

# Examining Personnel Contributions to the Persian Gulf during the Nakasone Administration: Focusing on the Issue of Dispatching Minesweepers\*

TAKASHIMA Masaaki\*\* and NAKAJIMA Shingo\*\*\*

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## Abstract

The overseas activities of the Self-Defense Forces began with the dispatch of minesweepers following the Gulf War in 1991. However, a similar initiative was contemplated four years earlier, in 1987, at the end of the Nakasone administration. During the Iran-Iraq War, responding to requests from the United States, the Japanese government explored the possibility of sending minesweepers to the Persian Gulf. As the conflict escalated, navigation safety became a critical issue for countries reliant on this region for oil transport. In response to requests for assistance from the United States, several Western European nations sent their own minesweepers to conduct minesweeping operations in the Persian Gulf. Under pressure from the U.S., the Japanese government also began to consider how it could contribute to ensuring safe navigation in the area. While the initial plan focused on sending minesweepers, the government ultimately abandoned this idea due to political and administrative challenges. This study examines the deliberations surrounding the dispatch of minesweepers, utilizing recently released materials to provide a comprehensive analysis of the process and background from the initial consideration to its eventual abandonment, and evaluates its significance.

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## Introduction

The question of whether or not to dispatch the Self-Defense Forces overseas dates back to the earliest days of the SDF. For a public whose memories of the war—which had caused enormous casualties in regions far from the Japanese mainland, including the continent, the South Pacific, and Southeast Asia—remained vivid, and in the 1950s, when national opinion was divided over the very existence of postwar defense capabilities that had been rebuilt since the establishment of the National Police Reserve, the question of defining the geographical scope of activities for the new defense force was an incomparably larger issue than it is today.

In the latter half of the 1950s, this issue emerged in the context of United Nations-centered diplomacy, one of the three pillars of postwar Japanese foreign policy. For Japan, which had finally achieved UN membership in 1956, the question of whether the Self-Defense Forces should be involved in cooperation with the United Nations was an important matter, but given the fresh memories of the war at that time, it was particularly difficult to address in domestic political

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\*\* Captain, Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force: Instructor, Instruction Office, Japan Joint Staff College, Japan Ministry of Defense

\*\*\* Chief, Military History Division, Center for Military History, NIDS

discourse.<sup>1</sup> In the 1960s, Japan joined the ranks of advanced nations. Similarly, as one of the three pillars of diplomacy, Japan advocated for “upholding its position as a member of Asia,” but faced the question of how to engage with the Malaysian conflict that arose during this period, including the dispatch of the Self-Defense Forces. While this matter was continuously discussed within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the conflict itself ended before the government as a whole was compelled to respond.<sup>2</sup> At roughly the same time as these discussions within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, consideration was also given within the ministry to whether the Self-Defense Forces could be dispatched for UN military activities, and the “Act on Cooperation with United Nations Peacekeeping Operations and Other Operations” was drafted, with the core principle of dispatching the Self-Defense Forces to UN peacekeeping operations (PKO) that did not involve the use of force. Additionally, although not a PKO, participation in peacekeeping activities during the post-Vietnam War period was also considered within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Furthermore, from the mid-1960s onward, the Defense Agency also examined the dispatch of personnel to PKO, but none of these attempts came to fruition.<sup>3</sup>

Then, in the latter half of the 1980s, during the Nakasone administration, the overseas dispatch of the Self-Defense Forces emerged again as a point of discussion, though in a different context from these earlier instances. This occurred in relation to another of the three pillars of Japanese diplomacy: “Cooperation with the free-world nations,” particularly with regard to relations with the United States. Under the preceding Zenkō Suzuki cabinet, Japan-U.S. relations had been strained, particularly over security issues, but upon assuming the position of prime minister, Nakasone devoted himself to repairing them. His efforts extended beyond symbolic rhetoric such as “Japan and the United States share a common destiny” to encompass concrete policies, including the commencement of military technology transfers to the United States and a focus on sealane defense. Furthermore, his emphasis on the Japan-U.S. alliance was also evident in multilateral settings, as demonstrated by his conduct at the Williamsburg Summit. Prime Minister Nakasone, who had thus pursued closer security ties with the United States both bilaterally and in multilateral contexts, faced a difficult problem that tested such a policy line at the end of his administration. This was the issue of dispatching minesweepers to the Persian Gulf.<sup>4</sup> It appears that this was the first time that the overseas dispatch of the Self-Defense Forces became an urgent

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<sup>1</sup> Kozai Shigeru, *Kokuren no Heiwa Iji Katsudo* [U.N. Peacekeeping Operations] (Tokyo: Yuhikaku [Yuhikaku Publishing], 1991), pp. 484-485; Tanaka Akihiko, *20 Seiki no Nihon 2 Anzen Hoshō: Sengo 50 Nen no Mosaku* [Japan in the 20th Century 2: Security: Struggle of 50 Years after the War] (Tokyo: Yomiuri Shimbun [Yomiuri Newspaper], 1997), pp. 210-211.

<sup>2</sup> Regarding the Malaysia conflict, see in detail Irie Toshihiro, “Ikeda-Sato Seikenki no ‘Kokusaiteki Heiwa Iji Katsudo’ Sanka Mondai: Kōgō Doran-Mareishia Funso to Jieitai Haken no Kento” [The Issue of Participation in ‘International Peacekeeping Activities’ During the Ikeda and Sato Governments—the Congo Crisis, Malaysian Conflict and Deliberations on the Dispatch of SDF Forces], in *PKO no Shiteki Kenshō* [Historical Analysis of PKOs], vol. 42, nos. 3-4, Gunji Shigakkai [Military History Society of Japan], ed. (Kinseisha [Kinseisha, Publishers], March 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Pan Liang, *Nihon no Kokuren Gaiko: Senzen Kara Gendai Made* [Japan’s United Nations Diplomacy: From the Prewar Era to the Present] (Nagoya: Nagoya Daigaku Shuppankai [Nagoya University Press], 2024), pp. 430-432.

<sup>4</sup> For recent research on the Nakasone Cabinet, see Hattori Ryūji, *Nakasone Yasuhiro: “Daitoryoteki Shusho” no Kiseki* [Nakasone Yasuhiro: The Origins of a “Presidential Prime Minister”] (Tokyo: Chuokoron Shinsha [Chuokoron-Shinsha, Inc.], 2015); Wakatsuki Hidekazu, *Reisen no Shuen to Nihon Gaiko: Suzuki Nakasone Takeshita Seiken no Gaisei 1980-1989 Nen* [The diplomatic endeavor of Japanese three prime ministers in the sunset of Cold War: 1980-1989] (Tokyo: Chikura Shobo [Chikura Publishing Company], 2017).

point of discussion as a result of a U.S. request.

In recent years, as relevant historical materials—particularly diplomatic documents at The Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan—have been made available to the public, research has progressed on the process from consideration to abandonment of the minesweeper dispatch during the Nakasone administration. For example, Katō Hiroaki points to the impact that public opposition to the Self-Defense Forces dispatch had on policymakers, including Nakasone.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, Yamaguchi Wataru focuses on the consideration of the minesweeper dispatch and the perceptions of the bureaucratic apparatus involved as a case in which the challenges of “Comprehensive National Security” became manifest.<sup>6</sup> Building upon these studies, this study attempts a systematic analysis by delving into the issue of safe navigation in the Persian Gulf and U.S. demands, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ consideration and rejection of minesweeper dispatch, deliberations within the Defense Agency and Self-Defense Forces, and judgments at the political level, including by Nakasone. The purpose of this study is to meticulously depict the policy process from the initial proposal of minesweeper dispatch to its eventual abandonment. To this end, focusing on the deliberations of the special task force established within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to address the issue of safe navigation in the Persian Gulf—which has received little attention in previous research—this study conducts a detailed analysis by utilizing multiple layers of publicly available materials and supplementing non-disclosed portions. Furthermore, while clarifying the deliberation process within the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force from military and practical perspectives regarding minesweeper equipment and operations, this study aims to clarify the significance of the special task force’s deliberations with a view to subsequent developments.

## 1. The Issue of Safe Navigation in the Persian Gulf

In January 1984, the Iran-Iraq War intensified, and both sides began attacking each other’s tankers. Subsequently, both countries also targeted third-country vessels engaged in trade with their opponent, and Iran deployed floating mines in the Persian Gulf.<sup>7</sup> The background to the obstruction of safe navigation in the Persian Gulf lay in both countries’ intentions to prevent their adversary from acquiring foreign currency and purchasing weapons by disrupting each other’s oil exports, thereby aiming to weaken each other’s combat capabilities. The Japanese government was compelled to respond to this issue of safe navigation in the Persian Gulf, which originated with Iran’s 1986 attack on a Kuwaiti-flagged tanker. When Kuwait, attacked by Iran, requested tanker escorts from permanent members of the UN Security Council, the Soviet Union complied with the request and dispatched one destroyer and three minesweepers to the Persian Gulf. The

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<sup>5</sup> Kato Hiroaki, *Jieitai Kaigai Haken no Kigen* [The Origins of Self-Defense Forces Overseas Dispatch] (Tokyo: Keiso Shobo [Keiso Shobo, Publishers], 2020), p. 121.

<sup>6</sup> Yamaguchi Wataru, *Reisen Shuenki no Nichibei Kankei: Bunka Suru Sogo Anzen Hosho* [US-Japan Relations in the Sunset of the Cold War: Diversifying Comprehensive Security] (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kobunkan [Yoshikawa Kobunkan, Publishers], 2023), chap. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Torii Jun, *Iran Iraku Senso* [The Iran-Iraq War] (Tokyo: Daisan Shokan [Daisan Shokan, Publishers], 1990), pp. 330-332.

United States could not overlook the Soviet Navy's advance into the Persian Gulf,<sup>8</sup> and that year decided to conduct ship escort operations in the Persian Gulf by U.S. Navy vessels.<sup>9</sup>

The Persian Gulf became a hazardous area, and on May 16, 1987, the Soviet tanker *Chuykov* struck a mine off the coast of Kuwait.<sup>10</sup> The following day, the U.S. frigate *Stark*, which was escorting civilian tankers, was mistakenly bombed by an Iraqi military aircraft, resulting in 37 deaths.<sup>11</sup> While acknowledging this incident as a "mistaken bombing," the United States, which was friendly with Iraq at the time, lodged a stern protest.<sup>12</sup> Following this incident, the U.S. Congress focused attention on the extent of cooperation from Western nations and Japan regarding U.S. efforts in the Persian Gulf. At the Senate Appropriations Committee on May 19 and elsewhere, Republican Senator Theodore Fulton Stevens Sr. and Democratic Senator David Lyle Boren argued that Americans were sacrificing their lives in the Persian Gulf to secure vital oil transportation routes for Japan, raised questions about the imbalance in trade friction and security burden between Japan and the United States, and advocated strengthening Japan-U.S. relations by raising Japan's defense posture to a level befitting a U.S. ally.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, at a Senate hearing, Democratic Senator James Ralph Sasser stated, "The United States alone should not be expected to bear the responsibility for ensuring freedom of navigation.<sup>14</sup> Britain and France have joined the escort operations, and Japan should bear its fair share of the cost." In response to such movements in Congress and public opinion, on May 28, Robert Bigger Oakley, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Asia and the Pacific, recommended that "Japan and West Germany, while unable to dispatch their navies (due to domestic circumstances), should be asked to provide economic assistance given their relationship of importing crude oil from the Gulf region."<sup>15</sup>

The argument in the United States that Japan was getting a "security free ride" had been

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<sup>8</sup> The United States ultimately accepted the Kuwaiti government's request, but from Secretary of Defense Weinberger's report to Congress, it can be seen that in the background lay the United States' consciousness of opposition to the Soviet Union, unable to overlook Soviet advances in the Persian Gulf region while seeking reconciliation between the United States and Soviet Union with the Gorbachev administration. Sources: Ambassador in the United States to the Foreign Minister, No. 5851, "Perusha Wan no Anzen Koko Mondai (Beikokuboshō no Gikai ni Taisuru Hokokusho)" [Safety of Navigation in the Persian Gulf Problem (U.S. Department of Defense Report to Congress)], June 18, 1987, Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2019-0784; Casper W. Weinberger, Secretary of Defense, "A Report to the Congress on Security Arrangements in the Persian Gulf," June 15, 1987.

<sup>9</sup> Takahashi Kazuo, *Moeagaru Umi: Wangan Gendaishi* [Burning Seas: Contemporary History of the Gulf] (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai [University of Tokyo Press], 1995), p. 203.

<sup>10</sup> *Asahi Shimbun* [Asahi Newspaper], May 18, 1987.

<sup>11</sup> George P. Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph* (New York: Scribner, 1993), p. 927.

<sup>12</sup> Letter, Ronald Reagan to Yasuhiro Nakasone, June 5, 1987. For the translation quote, see Yamaguchi, *Reisen Shuenki no Nichibei Kankei*, p. 321.

<sup>13</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Security Division of the North American Affairs Bureau, "Sutaku Go Jiken wo Keiki to Suru Tainichi Boei Doryoku Kyōka Yokyu: Sutiinzu Joingiin Hatsugen to Boren Joingiin Shokan [Demands for Strengthened Japanese Defense Efforts Triggered by the Stark Incident: Senator Stevens' Statement and Senator Boren's Letter]" (Hokubei Ho 62-32), Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2019-0784.

<sup>14</sup> Ambassador to the United States to Minister for Foreign Affairs, Cable No. 5016, "Beigikai no Ugoki (Sutaku Go Jiken) [Movements in the U.S. Congress (Stark Incident)]," May 28, 1987, Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2019-0784.

<sup>15</sup> Robert B. Oakley, "Memorandum for Frank C. Carlucci NSPG on Gulf Policy," May 28, 1987, folder "NSPG 0153 29 May 1987," box 91306, Executive Secretariat, NSC: National Security Planning Group (NSPGs): Records, Ronald Reagan Library, pp. 8-9. For the translation quote, see Kato, *Jieitai Kaigai Haken no Kigen*, p. 102.

advanced since the 1970s, but against the background of Japan-U.S. trade friction, it intensified in conjunction with “Japan-bashing” in the U.S. Congress from around 1985, when the trade deficit with Japan exceeded \$50 billion. This movement was compounded by American casualties in the Stark incident and the imbalance in burden-sharing among stakeholders, making Japan’s avoidance of responsibility and insufficient contribution regarding the issue of safe navigation in the Persian Gulf all the more conspicuous.<sup>16</sup> It should be noted that on June 18, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a “bill to increase Japan’s defense budget to 3% of GNP or to pay the United States the difference from the current defense budget.”<sup>17</sup> This was a form that reflected the arguments of Senators Stevens and Boren, but shouldering the burden for U.S. forces in the Far East maritime area<sup>18</sup> and increasing the defense budget<sup>19</sup> had been longstanding demands on Japan and were not essentially related to contributions to the Persian Gulf. This passage reflected the momentum of criticism toward Japan at the time, and the United States sought to leverage Japan’s insufficient contribution to reduce its own burden in the Far East region.

## 2. U.S. Administration Demands on Japan

On May 29, in response to the Stark incident, the U.S. Department of Defense decided to dispatch an aircraft carrier and Aegis cruiser to the Persian Gulf to strengthen maritime forces in the Middle East region. On June 2, it announced the dispatch of the U.S. aircraft carrier *Saratoga* and a fleet of 14 vessels to the Mediterranean, with three of them to be added to the Middle Eastern fleet.<sup>20</sup> The day after the announcement, U.S. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Michael Hayden Armacost presented the U.S. view on the issue of safe navigation in the Persian

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<sup>16</sup> On June 18, 1987, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a “bill to increase Japan’s defense budget to 3% of GNP or to pay the United States the difference from the current defense budget.” Shouldering the burden for U.S. forces in the Far East maritime area and increasing the defense budget had been longstanding demands on Japan, but the passage of the bill at this timing can be evaluated as reflecting the momentum of criticism of Japan at the time.

<sup>17</sup> *Asahi Shimbun* [Asahi Newspaper], evening edition, June 19, 1987.

<sup>18</sup> In March 1982, Secretary of Defense Weinberger indicated his intention to have Japan assume defense of the sea and air areas (sea lanes) north of the Philippines and west of Guam to counter threats from Soviet bombers and strategic submarines, and to allocate U.S. forces in those sea and air areas to the Middle East. In response, Prime Minister Suzuki explained to President Reagan at the Japan-U.S. summit meeting that defense of 1,000-nautical-mile sea lanes would proceed within the scope of exclusively defense-oriented policy. Receiving Prime Minister Suzuki’s statement, President Reagan stated that Japan and the United States were equal partners, and if Japan could patrol (check the Soviet Union in) its surrounding waters, the United States could allocate forces to Indian Ocean security. At the Japan-U.S. Security Consultative Committee (SCC) senior-level meeting that year, the U.S. side argued that regarding sea lane defense in the above areas, Japan’s existing forces were insufficient, lacking anti-submarine warfare capability and maritime air defense capability, and expressed the view that self-help efforts in waters surrounding Japan were essential to U.S. military operations. At the immediately following Japan-U.S. defense ministerial talks, when Defense Agency Director-General Ito agreed to accept U.S. Air Force F-16s at Misawa Air Base, Secretary of Defense Weinberger welcomed Japan’s self-help efforts (fitting U.S. purposes), and Secretary of State Shultz also made clear his stance of emphasizing Japan while stressing stability in Japan-U.S. relations.

<sup>19</sup> At the October 1982 Japan-U.S. foreign ministerial talks, Minister for Foreign Affairs Sakurachi conveyed to Secretary of State Shultz that he would pursue a 7.346% increase in defense spending, but the increase in defense spending remained at 6.5%. While a 6.5% increase showed significant growth, because the initially stated goal was too high, it resulted in giving the U.S. Congress a disappointing impression. In January 1984, Prime Minister Nakasone conveyed to U.S. NSC Director Sigur his intention to aim for abolition of the 1% framework for defense spending.

<sup>20</sup> Torii, *Iran Iraku Senso*, pp. 446-465.



Gulf to Ambassador of Japan to the United States Matsunaga Nobuo, stating that “Japan needs to make concrete contributions in a visible form.”<sup>21</sup> Around this time, U.S. public opinion calling for some form of contribution from Japan, which depended on the Middle East for two-thirds of its oil, was prominent, and on June 5, President Ronald Wilson Reagan sent a personal letter to Prime Minister Nakasone “requesting cooperation from Western nations and asking for the Prime Minister’s views on the most effective contribution to this issue.”<sup>22</sup> A report<sup>23</sup> to Congress dated June 15 by U.S. Secretary of Defense Caspar Willard Weinberger stated that West Germany and Japan had declined to participate in escort operations in the Persian Gulf for constitutional reasons, and that while a symbolic presence was expected from European allies, financial support would be requested from Japan if possible. The same report also conveyed the purposes and significance of escort missions by U.S. Navy vessels in the Persian Gulf, including limiting Soviet involvement in the Gulf region,<sup>24</sup> contributing to the security of pro-American Gulf states that were political and economic resources for the United States, and not impeding the flow of Persian Gulf oil to maintain stability among Western nations dependent on the Gulf for oil. It also touched upon subsequent concrete policies, such as having Kuwaiti-flagged vessels fly the U.S. flag (to disguise them as U.S.-flagged) and making them subjects of escort by U.S. military vessels.

On June 25, as stated in Weinberger’s report, the U.S. Navy commenced escort operations in the Persian Gulf. This is attributed to President Reagan’s active interest in safe navigation in the Persian Gulf, contrary to the opposition of the State Department and the reluctance of the U.S. Navy, with the aim of checking the Soviet Union and maintaining relationships of trust with other Middle Eastern nations.<sup>25</sup> On July 1, the U.S. government officially decided to have Kuwaiti-flagged tankers fly the U.S. flag and escort them.<sup>26</sup> On July 22, the U.S. military added forces including five vessels comprising nine missile cruisers, an aircraft carrier, and more than 50 aircraft, including F-14s,<sup>27</sup> and began escorting Kuwaiti-flagged tankers that had been re-registered as U.S.-flagged.<sup>28</sup> However, two days later, the Kuwaiti-flagged tanker *Bridgeton* struck

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<sup>21</sup> Ambassador to the United States to Minister for Foreign Affairs, Cable No. 5292, “Perusha Wan Anzen Koko Mondai (Honshi Amakosuto Kaidan) [Issue of Safe Navigation in the Persian Gulf (Ambassador-Armacost Meeting)],” June 3, 1987, Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2019-1069.

<sup>22</sup> Second Middle East Division, “6 Gatsu 5 Nichi Zuke Nakasone Sori Ate Regan Daitoryo Shinsho (Kariyaku) [Personal Letter from President Reagan to Prime Minister Nakasone Dated June 5 (Provisional Translation)],” June 5, 1987. Quote from Yamaguchi, *Reisen Shuenki no Nichibei Kankei*, p. 325.

<sup>23</sup> Ambassador to the United States to Minister for Foreign Affairs, Cable No. 5851, “Perusha Wan no Anzen Koko Mondai (Bei Kokubosho no Gikai ni Taisuru Hokokusho) [Issue of Safe Navigation in the Persian Gulf (Report by the U.S. Department of Defense to Congress)],” June 18, 1987, Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2019-0784; Secretary of Defense Caspar W. Weinberger, “A Report to the Congress on Security Arrangements in the Persian Gulf,” June 15, 1987.

<sup>24</sup> The world oil market is interconnected, and disruption in one location invites disruption of the whole. The view is presented that Soviet involvement in the region, as an oil-producing country, was intended to drive up oil prices.

<sup>25</sup> Janice Gross Stein, “*The Wrong Strategy in the Right Place: The United States in the Gulf*,” *International Security*, vol. 13, no. 3 (Winter 1988/89) (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), pp. 148-149.

<sup>26</sup> Kato, *Jieitai Kaigai Haken no Kigen*, p. 101.

<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, the United States was also pursuing diplomatic efforts to end the war through the United Nations. On July 20, 1987, UN Security Council Resolution 598 was adopted, demanding an immediate ceasefire for Iran and Iraq, release of prisoners of war, and withdrawal of forces, but this did not lead to a ceasefire agreement between the two countries.

<sup>28</sup> Eto Shinkichi and Yamamoto Yoshinobu, *Sogo Anpo to Mirai no Sentaku* [All-round Security and Choice of Future] (Tokyo: Kodansha [Kodansha, Publishers], 1992), p. 242.

a mine. The U.S. military decided to strengthen its minesweeping forces,<sup>29</sup> but the Navy possessed only three minesweepers, an extremely inadequate minesweeping capability to commit to escort operations in the Persian Gulf.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, the United States decided to approach Western nations about dispatching minesweepers.<sup>31</sup> In August, when a Panamanian-flagged tanker struck a mine outside the Strait of Hormuz, the safe navigation of vessels in the Persian Gulf had transformed into an international problem. Against this background and combined with U.S. requests, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, the Netherlands, and Belgium joined the minesweeping operations in the Gulf. Dependence on crude oil imports via the Strait of Hormuz was 55% for Japan, 27% for Europe, and 18% for the United States, and while Japan's dependence was overwhelmingly high, safe navigation in the Persian Gulf was not just another country's problem for Western European nations.<sup>32</sup>

In response to changes in the international situation and the responses of European nations, questions about the government's response to this matter began to be raised in the Diet in Japan as well.<sup>33</sup> On August 27, when asked by Democratic Socialist Party member Wada Kazuhito about the possibility of dispatching minesweepers to the Persian Gulf at the House of Representatives Cabinet Committee, Prime Minister Nakasone explained that, while denying the practical possibility of dispatching minesweepers, mine clearance by the Self-Defense Forces in the Persian Gulf would not constitute the use of force, would be legally possible, and would not constitute the dispatch of troops, thus leaving open the theoretical possibility. Furthermore, he responded that going to places where there is a risk of being drawn into international conflicts is not necessarily appropriate, and, from a political judgment, he stated that "we will forgo dispatching them this time." He concluded that, regarding the issue of safe navigation in the Persian Gulf, Japan was making diligent efforts through diplomatic means, and that diplomatic efforts were the most appropriate course of action for Japan to take.<sup>34</sup>

### 3. Deliberations within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

In response to demands from the United States and Diet questioning, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs held a meeting on Japan-U.S. relations on September 4 and 5, with the participation of Administrative Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Murata Ryohei and Ambassador of Japan to the United States Matsunaga, to consider Japan's contribution measures. Ambassador Matsunaga

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<sup>29</sup> *Yomiuri Shimbun* [Yomiuri Newspaper], July 25, 1987.

<sup>30</sup> Martin S. Navias and E. R. Hooton, *Tanker Wars: The Assault on Merchant Shipping During the Iran-Iraq Conflict, 1980-1988—Library of International Relations* (New York: I. B. Tauris & Company, 1996), p. 144.

<sup>31</sup> Yamaguchi, *Reisen Shuenki no Nichibei Kankei*, p. 323.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 323-324.

<sup>33</sup> Within the Nakasone administration, the issue of safe navigation in the Persian Gulf was reported at the 13th through 15th "Ministerial Meetings on Comprehensive Security" held in February, May, and October 1985 respectively, but there is no evidence that it was actively discussed among ministers regarding Japan's response. At the 16th "Ministerial Meeting on Comprehensive Security" on July 7, 1987, regarding the Persian Gulf situation, while the Minister for Foreign Affairs reported that proactive peace efforts toward both Iran and Iraq were continuing, and the Minister of Transport expressed dissatisfaction with diplomatic efforts regarding the issue of safe navigation in the Persian Gulf, there is no record of the Prime Minister's remarks. There is also no indication that U.S. involvement in the Gulf region and requests for support from Japan were shared among the ministers.

<sup>34</sup> "Dai 109 Kai Kokkai Shugiin Naikaku Iinkai Giroku Dai 6 Go [Minutes of the 109th Session of the Diet, House of Representatives Cabinet Committee, No. 6]," August 28, 1987, pp. 47-48.

expressed the view that Japan's image within the United States was deteriorating and that Japan should demonstrate a proactive stance toward ensuring safe navigation in the Persian Gulf.<sup>35</sup> On the 5th, it was decided to establish within the ministry a special task force headed by the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs to address the issue of safe navigation in the Persian Gulf, the "Task Force on the Persian Gulf Issue" (hereinafter referred to as the "Task Force"), to examine feasible contribution proposals within constitutional and legal frameworks. The Task Force's participating members were the Director-General of the Minister's Secretariat, Director-General of the North American Affairs Bureau, Director-General of the European and Asian Affairs Bureau, Director-General of the Middle Eastern and African Affairs Bureau, Director-General of the Economic Affairs Bureau, Director-General of the Economic Cooperation Bureau, Director-General of the Treaties Bureau, Director-General of the United Nations Bureau, and Director of the General Affairs Division, and the secretariat was established in the Second Middle East Division of the Middle Eastern and African Affairs Bureau.<sup>36</sup>

The first Task Force meeting was held on September 7, and four items for examination and their respective responsible divisions were determined.<sup>37</sup> Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs Kuriyama Takakazu conveyed that a general conclusion should be presented in time for the Japan-U.S. summit meeting on September 21, and that an interim report within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the above examination matters was scheduled for the 10th.

- (1) Regarding the dispatch of Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force minesweepers, the Security Division of the North American Affairs Bureau would examine the two cases of pre-ceasefire dispatch and post-ceasefire dispatch. The legal aspects of dispatch would be examined by the Legal Regulations Division of the Treaties Bureau, and the technical aspects and mechanisms for implementation would be examined by the Second Middle East Division and the Policy Division of the United Nations Bureau.
- (2) Regarding cost-sharing for minesweeping, the Security Division of the North American Affairs Bureau would examine the overall scale, including Defense Agency costs, partner countries, and frameworks.
- (3) Regarding economic cooperation with Gulf countries, the Policy Division of the Economic Cooperation Bureau would examine this.
- (4) Regarding separate cooperation with the United States, the Security Division of the North American Affairs Bureau would examine this.

In early September, prior to the Task Force's deliberations, Italy and the Netherlands had also decided to dispatch minesweepers to the Persian Gulf, and Japan's inaction stood out among the beneficiaries of safe navigation in the Persian Gulf. When Japan began its consideration, there were diplomatic urgings from the State Department and Department of Defense to promptly examine

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<sup>35</sup> *Asahi Shimbun* [Asahi Newspaper], September 6, 1987.

<sup>36</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Second Middle East Division of the Middle Eastern and African Affairs Bureau, "Perusha Wan Mondai ni Kansuru Tasuku Fosu ni Tsuite [Concerning the Task Force on the Persian Gulf Issue]," October 8, 1987; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "'Perusha Wan Mondai ni Kansuru Tasuku Fosu' no Setchi [Establishment of the 'Task Force on the Persian Gulf Issue']," September 7, 1987, Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2019-0786.

<sup>37</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Perusha Wan Mondai ni Kansuru Tasuku Fosu Dai 1 Kai Kaigo (Gijiroku) [Task Force on the Persian Gulf Issue, First Meeting (Minutes)]," September 7, 1987, Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2019-0786.



contribution measures, and the demands were urgent and concrete. On the 8th, U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard Lee Armitage suggested four options for Japan's contribution: (1) dispatch one to two minesweepers to the site and allocate them to escort Japanese vessels; (2) Japan bears 50% of the U.S. military's additional war costs; (3) assume the repair costs for U.S. vessels at Yokosuka; (4) significantly increase costs for stationing U.S. forces in Japan. He added his personal view that the dispatch of minesweepers would have a very strong impact on the United States (Congress and the public), along with advice that even good decisions have little impact if they miss the timing, and therefore should be ready in time for the Japan-U.S. summit meeting on the 21st.<sup>38</sup> Also on the 8th, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Arabian Gulf Affairs expressed the opinion that Japan's direct contribution, specifically the dispatch of minesweepers, would produce the greatest effect on the American public and Congress, with sharing the costs of U.S. military operations in the Persian Gulf being the second-best option. He stated that the time factor was also extremely important, and that the summit meeting on the 21st should be used as the timing for Japan to express its intention. Additionally, the view was presented that it would be difficult to defend the Japanese government (and its inaction), given the status of Western European nations' minesweeper dispatches. In addition to the United States and United Kingdom already on duty, Italy dispatched eight vessels, the Netherlands two, Belgium two minesweepers and one auxiliary vessel, and West Germany showed concrete initiatives such as filling gaps left by other countries within the scope of its constitution, thereby putting pressure on Japan.<sup>39</sup>

The second Task Force meeting was held on the evening of September 9.<sup>40</sup> While taking into account the specific suggestions presented by the United States on the 8th, items presented at the first meeting were examined. It appears that explanations regarding "technical issues of minesweeper dispatch" were given using materials<sup>41</sup> prepared by the Maritime Staff Office of the Defense Agency (hereinafter referred to as the "MSO"). The mines deployed in the Persian Gulf were moored mines and bottom mines, and an estimate was presented that Iran's mine-laying capability was extremely outdated, but the implementation of minesweeping was not disclosed, and judgments on feasibility and unit activities are unknown. However, from the context, it is believed that a judgment was presented that removal of mines laid by Iran was possible. Furthermore, regarding deployment capability to the Persian Gulf, it was stated that with the relatively large *Hatsushima*-class minesweeper (displacement 440 tons), deployment would be possible by accompanying a minesweeper tender and supply ship for command communications, logistical

<sup>38</sup> Ambassador to the United States to Minister for Foreign Affairs, Cable No. 8181, "Wangan Josei ni Kanrensuru Wagakuni no Yakuwari (Beikokubosho Moshire) [Japan's Role Related to the Gulf Situation (U.S. Department of Defense Request)]," September 9, 1987, Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2019-0786.

<sup>39</sup> Ambassador to the United States to Minister for Foreign Affairs, Cable No. 8182, "Perusha Wan no Anzen Koko Mondai (Kokumushonaiwa) [Issue of Safe Navigation in the Persian Gulf (State Department Internal Discussion)]," September 9, 1987, Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2019-0786.

<sup>40</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Second Middle East Division of the Middle Eastern and African Affairs Bureau, "'Perusha Wan Mondai ni Kansuru Tasuku Fosu' Dai 2 Kai Kaigo ni Tsuite [Concerning the 'Task Force on the Persian Gulf Issue' Second Meeting]," September 8, 1987, Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2019-0786.

<sup>41</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Security Division of the North American Affairs Bureau, "Kaijo Jieitai Sokai Butai no Perusha Wan eno Haken (Gijutsuteki Sokumen Kara no Kento) [Dispatch of Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force Minesweeping Units to the Persian Gulf (Examination from Technical Aspects)]," September 9, 1987, Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2019-0786.

support, supply, and so forth. Attached materials show vessels used in minesweeping operations at that time. Since *Takami*-class and *Hatsushima*-class minesweepers, minesweeper tenders *Hayase* and *Soya* (minelayer), minesweeping helicopter *V-107A*, and supply ships *Sagami* and *Towada* are introduced, it is believed that the concept was to dispatch a combination of these minesweepers, minesweeper tenders, and supply ships. While the number of minesweepers to be dispatched is not mentioned, it was stated that the minesweeping helicopter would be difficult to dispatch due to maintenance issues. In addition, four items are presented as technical problems, but their content cannot be confirmed as they are not disclosed. This issue will be discussed later.

Regarding “cost-sharing for minesweeping,” calculation results by the MSO were also introduced.<sup>42</sup> According to the materials, if one JMSDF minesweeping unit were to engage in minesweeping operations for three months, approximately 1 billion yen would be necessary, and as additional budgetary measures required to advance to the Persian Gulf and work in that area—fuel, food, spare equipment, various allowances, and so forth—were totaled, the estimate came to approximately 1.1 billion yen. By simple calculation, approximately 2.1 billion yen would be shown as necessary for a three-month minesweeping mission in the Persian Gulf. Synthesizing materials prepared by the MSO, it was stated that by organizing unit formations and taking necessary budgetary measures, it would be possible to conduct minesweeping operations in the Persian Gulf. Considering the composition shown in these materials based on unit formations at that time, if the flagship *Soya* of the second minesweeper group were used as a minesweeper tender, it appears that a posture of adding one supply ship to one subordinate minesweeper division (the 13th, 15th, 17th, and 20th Minesweeper Divisions were all composed of two *Hatsushima*-class minesweepers) was envisioned to undertake three-month rotation missions. Legal issues aside, depending on political decisions, operations would be conducted for a certain period, but considering the number of minesweeper tenders and supply ships possessed at the time and the number of crew members, it appears that long-term operations were not contemplated. It can be inferred that conducting a symbolic mission once for a short period was the limit.

The “mechanisms for implementing minesweeper dispatch”<sup>43</sup> refers to framework-building for Japan to participate with minesweepers, which can also be rephrased as necessary conditions for dispatch. Four patterns were presented for these, one being the adoption of a resolution on Persian Gulf minesweeping at the UN Security Council. This would involve the Security Council calling on member states to dispatch minesweepers to ensure safe navigation in the Persian Gulf. Furthermore, the preconditions for Japan to dispatch minesweepers were presented as follows: operations would take place after a ceasefire based on UN Resolution 598, be conducted on the high seas and be funded at the expense of the dispatching countries. The second would be through a call for minesweeper dispatch by a Security Council presidential statement, and the third would be through a statement by the UN Secretary-General. The fourth would be the establishment of a “maritime PKO” by Security Council resolution. However, for all four of these patterns, it was

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<sup>42</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Security Division of the North American Affairs Bureau, “Sokai Keihi no Buntan ni Kansuru Shisan [Estimate Regarding Cost-Sharing for Minesweeping],” September 9, 1987, Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2019-0786.

<sup>43</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Policy Division of the United Nations Bureau, “Jisshi no Tame no Mekanizumu (Kokuren no Wakugumi) [Mechanisms for Implementation (United Nations Framework)],” September 9, 1987, Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2019-0786.

determined the possibility of realization was slim.<sup>44</sup> For Japan to dispatch minesweepers, it would have to be done in accordance with one of the above mechanisms, but all of them would require significant human, time, and financial resources to implement. Furthermore, if a ceasefire were a precondition, a rapid response would be impossible, and Japan would be unable to respond to U.S. requests in a timely manner.

Regarding “economic cooperation with Gulf countries,”<sup>45</sup> from the view that Gulf oil-producing countries had high income levels to begin with and financial cooperation through Official Development Assistance (ODA) was difficult, the use of untied loans for developing countries (which do not limit material supply sources to Japan) for countries such as Oman, which had a relatively low income level among Gulf countries, was proposed. Additionally, a proposal was presented to positively consider reconstruction assistance for Iran and Iraq after the end of the conflict. Regarding “separate cooperation with the United States,” specifically the “burden of costs for U.S. forces in Japan,”<sup>46</sup> the Status of Forces Agreement stipulated that the United States was to bear all costs accompanying the maintenance of U.S. forces in Japan. While there was a possibility that the Japanese side could bear part of military facility construction costs, it was determined that under the current agreement, there was little room for Japan to assume additional costs.<sup>47</sup>

At the third Task Force meeting<sup>48</sup> held from the morning of September 10, a draft of the Ministry’s interim report was presented. The response measures presented in this report draft<sup>49</sup> were prepared based on the deliberations of the second meeting, and recorded cost-sharing (for the U.S. military), economic cooperation (with Gulf countries), dispatch of minesweepers, and a “Draft Statement by the Prime Minister at the Japan-U.S. Summit Meeting” that concisely explained these. Regarding cost-sharing, a plan was presented for Japan to contribute \$100 million annually out of the immediate additional costs required by the U.S. military to ensure freedom of navigation in the Persian Gulf, with room for consideration left open regarding Japan’s position (whether framed as “Japan-U.S. security” or “participation in international efforts”). Regarding economic cooperation, special assistance to Oman was advocated on the grounds that political stability of Gulf countries was necessary for freedom of navigation in the Persian Gulf. Regarding the dispatch of minesweepers, a dispatch proposal involving a minesweeper tender and supply ship was presented, but several matters requiring examination were indicated, including constitutional issues and limitations of the Self-Defense Forces Law: (1) the need for a Security Council resolution as the nominal basis for dispatch, (2) passive reactions from the shipping and oil industries, (3) the

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Policy Division of the Economic Cooperation Bureau, “Wangan Shokoku ni Taisuru Keizai Kyoryoku [Economic Cooperation with Gulf Countries],” September 9, 1987, Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2019-0786.

<sup>46</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Security Division of the North American Affairs Bureau, “Zainichi Beigun Keihi no Futan [Burden of Costs for U.S. Forces in Japan],” September 9, 1987, Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2019-0786.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Second Middle East Division of the Middle Eastern and African Affairs Bureau, “‘Perusha Wan Mondai ni Kansuru Tasuku Fosu’ Dai 3 Kai Kaigo ni Tsuite [Concerning the ‘Task Force on the Persian Gulf Issue’ Third Meeting],” September 9, 1987, Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2019-0786.

<sup>49</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Kenmei Nashi [No Subject],” document prepared by Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs Kuriyama, September 10, 1987, Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2019-0786.

need for escort measures for Japanese minesweepers by U.S. vessels, and (4) the necessity or otherwise of defense operations upon dispatch. The Prime Minister's statement (draft) was set as: "I would like to consider cost-sharing. I would like the two governments to determine the amount and concrete methods urgently. The dispatch of minesweepers has various constitutional and domestic legal constraints, and I would like to continue studying this. Regarding Oman and other Gulf countries, military support is not possible, but economic support will be considered if requested by these countries." Regarding the dispatch of minesweepers, although there were various preconditions and issues, at this point it remained a proposal under consideration.

At the fourth meeting that evening of the same day,<sup>50</sup> cost-sharing, economic cooperation, and minesweeper dispatch continued to be examined. To gauge the U.S. government's reaction to these, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs informed the U.S. side that, regarding the dispatch of minesweepers and financial contributions, many legal and political constraints existed, and that for Japan to undertake these measures, the adoption of a Security Council resolution or presidential statement requesting cooperation from UN member states on ensuring safe navigation in the Persian Gulf would be necessary.<sup>51</sup> However, the U.S. government's reaction was that with Security Council Resolution 598 already adopted and Western nations voluntarily dispatching minesweepers, issuing a resolution or statement calling for minesweeping cooperation was too late (unnecessary). Due to time constraints in securing a Security Council resolution and Iran's expected backlash, the U.S. government showed an extremely passive attitude toward Japan's proposal. Furthermore, on the U.S. side, regarding congressional pressure, notification was given that, while a statement by an Assistant Secretary of State was scheduled in response to questions about Japan's contribution in the House of Representatives on September 15, there were positive developments to report, and Japan found itself pressured to expedite its deliberations.<sup>52</sup> Thus, it became clear that U.S. cooperation could not be obtained for the mechanism that Japan considered necessary to dispatch minesweepers.

#### 4. Rejection of the Minesweeper Dispatch Proposal

Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs Kuriyama, who headed the Task Force at this time, later stated that because he himself was passive about the dispatch of minesweepers, he rejected the opinion within the Ministry that "minesweepers should be sent."<sup>53</sup> The minutes of the first Task Force meeting record Treaties Bureau Director-General Saito Kunihiko stating that "Prime Minister Nakasone clearly stated in the Diet that 'the dispatch of minesweepers is legally possible but

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<sup>50</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Second Middle East Division of the Middle Eastern and African Affairs Bureau, "Perusha Wan Mondai ni Kansuru Tasuku Fosu Dai 4 Kai Kaigo (Gijiroku) [Task Force on the Persian Gulf Issue, Fourth Meeting (Minutes)]," September 10, 1987, Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2019-0786.

<sup>51</sup> Minister for Foreign Affairs to Ambassador to the United States, Cable No. 5890, "Perusha Wan no Anzen Koko Mondai [Issue of Safe Navigation in the Persian Gulf]," September 10, 1987, Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2019-0786.

<sup>52</sup> Ambassador to the United States to Minister for Foreign Affairs, Cable No. 8299, "Perusha Wan no Anzen Koko Mondai (Kaito) [Issue of Safe Navigation in the Persian Gulf (Reply)]," September 11, 1987, Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2019-0786.

<sup>53</sup> GRIPS, *Kuriyama Takakazu Oraru Hisutori: Wangan Senso to Nihon Gaiko* [Kuriyama Takakazu Oral History: The Gulf War and Japanese Diplomacy] (Tokyo: Seisaku Kenkyu Daigakuin Daigaku [National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies], 2005), p. 46.

will not be done politically,” with subsequent remarks not disclosed. Following this, Kuriyama stated, “As an intellectual exercise aside, I do not think it is necessary to examine that far this time,” with what follows thereafter not disclosed.<sup>54</sup> In line with this discussion, Kuriyama testifies in his memoirs that “There were opinions within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that we should discuss more with the Cabinet Legislation Bureau, involving the Prime Minister, about sending (minesweepers). Since I was very passive about that, I overruled such opinions.” This can be interpreted as Kuriyama rejecting as unnecessary the Treaties Bureau Director-General’s proposal for discussion from legal aspects at the meeting. In other words, there are indications that Kuriyama thought that since minesweepers would not be sent in the first place, there was no point in making a clear determination on legal aspects, or that such determination should not be made. While Kuriyama stated that he did not hold the view that the dispatch of minesweepers itself was unconstitutional, he explained that the reason he was passive about dispatch was because he thought escort vessels would be necessary to accompany them. Kuriyama rejected the minesweeper dispatch proposal in consideration of the impact that the dispatch of escort vessels capable of using force would have on the international community.<sup>55</sup> In other words, he focused not on the legal propriety of minesweeping operations in the Persian Gulf or requirements to be met, but on the negative external effects that would realistically arise when Self-Defense Forces units were dispatched to the Persian Gulf as a package including escorts.

From the minutes of the fifth Task Force meeting held on the evening of September 11,<sup>56</sup> it can be seen that on the same day, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs Kuriyama made an interim report to Minister for Foreign Affairs Kuranari Tadashi. While the content of the interim report has not been clarified, since a report to the prime minister was to be carried out on the 14th at the beginning of the week, it is believed that the Foreign Minister’s approval was obtained for the content of the report to the prime minister. Japan’s contribution proposals presented in the later interim report to the prime minister changed from the interim report draft presented at the third meeting (cost-sharing, economic cooperation, minesweeper dispatch) to two proposals: “dispatch of Japan Coast Guard patrol vessels” and “economic cooperation with the Persian Gulf region.” In other words, the dispatch of minesweepers and bearing costs for the U.S. military were excluded. Materials compiled after the conclusion of the Task Force record that on the 11th, the dispatch of patrol vessels was discussed.<sup>57</sup> Following the Foreign Minister’s approval of the interim report on the 11th, from this day the subject of examination for personnel contribution by the Task Force was changed from the dispatch of minesweepers to the dispatch of patrol vessels. Okamoto Yukio, who participated in the deliberations as Director of the Security Division of the North American Affairs Bureau at the time, testifies that “the dispatch of the Self-Defense Forces was politically quite

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<sup>54</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Perusha Wan Mondai ni Kansuru Tasuku Fosu Dai 1 Kai Kaigo (Gijiroku) [Task Force on the Persian Gulf Issue, First Meeting (Minutes)],” September 7, 1987, Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2019-0786.

<sup>55</sup> GRIPS, *Kuriyama Takakazu Oraru Hisutori*, p. 46.

<sup>56</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Perusha Wan Mondai ni Kansuru Tasuku Fosu Dai 5 Kai Kaigo (Gijiroku) [Task Force on the Persian Gulf Issue, Fifth Meeting (Minutes)],” September 11, 1987, Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2019-0786.

<sup>57</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Second Middle East Division of the Middle Eastern and African Affairs Bureau, “Perusha Wan Mondai ni Kansuru Tasuku Fosu ni Tsuite [Concerning the Task Force on the Persian Gulf Issue],” October 8, 1987, Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2019-0786.



impossible, so it was crushed at an early stage,”<sup>58</sup> and states that as an alternative proposal after the minesweeper proposal disappeared, “after a meeting on a certain day in September, ... ‘How about Japan Coast Guard patrol vessels?’ ” Okamoto directly conveyed the patrol vessel proposal to Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs Kuriyama.<sup>59</sup> Since the dispatch of minesweepers, which had been examined until the fourth meeting on the evening of the 10th, changed to discussion of patrol vessel dispatch at the meeting on the following evening, Okamoto’s proposal may have been made between the night of the 10th and the following morning. Since on the night of the 10th, the U.S. passive attitude became clear regarding UN cooperation request resolutions or presidential statements that Japan had made precondition for minesweeper dispatch, if the replacement of the minesweeper proposal with the patrol vessel proposal was conveyed and approved in the Foreign Minister’s briefing on the interim report draft on the 11th, discussion of patrol vessel dispatch could begin that evening and be ready in time for the interim report on the 14th.

On September 14, L. Desaix Anderson, Minister at the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo, conveyed U.S. intentions to Kuriyama. The priority order of U.S. demands was: (1) dispatch of minesweepers, (2) Japan bears half of the U.S. Navy’s additional costs in the Persian Gulf, (3) Japan and the United States share maintenance costs for U.S. vessels dispatched from Yokosuka to the Persian Gulf, (4) increase the Japanese government’s burden of costs for stationing U.S. forces in Japan. Additionally, provision of Q-ships<sup>60</sup> and bearing hospital facility construction costs at Camp Zama and Sagami-hara were added to the demands. Even at this point, the U.S. side placed emphasis on the dispatch of minesweepers, requesting reconsideration of the Prime Minister’s Diet statement on August 28 that was negative about minesweeper dispatch, while emphasizing Japan’s insufficient contribution despite depending on the Persian Gulf for 60% of its oil. Kuriyama avoided giving a clear answer and merely stated that contribution measures were under consideration.<sup>61</sup> However, as already mentioned, at this stage the dispatch of minesweepers was no longer under consideration. On the same day, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs made an interim report to the prime minister on the results of deliberations up to this time. There were two concrete response measures (adopted proposals) presented to the prime minister: the dispatch of Japan Coast Guard patrol vessels, and economic cooperation with the Persian Gulf region (Oman and Jordan). there were three proposals that were considered but ultimately rejected: dispatch of minesweepers, cost-sharing, and bearing costs for U.S. forces in Japan. The purpose of dispatching patrol vessels was to provide navigation information to merchant ships, navigation guidance, and assistance to vessels in distress—all within the scope of the Japan Coast Guard Act. The patrol vessels were to consist of two ships, and the requirements for the vessels included the provision of medical services and helicopter accommodation. On the other hand, regarding minesweeper dispatch, while the effect

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<sup>58</sup> Iokibe Makoto, Ito Motoshige, and Yakushiji Katsuyuki, eds., *Okamoto Yukio: Genba Shugi wo Tsuranui ta Gaikukan* [Okamoto Yukio: The Persistently Hands-on Diplomat] (Tokyo: Asahi Shimbun [Asahi Shimbun Publications], 2020), p. 115.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>60</sup> Q-ship: Refers to a vessel that proceeds at the head of a convoy as a decoy on dangerous routes with mines to ensure safety of the route. However, the vessel’s crew would be provided by the United States or Gulf countries.

<sup>61</sup> Minister for Foreign Affairs to Ambassador to the United States, Cable No. 5967, “Wangan Josei no Kanrensuru Wagakuni no Yakuwari (Zaikyo Beita Kara no Moshire) [Japan’s Role Related to the Gulf Situation (Request from U.S. Embassy in Tokyo)],” September 14, 1987, Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2019-0786.

on the United States would be maximized and it was constitutionally possible, it was explained that in actually carrying out minesweeping operations, responding to foreseeable hostile actions by Iran would be difficult to implement due to constraints under the Self-Defense Forces Law. Additionally, strong backlash from Iran against the dispatch of minesweepers was anticipated, and reactions from Japan's shipping and oil industries, which feared this, were unfavorable. The Prime Minister's statement draft for the Japan-U.S. summit meeting scheduled for the 21st read: "We considered minesweeper dispatch, but various strict legal constraints exist, and it has become clear that it is difficult as a practical matter. Instead, ... we would like to dispatch two patrol vessels." On the other hand, a note was also appended stating, "Minesweeper dispatch is constitutionally possible, but explaining to the United States to the effect that it is politically impossible (due to dangers such as being drawn into conflict) would be highly inadvisable. It must be avoided at all costs."<sup>62</sup> The Prime Minister's reaction at this time has not been conveyed, but since the minesweeper dispatch proposal was not revived in subsequent deliberations, it can be seen that abandonment of minesweeper dispatch was effectively approved within the administration at this point.

Incidentally, materials believed to have been prepared by the Task Force at an early stage for organizing its approach (preparation division and date unknown<sup>63</sup>) classify the means of dispatching minesweepers into three categories: independent dispatch, participation in an international framework (cooperative method), and support of Gulf countries (collaboration method), and record their respective advantages and problems. The advantage of independent dispatch is described as "very effective in terms of relations with the United States," while the problems include, (1) escorting and supplying minesweepers is difficult, (2) incurring Iranian backlash increases danger to Japanese vessels, and (3) response measures to unforeseen accidents have not been worked out (legal aspects), among others. In the report to the Prime Minister, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs explained the minesweeper proposal mainly from diplomatic and legal perspectives regarding points (2) and (3) above, but did not address the aspect of escort and supply in (1). Therefore, this issue will be examined from the perspective of the Defense Agency, which would be responsible for undertaking the operations (dispatching minesweepers).

## 5. Deliberations within the Defense Agency and Self-Defense Forces

Defense Agency high officials were negative about the dispatch of minesweepers. Defense Agency Director-General Kurihara Yuko telephoned Chief Cabinet Secretary Gotoda Masaharu from the United States, where he was visiting, and indicated his opposition to minesweeper dispatch, saying "We must not send them." Yoda Tomoharu, who was Director-General of the Director-General's Secretariat, also recalls that time, stating, "Including constitutional issues, dispatch is difficult without political judgment."<sup>64</sup> According to Yoda, preliminary research was conducted

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<sup>62</sup> Minister for Foreign Affairs to Ambassador to the United States, Cable No. 5967, "Wangan Josei no Kanrensuru Wagakuni no Yakuwari (Zaiko Beita Kara no Moshire) [Japan's Role Related to the Gulf Situation (Request from U.S. Embassy in Tokyo)]," September 14, 1987, Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2019-0786.

<sup>63</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Perusha Wan Anzen Koko Kakuho no Tame ni Wagakuni to Shite Nashieru Koto no Kanosei [Possibilities of What Japan Can Accomplish to Ensure Safe Navigation in the Persian Gulf]," undated, Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2019-0786.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

within the Defense Agency, and as a result of the Legal Regulations Division of the Director-General's Secretariat examining constitutional issues and Self-Defense Forces Law, and the Defense Division of the Maritime Staff Office examining practical issues such as unit formation and navigation plans, it had become clear that there were many issues to be resolved both legally and practically regarding the dispatch of minesweepers.<sup>65</sup> Fujii Kazuo, who served as Councilor of the Director-General's Secretariat at the time, also clearly expressed opposition when later asked about minesweeper dispatch, stating, "I think that is outrageous. ... If I had been in a position to speak at that time, I would have made efforts to somehow prevent it."<sup>66</sup> At the high official level, they feared the risk that only the government's accountability for results would be questioned if minesweepers were sent based solely on political judgment in a state where legal grounds were ambiguous.

What about at the MSO and unit levels? Research materials said to have been prepared by the MSO and cited at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Task Force indicated that dispatch would be possible by organizing appropriate unit formations and taking additional budgetary measures. However, it appears that the MSO was actually negative about dispatch from multiple perspectives.

Anjo Masaaki, Hull Section Chief of the Ship Division at the MSO at the time of the 1991 dispatch of minesweepers to the Persian Gulf, recalls his impression when referring to the 1987 examination results: "According to materials prepared by the Ship Division on minesweeper dispatch examined under instructions from the Nakasone Cabinet, it was clear that the greatest problem for dispatch in the Ship Division was the main engine. The main engines and minesweeping generators of minesweepers at that time were ZC-type engines, and overhaul maintenance after several thousand hours of operation required completely replacing the engine with a spare. Because this interval was short, it was necessary to dispatch a maintenance unit to the Middle East during operations to implement main engine replacement work, and since the costs, location, facilities, and so forth were unknown, dispatch was estimated to be quite difficult."<sup>67</sup> In the materials used at the Task Force, three months was set as the standard dispatch period, but in addition to supply, maintenance of the minesweepers' main engines was also likely considered. From a maintenance perspective, sustained mission execution in the Persian Gulf was difficult with the capabilities of minesweepers at that time.

Morita Yoshiyuki, a staff officer of the Second Minesweeper Group in the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force, states that he was instructed by the Self-Defense Fleet to conduct secret independent research in preparation for dispatch. In this plan, called the "H (Hotel) Plan," the route and number of days until minesweepers reached the Persian Gulf, as well as mine information, tidal currents, salinity, climate, and other factors, were studied in detail. Supply was particularly emphasized, and ports of call for procurement of fuel, water, and food, as well as for repairs, were researched. Concrete formations were also determined, consisting of six minesweepers (of which three were constantly operational), one minesweeper tender, one escort destroyer, and one

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>66</sup> Center for Military History, National Institute for Defense Studies [hereafter NIDS], eds., "Fujii Kazuo Oraru Hisutori [Kazuo Fujii Oral History]," in *Oraru Hisutori Reisenki no Boeiryoku Seibi to Domei Seisaku 6* [Oral History: Defense Buildup and Alliance Policy during the Cold War 6] (Tokyo: NIDS, 2016), p. 279.

<sup>67</sup> Anjo Masaaki, "Perusha Wan Sokaitei Haken Ibun [A Different Story of Minesweeper Dispatch to the Persian Gulf]," in *Kaijo Jieitai: Kushin no Ashiato Dai 2 Kan Sokai* [Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force: Footprints of Diligent Efforts, vol. 2, Minesweeping] (Tokyo: Suikokai [Suikokai, Publishers], 2011), pp. 285-286.

helicopter.<sup>68</sup> Since the materials shared at the Task Force were a formation of one minesweeper division consisting of a minesweeper tender, minesweepers, and a supply ship, it can be seen that in the examination process at the Self-Defense Fleet Command, MSO, or other divisions (Legal Regulations Division of the Defense Agency or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Security Division), the portion related to escort of minesweepers was reduced and a supply ship was added. The removal of the destroyer can be attributed to legal limitations and external negative factors previously indicated by Kuriyama. Additionally, since the draft interim report presented at the third Task Force meeting mentioned legal limitations and escort measures by U.S. vessels, it is possible that the escort destroyer was removed with the expectation that U.S. vessels would provide escort in the Persian Gulf. It is difficult to think that the Self-Defense Fleet and MSO, on the side of dispatching units, would remove escort elements for the advance, return, and operations of minesweepers.

As in Anjo's testimony, it appears that the divisions in charge of examination were generally negative about the dispatch of minesweepers. Sakuma Makoto, Commandant of the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force Staff College at the time, states: "The Defense Division of the MSO was doing research. ... The opinion of the people there was negative. Political atmosphere aside, there were all kinds of problems under the legal system at that time. That's understandable. 'We cannot send personnel in such a situation' was the basic answer of the MSO, at least the Defense Division."<sup>69</sup> While the details of "such a situation" mentioned by the Defense Division are unclear, if it were the first attempt at overseas dispatch of minesweepers, the MSO would have wanted to dispatch units with ample supply and escort to complete the mission. In other words, it is natural to see that they considered the H Plan or greater. However, due to problems inherent in the legal system at that time—specifically, the incomplete examination of response measures to unforeseen accidents (problem (3) noted in the Task Force's materials)—and the deletion of destroyers, it likely became "such a situation," which was an unfavorable form of dispatch for the MSO.

Hayashizaki Chiaki, Director of the Defense Division at the MSO at the time, states that there was discussion from the Defense Agency's Internal Bureaus (hereinafter referred to as the "Internal Bureaus") about the dispatch of minesweepers, and he had the Operations Division conduct independent research. He states that field units and retired personnel shared the view that long-distance navigation by minesweepers to the Persian Gulf was "severe." Additionally, he recalls that Hayashizaki himself was skeptical about the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force's minesweeping technology at that time, and that even in the 1991 dispatch of minesweepers to the Persian Gulf, what was effective was not mine clearance by minesweepers, but mine disposal by underwater disposal personnel.<sup>70</sup> If dispatched based solely on political judgment without legal grounds, responses to unforeseen circumstances would not have been worked out, leaving field units to handle them. Concerns existed regarding supply, escort, long-distance navigation, maintenance, and minesweeping capability, making it reasonable for the Defense Division to conclude, "we cannot send personnel."

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<sup>68</sup> Yamaguchi, *Reisen Shuenki no Nichibei Kankei*, p. 328.

<sup>69</sup> War History Research Center, NIDS, *Sakuma Makoto Oraru Hisutori Gekan* [Sakuma Makoto Oral History, vol. 2] (Tokyo: NIDS, 2007), p. 65.

<sup>70</sup> Center for Military History, NIDS, *Oraru Hisutori Nihon no Anzen Hosho to Boeiryoku 4 Hayashizaki Chiaki* [Oral History: Japan's Security and Defense Capability 4, Hayashizaki Chiaki] (Tokyo: NIDS 2019), p. 157.

Ochiai Taosa, Commander of the Persian Gulf Minesweeper Dispatch Force in 1991, states that when he was Chief of Staff of the Second Minesweeper Group in 1984, subordinate units researched minesweeping activities in areas away from the coast. According to Ochiai, JMSDF's minesweepers were coastal vessels, and their operational concept assumed navigation parallel to the Japanese archipelago, using ports as supply bases and conducting minesweeping while maintaining a distance from the coast. Minesweepers did not envision long-distance navigation away from each base (port), and if ordered to conduct operations in distant areas, challenges arose from vessels' low navigation and supply capabilities.<sup>71</sup> Generally, other countries' minesweeper units use transport ships for long distances, but Japan lacked such ships, so minesweepers had to self-propel to the operational area. Ochiai states that the second minesweeper group's research considered these problems,<sup>72</sup> which may have resulted in the 1987 H Plan and MSO study research.

Furthermore, regarding such technical problems related to dispatch, as mentioned above, the MSO is said to have identified four items in its prepared materials. While the content of the four items is not public, synthesizing testimonies, the issues likely included: (1) minesweepers' navigation capability and engine maintenance, (2) securing advance routes and supply bases in the Gulf, (3) living environment on minesweepers in tropical regions, and (4) escort of minesweepers during round-trip routes and stay in the Persian Gulf. In addition to legal issues, supply to units and vessels' navigation capability were held as technical concerns, leading the Defense Agency (Director-General, Internal Bureaus, MSO) to judge that minesweeper dispatch was difficult.

However, the MSO materials cited at the Task Force stated that dispatch was possible depending on the budget, which appears to contradict the testimonies of MSO personnel. It is unclear how the Task Force received a view opposite the MSO's thinking, but it is possible that the Defense Agency and Self-Defense Forces adopted a stance of readiness to follow orders. In other words, while minesweeper dispatch was difficult legally and functionally, they were prepared to undertake it if ordered based on a political decision, provided it was limited to a short period. In fact, Sakuma states regarding the 1991 dispatch: "At the time of the MSO examination in 1987, the result was negative. There were too many problems. That's certainly true. From that perspective, the answer would be that it cannot be done. However, if it should be done as a nation, and national demand is great, obstacles that can be eliminated are eliminated and we proceed. This is a different approach; you could say it's different,"<sup>73</sup> conveying that the 1991 dispatch resulted from the government accepting operational and equipment challenges.

## 6. Political Judgment

The minesweeper dispatch proposal was rejected early in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' deliberations and was also deemed difficult in the Defense Agency's deliberations, but what was the perception at the political level? To begin with, Nakasone himself stated in his Diet answer on August 28 that while it was legally possible, he would not dispatch minesweepers based on political judgment. Later, Nakasone stated regarding the intention of his remarks and perception of risks: "I took up minesweeper dispatch because, first, I wanted to strongly stimulate debate, and I did

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<sup>71</sup> War History Research Center, NIDS, *Sakuma Makoto Oraru Hisutori Gekan*, p. 257.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 258.

<sup>73</sup> NIDS, *Sakuma Makoto Oraru Hisutori Gekan*, p. 159.



not think minesweepers could actually be dispatched,” and “There was a danger that minesweeper dispatch would be misunderstood as Japan advancing overseas by force.”<sup>74</sup> Additionally, while referring to minesweeper equipment, he appears to have recognized deficiencies in this aspect, stating, “The facilities inside the vessels are not ready. In that tropical region, heat-resistant facilities are not at all ready either in living quarters or the dining areas. It would be impossible to bring them in suddenly.”<sup>75</sup> In other words, Nakasone made the statement “we will not dispatch them this time” while understanding the political risks of minesweeper dispatch and the limitations of the minesweeper equipment. Furthermore, he merely presented an interpretation in the Diet that while not realistic politically or practically, it was constitutionally and theoretically possible.

However, while Nakasone did not explicitly instruct or consult regarding the examination of minesweeper dispatch,<sup>76</sup> it appears that he was quietly exploring personnel contributions, including minesweeper dispatch, behind the scenes. Later, Nakasone stated that “minesweeper dispatch was an act guaranteeing Japan’s freedom of navigation, and ... an act done out of demands of Japan’s national policy,” and that he aimed to completely renew Japan’s image by taking proactive action regarding freedom of navigation.<sup>77</sup> From such statements, it can be seen that Nakasone understood the dispatch of minesweepers as a peaceful presence Japan could demonstrate to the international community, and he expected active discussion within the Diet and the government to enable such dispatch in the future. However, minesweeper dispatch at this point was, as he himself admits, an option that could not realistically be taken. Additionally, examining Nakasone’s statements from the perspective of relations with the United States, it can also be considered that Nakasone could not refuse approaches from U.S. government officials without first conducting an internal government examination.<sup>78</sup> Diplomatic procedures may have been necessary—such as careful internal deliberations and preparation of appropriate pretexts and alternative proposals—before declining the U.S. minesweeper dispatch request. If so, Nakasone’s additional remarks that it was not theoretically impossible, even though he understood it was politically and practically difficult, can be interpreted as playing the role of a “catalyst for domestic discussion” and a “diplomatic cushion for refusal” toward the United States.

Later, Gotoda recalled that when consulted by Nakasone about minesweeper dispatch, he argued that if Japan were to dispatch armed vessels to the Persian Gulf—a combat area—to escort tankers, once fighting began, even if Japan asserted the right of self-defense, it would not work with the opponent—this would become a war. He opposed the idea, arguing that the people did not

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<sup>74</sup> Kato, *Jieitai Kaigai Haken no Kigen*, pp. 106-107.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 103-104.

<sup>78</sup> Prime Minister Nakasone’s “unsinkable aircraft carrier” statement upon taking office in January 1983, and his view that “Japan and the United States are a community of common destiny across the Pacific and are in an alliance relationship,” resulted in strongly impressing the Japan-U.S. alliance upon the United States. Prime Minister Nakasone made clear his stance of emphasizing the Japan-U.S. alliance at every opportunity, and in September of that year, when submitting to the United States the Self-Defense Forces’ communications intercept records that served as evidence of the Soviet Union’s shooting down of a Korean Air Lines aircraft, relations became so favorable that even the U.S. Senate, which had repeatedly criticized Japan, unanimously adopted a resolution of gratitude to Japan. It was the Iran-Iraq War that the Nakasone administration, which sought favorable Japan-U.S. relations leveraging the Japan-U.S. alliance and defense issues in this way, faced, and Japan’s contribution regarding the Persian Gulf that was questioned at the end of the administration.

have that resolve.<sup>79</sup> This was a statement once again highlighting the political risks of minesweeper dispatch. In fact, Gotoda was weighing relations with the United States against domestic politics and opposing while still grasping the intentions of the U.S. administration. Minister of Finance Miyazawa Kiichi and Defense Agency Director-General Kurihara, who were visiting the United States at that time, were telephoning the Chief Cabinet Secretary to report on U.S. reactions. While Kurihara's statement "we must not send them" was presented earlier, from Miyazawa he had heard a statement by U.S. Secretary of State George Pratt Shultz to the effect that "it would be unreasonable to demand vessel dispatch from Japan."<sup>80</sup> From such reports, Gotoda judged that the United States had already assumed that Japan would probably not dispatch the Self-Defense Forces, and would not show a strong reaction even without vessel dispatch.<sup>81</sup>

Up to this point, drawing on materials and memoirs from that time, we have examined the events from the perspective of later generations, and it appears that those involved generally understood from the beginning that the dispatch of minesweepers was impossible. According to conventional wisdom, Nakasone strongly desired minesweeper dispatch and Gotoda admonished him; however, Nakasone stated in the Diet from the outset that minesweepers would not be dispatched, and he accepted the Task Force's examination results and the Chief Cabinet Secretary's opposition. The Defense Agency was also negative about dispatch, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is said to have rejected the minesweeper proposal at an early stage. At least among government officials involved in the examination, no one can be found who was proactive about minesweeper dispatch to the Persian Gulf at that time. If there was someone within the government who held strong feelings about minesweeper dispatch, it was possibly Ambassador of Japan to the United States Matsunaga, who was always at the forefront of U.S. government pressure. After the Stark incident in 1987, Japan-bashing in the U.S. Congress became increasingly intense, and demands on Japan also became more concrete. The U.S. administration, under congressional pressure, demanded personnel contributions and cost-sharing from Japan, strongly pressing that minesweeper dispatch was best. In such circumstances, it was Ambassador Matsunaga who received this pressure directly in the United States. The Ambassador's statements at the examination meetings within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs—showing a strong sense of crisis and urging a proactive attitude—combined with concrete suggestions from U.S. government officials during the same period, led to the Task Force's examination of minesweeper dispatch. However, that examination only served to make the legal, functional, and political issues surrounding minesweeper dispatch even clearer. In the end, at this time, many of those involved in the examination understood that the prospects for realizing minesweeper dispatch were slim from institutional and functional perspectives, or that it was a policy that should not be realized politically.

The Task Force's examination of minesweeper dispatch can be viewed, from another perspective, as the derivation of "reasons why minesweepers cannot be dispatched." These "reasons," together with the alternative proposal of patrol vessel dispatch, were reported to the Prime Minister and became the basis for the Prime Minister's statement at the Japan-U.S. summit meeting. Thus, the examination of minesweeper dispatch effectively ended its role by confirming

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<sup>79</sup> Gotoda Masaharu, *Jo to Ri: Gotoda Masaharu Kaikoroku Ge* [Emotion and Logic: A Memoir of Gotoda Masaharu, vol. 2] (Tokyo: Kodansha [Kodansha, Publishers], 1998), p. 189.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 227.

<sup>81</sup> Kato, *Jieitai Kaigai Haken no Kigen*, p. 112.

that dispatch was impossible. However, the numerous issues that became clear as a result of that examination would reignite four years later under similar circumstances. It possesses a strange continuity in which those involved in 1987 would again take part in changed positions, yet this time be required to conduct a reverse examination—"what would be necessary to enable dispatching minesweepers?" The examination of minesweeper dispatch to the Persian Gulf during the Iran-Iraq War can be evaluated as not a transient event that briefly flared up among politicians and quickly subsided, but as a forward-looking discussion that was examined within the government from both institutional and technical aspects and left room for subsequent utilization as a "legacy." In that sense, Nakasone's desire to make it a catalyst for discussion for Japan to demonstrate a peaceful presence would bear fruit over the following four years.

## Conclusion

The United States was compelled to become involved in the issue of safe navigation in the Persian Gulf, which originated from the intensification of the Iran-Iraq War, and despite suffering damage, implemented convoy escort operations by dispatching vessels to the Gulf. In 1987, safe navigation in the Persian Gulf, which had become a hazardous area, became a serious problem for countries reliant on this region for oil transport, and Western European nations, receiving requests for cooperation from the United States, dispatched minesweepers to remove mines and engaged in minesweeping operations in the Persian Gulf. On the other hand, criticism arose in the U.S. Congress that Japan, the destination for approximately 60% of oil tankers passing through the Strait of Hormuz, was not contributing anything to safe navigation in the Persian Gulf, and Japan-bashing intensified, overlapping with the "security free ride" argument and Japan-U.S. economic friction. As pressure from the U.S. administration intensified, suggesting demands for personnel contributions from Japan—namely the dispatch of minesweepers—the Japanese government began examining concrete contribution measures regarding safe navigation in the Persian Gulf, initially examining feasibility from legal and institutional aspects and technical and practical aspects, centered on the dispatch of minesweepers, but at the stage of the interim report, the minesweeper dispatch proposal was excluded.

What is often cited as the background to Nakasone's abandonment of minesweeper dispatch is Gotoda's strong opposition. While there was certainly strong opposition from Gotoda, Kuriyama, who headed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs examination team, testifies that the minesweeper dispatch proposal was rejected at an early stage of the examination. The examination team obtained the MSO's examination results and, after thoroughly examining practical aspects in addition to legal and institutional aspects, concluded that minesweeper dispatch was extremely difficult. Given that Kuriyama himself also harbored doubts about how to escort minesweepers, the minesweeper dispatch proposal was rejected. Within the Defense Agency as well, a case study of minesweeper dispatch was conducted, but it was determined to be difficult both legally and technically. At the MSO and Self-Defense Fleet as well, they independently researched minesweeper dispatch and devised concrete unit formations and so forth, but could not resolve practical issues such as equipment, supply, maintenance, and navigation capability, or legal and institutional issues such as means of escort and responses to attacks, and concluded that minesweeper dispatch was difficult. In other words, on the administrative side, minesweeper dispatch was deemed difficult due to legal, institutional, and practical issues, and was excluded from the interim report to the

Prime Minister. On the political side, while Nakasone harbored the expectation that minesweeper dispatch to the Persian Gulf was a good opportunity for Japan to demonstrate a peaceful presence in the international community, he recognized the political risks and understood that this was not a realistic option. Gotoda's opposition was also based on the grounds that if minesweepers were attacked, the people could not endure Japan being drawn into combat. In other words, although this has been overlooked in previous research, it can be said that this series of policy processes is better understood as both politicians and bureaucrats calmly assessing the realistic issues they faced and reaching the decision to abandon minesweeper dispatch, rather than as a decision driven by the political beliefs of a particular actor and his influence.

Subsequently, four years later, in a new international environment where the Cold War had ended, Japan was again expected to dispatch minesweepers. The 1987 examination served as a foundation for the ensuing deliberation within the Japanese government and its ministries. In light of subsequent developments, the 1987 examination, in which issues regarding minesweeper dispatch were identified from various angles, can be evaluated as ultimately bearing fruit four years later.