

Briefing Memorandum

The 3/11 Earthquake and international assistance:

Looking back on assistance activities by the USA, Australia, and South Korea

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Introduction

The Great East Japan Earthquake occurred on March 11, 2011. It was an unprecedented disaster, with 15,000 dead and 10,000 missing, mainly along the Pacific Ocean coast of the Tohoku and North Kanto regions. Since this disaster, while Japan of course has made its own efforts, assistance from other countries for disaster relief and earthquake recovery has been a significant help to Japan. This article looks back on the international assistance that Japan has received as of about two months after the earthquake (the date of this paper's writing). In particular, it provides an overview of assistance activities by the USA, Australia, and South Korea, which Japan sees as important partners, and seeks to draw some implications for Japan's national security.

International assistance ① Operation Tomodachi

Since the Great East Japan Earthquake, the country that has provided the most powerful assistance has been the USA, Japan's longstanding ally. The US Military's Operation Tomodachi was a major disaster assistance effort that mobilized about 18,000 people, almost 200 aircraft, and around 19 ships. By the time it effectively came to an end on May 1, Operation Tomodachi had once again reminded not only Japan but the entire international community of the USA's power.

Its value lay not just in the size of the operation, but in the US Military's great mobility. On the day of the earthquake, three MC-130 transport aircraft left a US Marine Corps base in Okinawa for Yokota Air Base. Early on the morning of the 16th, one of the MC-130s landed at the SDF Matsushima Air Base in Higashimatsushima, Miyagi Prefecture, where air traffic control is inadequate, successfully transporting supplies for the restoration of Matsushima Air Base and Sendai Airport. Subsequently, SDF and marine personnel began working to restore Sendai Airport. Another MC-130 was the first aircraft to fly into Sendai Airport after the earthquake. Obviously, restoration of Sendai Airport was of critical importance to the transport of supplies to the disaster area. The US Marines' swift action with those aircraft was commendable.

Meanwhile, on the day of the earthquake, much of the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit and the 11th Marine Regiment, which demonstrated their ability in earthquake relief, was on the way to

various Southeast Asian countries for cooperative activities including the upcoming ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) humanitarian disaster relief training, or DiREx. In fact, it took them some time to reach Japan. When the earthquake struck, about half of the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit was aboard the amphibious assault ship *Essex* in Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia, and aboard the dock landing ships *Germantown* and *Harpers Ferry* on the way to the Southeast Asia. By March 18th, the three ships, the *Essex*, the *Germantown*, and the *Harpers Ferry*, reached the sea off Akita with a large amount of relief supplies and about 4,000 marines. The force next moved to the sea off Sanriku, where it set to work on restoring Hachinohe and other ports damaged by the tsunami, rendering assistance to isolated outlying islands, restoring the Sendai Airport, removing rubble, and searching for the missing. Although it took a week before they could begin disaster relief efforts, the mobility of the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit and the 11th Marine Regiment as they hastily returned to Japan from Southeast Asia and rendered assistance mainly in coastal areas was spectacular.

In addition to its size and mobility, one must also point to the high competence of the US Military, which operates with the most advanced equipment. On March 13, two days after the earthquake, Global Hawk unmanned aerial vehicles began flying the skies over the disaster area. They played a major role through aerial photography of the affected area, especially the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant. Various types of satellites operated by the US Military also played important roles. For example, the Wideband Global SATCOM system supported disaster relief by the *Ronald Reagan's*. In addition, about 150 personnel of the Marine Corps Chemical Biological Incident Response Force (CBIRF) were sent to Yokota Air Base to assist with the nuclear disaster. The US Military in Japan also provided 150 sets of anti-radiation clothing, and the aircraft carrier *George Washington* provided another 100. Such advanced equipment and technologies and the high level of crisis management ability also played important roles in earthquake relief.

Although Operation Tomodachi produced great results, there are some aspects that deserve further examination. In particular, there should be a detailed analysis of Japan-US coordination on disaster relief operations following the 3/11 Earthquake. According to Raymond F. Greene, Consul general of the US Consulate in Okinawa, the SDF and the US Military gained important experience by using systems such as the Bilateral Crisis Action Team (BCAT) in Defense Ministry headquarters in Ichigaya, Yokota Air Base's Bilateral and Joint Operations Coordination Center (BJOCC), and the Bilateral Crisis Action Team at Sendai Base to carry out operations on a scale unprecedented in the history of the Japan-US alliance. These valuable real-world experiences should be examined for bettering, Japan-US operational coordination, information sharing, and so forth.

International assistance ② Australia and South Korea

As noted above, the US Military's activities were incomparable in terms of scale, mobility, technology, equipment, and joint operations capability with the SDF. Even so, countries other than

the USA also played very important roles. Particularly noteworthy were the actions of the Australian Defence Force (ADF). Immediately after the earthquake, the ADF joined Emergency Management Australia (a disaster management agency under the Federal Attorney-General) beginning Operation Pacific Assist and sending firefighters and search and rescue (SAR) teams to Japan. Early on the morning of March 14, a C-17 Globemaster III landed at Yokota Air Base. It transported supplies and SDF personnel. Additionally, in response to a joint request from the Japanese and US governments, Australia sent two more C-17s to Japan in order to transport remotely-operable drainage devices from Perth for use at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant. Operation Pacific Assist can be considered a demonstration of the functioning of the Japan-Australia security cooperation that has been fostered to date. In fact, ADF personnel who participated in Operation Pacific Assist regard it highly as the utilization of the cooperation that had been built up between the SDF and the ADF. Furthermore, Minister for Defense Stephen Smith often brings up the C-17 operations in close cooperation with the United States Forces Japan Air Operations Command as a practical demonstration of successful trilateral cooperation by Japan, the USA, and Australia. The policy of Japan-Australia and Japan-US-Australia cooperation that Japan has pursued to date can thus be seen as bringing about concrete results.

Republic of Korea is another country with which Japan attempts to strengthen security and defense cooperation. In fact, South Korea also dispatched three C-130s to Japan, with an SAR team of more than 100 people. South Korea also provided powerful assistance by lending reserve oil and reserve boric acid to help cool nuclear reactors. However, there are some aspects of the Japan-South Korea cooperation that require further examination. According to an Asahi Shimbun article, by April 13, South Korea's National Emergency Management Agency completed a report on the activities of South Korean rescue personnel after the Great East Japan Earthquake. The report indicated that the rescue team was initially to have left late on the night of March 13, but was delayed until the morning of the 14th. The reason indicated was red tape involved in getting permission for South Korean military aircraft to fly into Japanese civilian airports. If this is true, in order to carry out future disaster cooperation more quickly, Japan and South Korea may need to make a bilateral agreement, or there may need to be a broader regional or worldwide system for cooperation on humanitarian aid and disaster relief (HA/DR). In fact, then Australian Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd has already suggested that a system of automatic procedures for international assistance in the immediate aftermath of a disaster is important. He indicated the necessity of building mechanisms towards that end.

Conclusion

Looking back briefly over the disaster assistance provided by the USA, Australia, and South Korea after the 3/11 Great East Japan Earthquake, the implications extend beyond simple disaster

response. At least, the following three points regarding the future of Japan's national security will be examined.

Implications for Japanese disaster response

First, more than anything else, the varied experience gained from the response to the earthquake must be utilized to create systems for more rapid and effective response in the event of a major earthquake and/or tsunami disaster. In terms of equipment, Japan had to depend on foreign governments for many items, such as the special drainage devices from Australia and the MC-130s and anti-radiation clothing from the USA. Japan may need to decide which equipment it needs to keep on its own and even obtain it. Additionally, the work of restoring infrastructure for use as bases for rescue operations in the disaster area was carried out in cooperation with the US Military. Japan needs to examine what types of advance plans and training are needed in order to carry out the work more quickly and effectively, and, if necessary, on its own.

Implications for joint Japan-US operations

As indicated above, it is also necessary to consider the proper form for future joint operations between the US Military and the SDF. The US Military's four forces combined mobilized a peak of 18,000 personnel, while the SDF took what has been called the "100,000 personnel stance" to carry out activities in close cooperation with the US Military. It may become necessary to review this as more than mere disaster assistance, i.e., to see it as a practical demonstration of Japan-US joint operations and to gather and study the lessons of this coordination and cooperation, and to review information sharing, operational coordination, training, and so on. In an interview with the Asahi Shimbun, Defense Minister Kitazawa has already spoken of the possibility of deepening the coordination mechanisms specified in the guidelines for Japan-US security cooperation.

Implications for regional cooperation

The proper forms for the Asia-Pacific region and international cooperation regarding disaster assistance must also be deliberated. There have been a number of major earthquakes in the Asia-Pacific region since the 2004 Indian Ocean Earthquake. Along with them, systems for regional cooperation, often derided as nothing but talk, have gradually developed into action in the disaster assistance field. However, bearing in mind that this time Japan-Australia cooperation went relatively smoothly but acceptance of the South Korean SAR team was delayed can be taken up, opportunities to strengthen regional or global cooperation may arise in terms of the development of mechanisms for accepting relief teams and military aircraft in the event of a major disaster. In fact, Japanese diplomacy has already begun working on promoting disaster-related cooperation through Japan-China-South Korea cooperation and the Asian Development Bank.

The purpose of this paper is to respond to reader interest in security issues while promoting better understanding of NIDS. A "briefing," of course, is a background explanation. Our hope is that this paper will help readers to better understand the complex security issues. Note that the views expressed in this paper do not represent the official opinion of NIDS.

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