dated May 31, 2006. Указ Президента РФ от 31 мая 2006г, № 549 (ред. от 21 мая 2017г.), «Об установлении профессиональных праздников и памятных дней в Вооруженных Силах Российской Федерации», Собрание законодательства Российской Федерации, от 05 июня 2006г., № 23, ст. 2455.

²¹ “Red Star,” July 29, 2019 (digital edition). Красная звезда от 29 июля 2019г., № 82.

²² Prime Minister’s Office of Malaysia, *Fleet Review on Warships at LIMA’19*, March 27, 2019,

<https://www.pmo.gov.my/2019/03/fleet-review-on-warships-at-lima-19/>. The Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace Exhibition was held for the first time in 1991, but it is unclear if the fleet review was held from the beginning. An international fleet review was held in 2015 and 2017.

²³ Indonesia held its first fleet review during the 2nd MNEK in 2016, and the most recent review was held at the 3rd MNEK in 2018. Cabinet Secretariat of the Republic of Indonesia, *President Jokowi Opens 2016 International Fleet Review*, 12 April 2016, <https://setkab.go.id/en/president-jokowi-opens-2016-international-fleet-review/>; Komando Armada II, *Parade Sailing Pass Resmi Menutup MNEK 2018*, 10 Mei 2018, <https://koarmada2.tnial.mil.id/2018/05/10/parade-sailing-pass-resmi-menutup-mnek-2018/>.

²⁴ Indian Navy, *International Fleet Review – 2016*, <https://www.ndiannavy.nic.in/content/international-fleet-review-2016-1>.

²⁵ CGTN, *President Xi reviews multinational fleet in E China’s port city*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DQMDgfnTWpI>.

²⁶ Department of Defense, Australian Government, Navy celebrates centenary with international review, <http://www.defence.gov.au/annualreports/13-14/features/feature-navy-celebrates-centenary-with-international-review.asp> Royal New Zealand Navy, “Programme of the INR,” *Navy Today*,

No.205, November, 2016, p.18, _

<http://navy.mil.nz/downloads/pdf/navy-today/nt205.pdf>.

²⁷ Richard Foot, "Queen inspects massive naval armada as royal tour begins in Halifax," *Canada. Com*, June 29, 2010, [http://www.canada.com/life/queen+inspects+massive+naval+armada+royal+](http://www.canada.com/life/queen+inspects+massive+naval+armada+royal+tour+begins+halifax/3216836/story.html)

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²⁸ The countries confirmed to have held fleet reviews at anchor include the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, India, Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore.

²⁹ In addition to Japan, China and South Korea are examples of countries that hold large-scale, mobile fleet reviews. In 2010, France also held the French Navy International Fleet Review — 70th anniversary of the Landing in Provence as a mobile review. Russia is holding its 2019 fleet review in St. Petersburg, combining a static and mobile review. CGTN, *President Xi reviews multinational fleet; South Korean Military Channel, Republic of Korea Navy International Fleet Review 2018*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WtDONvhLC00> ; Navy Recognition, *French Navy International Fleet Review / 70th Anniversary of the Landing in Provence*, August 15, 2014, [http://www.navyrecognition.com/index.php/focus-analysis/naval-exercises/1938-french-navy-](http://www.navyrecognition.com/index.php/focus-analysis/naval-exercises/1938-french-navy-international-fleet-review-70th-anniversary-of-the-landing-in-provence.html)

[international-fleet-review-70th-anniversary-of-the-landing-in-provence.html](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YqAy6hsX3C4); на русском (28 июля 2019г.) «Парад в честь Дня ВМФ в Санкт-Петербурге», [https:// www.youtube.com/watch?v=YqAy6hsX3C4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YqAy6hsX3C4).

³⁰ For example, in 1969, the NATO 20th anniversary international fleet review was held at HMNB Portsmouth at Spithead in the United Kingdom. National Museum of the Royal Navy, *Royal Reviews of the Fleet* (Information Sheet No. 062), p.2.

³¹ It was held at the location in 1945, 1976, 1986, and 2000. In 1957, it was held at Hampton Roads, Virginia. *All Hands-Magazine of the U.S. Navy*, September 2000, p.16; *All Hands*, September 1986, p.21; *All Hands*, August 1976, p.7; Harry S. Truman Library & Museum, Riverside Park, Navy Day, <https://www.trumanlibrary.org/photographs/view.php?id=57739>; Library of Congress, *International Naval Review, Hampton Roads, Virginia, 1907*, [https:// www.loc.gov/ item/mp76000258/](https://www.loc.gov/item/mp76000258/).

³² [Jesse Johnson](https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2019/04/23/asia-pacific/chinese-navy-puts-military-might-display-fleet-review-attended-japan-others), "Chinese Navy puts military might on display with fleet review attended by Japan and others," *The Japan Times*, Apr 23, 2019, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2019/04/23/asia-pacific/chinese-navy-puts-military-might-display-fleet-review-attended-japan-others>.

³³ South Korean Military Channel, *Republic of Korea Navy International Fleet Review 2018*.

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