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Nakahara, Masato

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The Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake (1995) and the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF): Changing Perceptions and Integration of JSDF into Local Communities

Masato Nakahara^{1,*}

¹Graduate School of International Cooperation Studies, Kobe University, Japan

Abstract. This research clarifies how the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) integrated into local communities after the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake of January 17, 1995. In Japan's post-war pacifist mood, the JSDF had been regarded as a "social outcast" and marginalized by local communities for a long time. In the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake that occurred under such circumstances, cooperation between the JSDF and local governments did not function well. Learning from the earthquake, local governments recognized the need to strengthen daily cooperation with the JSDF through disaster drills. Moreover, local governments that sought the cooperation of the JSDF in disaster drills felt indebted to the JSDF for its cooperation and began to cooperate in recruiting JSDF personnel. Furthermore, these partnerships became stronger with local governments beginning to invite the JSDF to local festivals. As a result, the JSDF became more integrated into local communities. The above findings indicate that the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake became an important turning point in the process of the JSDF being integrated into local communities. Indeed, this change in local communities implies that a social base was formed that would later lead to the "JSDF boom" in the wake of the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 11, 2011.

Keywords: Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF), Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, Perceptions of the JSDF, Anti-JSDF culture, Local communities.

1 Introduction

In a 2015 poll by the Cabinet Office, 92.2% of the Japanese public answered they had a "good impression" of the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF), while only 4.8% answered they had a "bad impression".¹ In another poll, 60% of the

Japanese public said the JSDF was "trustworthy," making it the most trustworthy of eight other public bodies, such as Magistracy (47%), Police (43%), Inspections (39%), Teachers (32%), and so on.² So how did the JSDF, long

*email: masato74@people.kobe-u.ac.jp

perceived as a ‘social outcast’³ in the post-war pacifist mood that permeated in a defeated Japan, really become the most trusted organization?

It is typically believed that the perceptions of the JSDF has changed positively since the 1990s, following the organizations’ increased activities. Most notably, it is assumed that the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake of January 17, 1995, was a significant turning point.

For example, Akihiro Sadō notes that one of the reasons for the growing support for the JSDF was its relief activities during disasters such as the Great Hanshin-Awaji and Great East Japan Earthquake.⁴ Minato Kawamura states that the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake dispelled negative feelings toward the JSDF, deepened understanding of its activities, and rapidly spread positive perceptions.⁵ Sabine Frühstück also points out the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake marked a milestone on the JSDF’ march to public approval and a moment of intense media exposure.⁶ Tokyo Governor (as of July 2023), Yuriko Koike, also stated, “I still vividly remember the great efforts of the JSDF during the 1995 Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake in my hometown. The earthquake also marked a change in the attitude of those who had long denied the existence of the JSDF.”⁷

However, none of the previous studies revealed detailed mechanisms of this transformation of public perception. Is this simply because the public became aware of the JSDF’s activities in the disaster-stricken areas through the media, which improved the public’s impression of the JSDF? It certainly makes sense, but in fact, the mechanism seems to be more complicated than that.

Therefore, this research uses a process-tracing approach⁸ to clarify how perceptions of the JSDF changed by focusing on the local communities after the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake by using primary documents such as newsletters published by JSDF-related

organizations and from mainstream newspapers as primary sources of data.

The structure of this paper is as follows: how the JSDF was recognized in post-war Japanese society and local communities before the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, how the debate on the JSDF’s role in times of disaster was activated over the JSDF’s response to the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, how local governments recognized the need to cooperate with the JSDF on a daily basis, how local governments began to cooperate with the JSDF in recruiting its personnel, how the JSDF was invited to local festivals and events as a result of the deepening cooperation with local governments. Finally, the paper summarizes the points of this research and presents its implications.

2 Anti-JSDF Culture before the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake

In post-war Japan, demilitarization has been promoted under the leadership of the United States. As Glenn Hook summarized, demilitarization policy is divided “in four different dimensions: (1) the military, as the armed forces were physically abolished; (2) the political, as the military was banned in the new Constitution and military influence on the policy-making process was eliminated; (3) the economic, as the great arms industry of the zaibatsu (business combines) were dismantled; and (4) the social, as the military and all it stood for were rejected by most at the mass level.”⁹

Under these policies, successive governments had taken the so-called Yoshida Doctrine and “concentrated its attention on domestic affairs, leaving the critical issue of the nation’s security up to the security arrangements with the United States.” As Akihiro Sadō cites, due to politicians having tried to prevent national defense from becoming a political issue, it has been the main

characteristic of post-war Japanese politics to, as far as possible, avoid dealing with military-related affairs. Thusly, Sadō said that a national mood prevailed where it was generally unthinkable to use the JSDF for purposes other than disaster relief and civic cooperation.¹⁰

This paper refers to this post-war Japanese mood as “anti-JSDF culture”, referring to Thomas Berger’s “culture of anti-militarism.” According to Berger, culture of anti-militarism which has its roots in the collective Japanese memories of the militarist takeover in the 1930s, “is one of the most striking features of contemporary Japanese politics.”¹¹ One of the examples of the anti-JSDF culture is that Kenzaburō Ōe, later Nobel Prize winner in literature, refers to National Defense Academy students as “shameful,” and he writes that he seeks to reduce the number of applicants from applying for the National Defense Academy in a column of the *Mainichi Shimbun* on June 25, 1958.¹²

Such anti-JSDF culture were particularly seen in the local governments. “From the mid-1960s, reformist leaders were elected to lead regional governments in various parts of the nation, and by the 1970s, reformist governors had been elected in two major urban centers: the Tokyo Metropolitan area and the Kinki region (i.e. the Osaka, Kyoto, Kobe region), in Western Japan.”¹³ The characteristic of these governors is that they were not supported by the Liberal Democratic Party, but by one or both of the two reformist parties such as the Japan Socialist Party and the Japanese Communist Party.¹⁴ Therefore, the reformist local governments as well as the Socialist Party and the Communist Party viewed “the existence of the JSDF as a violation of the post-war constitution.”¹⁵ As Aaron Skabelund mentions, “these regional and local leaders implemented policies that hampered the activities of the JSDF, for

example, by preventing them from holding parades on public streets”.¹⁶

For a considerably long time, regional and local leaders also refused to cooperate with the JSDF, even with disaster drills.¹⁷ For instance, on September 1, 1971, director general of the Defense Agency, Yasuhiro Nakasone planned a disaster drill with the cooperation of the Kōtō district in Tokyo. However, the reformist Tokyo governor Ryōkichi Minobe hindered the implementation of the drill. In Kobe City, the SDF’s Provincial Liaison Office (*Chihō Renraku Honbu*) requested the city government to conduct joint exercises three times, but the reformist mayor, Tatsuo Miyazaki, continuously refused the request.¹⁸

The reformist local governments also challenged the JSDF’s constitutionality in court, such as in the Naganuma case. In 1969, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries reclassified a forest preserve to allow the Japan Air SDF to construct a Nike missile site. On July 7, 1969, a group of anti-base residents from Naganuma town in Hokkaido, filed a lawsuit in Sapporo District Court. The group pursued an injunction against the government to prevent changing the status of the forest, claiming that the establishment of a missile site in the national forest preserve was violated the Forestry Law. The group insisted that “such a reclassification may be made only in the public interest. Since the SDF were unconstitutional, the plaintiffs argued, the JSDF airbase could not be regarded as being in the public interest.”¹⁹ In 1973, the Sapporo District Court ruled the JSDF to be unconstitutional.

The important thing here is that the reformist local governments suspended the recruitment of JSDF personnel after receiving a court ruling that the JSDF were unconstitutional. Article 97 of the SDF Act (*Jieitai Hō*) stipulates that local governments are responsible for part of the recruitment process. However, following the Sapporo District Court’s

ruling, some reformist local governments stopped cooperating with the recruitment of those personnel.

For example, in September 1973, Kamakura and Fujisawa cities in Kanagawa Prefecture and Kushiro City in Hokkaido announced temporary suspensions of the recruitment. In the following October, the National Association of Reformist Mayors (*Zenkoku Kakushin Shichō Kai*)²⁰ also decided to suspend JSDF personnel recruitment.²¹ On November 22, the four reformist mayors of Yokohama, Kawasaki, Kamakura, and Fujisawa cities in Kanagawa Prefecture held a meeting at Yokohama City Hall and decided to temporarily suspend the recruitment of JSDF personnel from December 1st, 1973.²² Shizuoka, Nagoya, Kyoto, Kobe, and Matsue cities also did not cooperate in any way with the recruitment work as of 1994.²³ Thus, the JSDF, which could no longer obtain the cooperation of local governments in recruiting personnel, came to be rejected by the local community. Under these circumstances, the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake occurred in 1995.

3 The Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake and the Revitalization of the Debate on the JSDF

At 5:46 a.m. on January 17, 1995, an earthquake of magnitude 7.2 on the Richter scale struck the southern part of Hyogo Prefecture. The earthquake caused damage to the cities of Ashiya, Nishinomiya, and Takarazuka cities, Awaji Island and the whole of Kobe, killing 6,434 people.

After the earthquake struck, the JSDF were dispatched to the disaster area. The disaster relief mission lasted 101 days until the forces were withdrawn on April 27. During this period, the total number of forces deployed reached about 2,254,700 personnel (including 1,639,749 from the

JSDF), 346,800 vehicles, 679 naval vessels, and 13,355 aircraft, including those of the Maritime and Japan Air Self-Defense Forces, making it the largest deployment since the establishment of the JSDF.²⁴

The public approved of the JSDF's disaster relief efforts. For example, in a public opinion poll conducted by the Cabinet Office in July 1995, more than 90% of the respondents replied positively to the question, "What is your impression of the JSDF's disaster relief efforts from January to April in response to the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake?" (Table 1).

Table 1. Impression of the JSDF's disaster relief efforts (%) (July 1995)

Achieved great success	38.4
Achieved some success	51.8
Not achieved much	7.0
Achieved very little	0.7
I don't know	2.1

Source: Naikakufu Seifu Kōhōshitsu. Kongō no Jieitai no Yakuwari ni Kansu-ru Yoron Chōsa, July (1995) (<https://survey.gov-online.go.jp/h07/H07-07-07-06.html>, accessed September 11, 2021).

On the other hand, it is also true that the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake revealed many issues concerning cooperation between local governments and the JSDF. Specifically, this disaster exposed various crisis management problems, such as delays in local governments' requests to the JSDF for disaster relief, difficulties in mobilizing troops in the chaotic and congested disaster area, inadequate facilities for receiving troops, and lack of information exchange and communication with related agencies.²⁵

Consequently, the debate over the nature of the JSDF was revitalized following the earthquake. In political circles, for example, the then Liberal Democratic Party secretary-general Yoshiro Mori commented on the delay in mobilizing the JSDF at a press conference

on January 20, three days after the earthquake, saying, “The Socialist Party was skeptical of the JSDF. This has created a sense of reticence on the part of the JSDF, and local government leaders have become more cautious in their requests for mobilization.”²⁶

At a press conference following the January 22 meeting of the emergency task force, the then Japan Defense Agency director-general Tokuchirō Tamazawa said, “This time, there were few requests for cooperation from local governments to the JSDF. In the future, these aspects need to be changed, and it is most necessary to build a cooperative framework between the prefectures and the JSDF.” Tamazawa also said, “It has become clear now that without the cooperation of the JSDF, relief activities will be delayed. I would like to explain the need for cooperation,” thus stressing the need to strengthen cooperation in the future.²⁷

Ichirō Ozawa, the then secretary-general of the New Frontier Party (*Shinshintō*), also stated the following about the government’s response to the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake at a press conference held on January 25:

Japan has no emergency system at all. In addition to this institutional inadequacy, the Socialist Party’s thinking still opposes even the mobilization of the JSDF for disaster relief, and it is this kind of constitution of the government that causes the JSDF to lag in its activities.²⁸

Ozawa continued, “There is no politics more people-friendly than saving lives. Ideological arguments about the JSDF take precedence over human life. It is not friendly to people at all,” criticizing Prime Minister Murayama’s political stance.²⁹

The debate on the JSDF gained momentum not only in the political world but also in the business sphere. For

example, in an interview published in the *Yomiuri Shimbun* on January 28, 1995, Osamu Uno, former president of Kansai Economic Federation (*Kankeiren*), described the “lessons of the disaster” as follows:

The earthquake has gone beyond what local governments can handle today. Without the support of other municipalities and the mobilization of the JSDF, the damage would have been more extensive. Many such cooperation requests cannot be made without directions from the national government. I think some things could have been handled sooner if the regions had more authority during peacetime.³⁰

Additionally, the Kansai business community discussed recovery measures at the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake Reconstruction Conference held on February 9 and compiled an appeal to the government. At that time, Fuyuhiko Maki, president of the Kobe Chamber of Commerce and Industry, raised the issue of how the prime minister would deploy the JSDF in an emergency and noted that his response was insufficient.³¹

Thus, the delay in the initial response caused by the lack of communication between the JSDF and the relevant agencies stimulated debate over the nature of the JSDF, and a tendency to actively dispatch the JSDF in times of disaster was created. Minato Kawamura speaks about those days in his book as follows:

The “delay” in JSDF rescue operations upon the occurrence of the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake conversely instilled a sense of the existence of the JSDF in the public consciousness. It could be considered that negative feelings toward the JSDF have been dispelled, understanding of the JSDF’s activities has deepened, and positive perceptions have spread rapidly. In

this light, the “delay” by Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama of the Socialist Party and the leaders of Hyogo Prefecture and Kobe City in requesting the deployment of the JSDF in the aftermath of the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake was, on the contrary, to the advantage of the JSDF, because the anti-JSDF attitude of reformist leaders and others who tried to avoid calling on the JSDF for help as much as possible came under severe criticism from the Japanese public and Kobe citizens in particular.³²

However, in the discussion regarding the JSDF, some revealed reluctance to deploy the JSDF in the event of a disaster. For example, Yukio Aoshima, who was elected governor of Tokyo on April 23, 1995 stated at a special Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly meeting on May 11, 1995, “I have announced a policy of requesting the JSDF to be dispatched in times of disaster, but if the request is made too easily, it may lead to the deployment of troops overseas,” thus indicating a cautious approach to making requests. Aoshima further stated that he “basically considers the JSDF to be unconstitutional,” and then added, “The JSDF has gradually increased its power and has now become an army. I still think, to this day, that it must be dismantled at some point.”³³

By this time, wary stances like those of Aoshima, who was cautious about deploying the JSDF, had already fallen out of public favor. This can be seen from the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake Public Opinion Survey conducted by the *Yomiuri Shimbun* two weeks after the earthquake.³⁴ For the question “If you were to receive disaster relief in a major earthquake, who would you most want to rely on?” the most common response was ‘the JSDF’ (Table 2)

Table 2. Who respondents are most likely to rely on for disaster relief in a major earthquake

Police	3.3
Fire department	10.4
JSDF	32.2
Prefectural and municipal offices	29.5
Volunteers	20.8
Other	1.2
No organization in particular	1.4
Refused to answer	1.2

Source: Created by the author from *Yomiuri Shimbun*, January 31, Tokyo morning edition, 9 (1995).

Furthermore, when asked, “Do you think the JSDF should be mobilized for disaster relief by order of the prime minister in the event of a major disaster, even without a request from local governments?” 93.4% said they should be mobilized, 4.8% disagreed, and 1.8% did not respond.³⁵ In addition, more than 90% of respondents across regions and age groups said that the JSDF “should be mobilized.” The percentage of people who responded similarly also exceeded 90% among respondents who did not support any political party as well as those who supported the LDP, the Socialist Party, or the New Frontier Party. Even among those who said that they would most likely rely on prefectural, municipal, and other government offices for disaster relief in the event of a major earthquake, 94% said the JSDF should be mobilized, indicating public trust in the JSDF³⁶

In response to such public opinion, on July 18, six months after the earthquake, the government’s Central Disaster Management Council redrafted the Basic Disaster Management Plan, which forms the basis of disaster management plans for local governments, for the first time in 32 years. The new Basic Disaster Management Plan incorporates reflections on the delays in dispatch requests to the JSDF by governors in disaster-affected areas after the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake and clearly

states that “the JSDF can dispatch units, etc., (at its own discretion) in times of emergency, when there is no time to wait for a dispatch request,” such as a major earthquake.³⁷

Note that Tokyo governor Aoshima met with director general Tokuchirō Tamazawa at the Defense Agency on July 25, two months after Aoshima’s May 11 statement that the JSDF was unconstitutional. There, he apologized for his statement, saying that “it was inappropriate, even though it was a personal view”. He then clarified his intention, saying, “As the governor of Tokyo in charge of the metropolitan government, I have no intention of adopting the position that (the JSDF) is unconstitutional.”³⁸

4 JSDF & Local Governments: Increased Cooperation with Disaster Drills

As the debate over the JSDF’s response to the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake increased, prefectures began to seek ways to strengthen cooperation with the JSDF. A survey conducted by the *Yomiuri Shimbun* on January 30, 1995, about two weeks after the earthquake, shows that each prefecture sought to strengthen cooperation with the JSDF in disaster drills after the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake (Table 3).

Table 3. Participation in JSDF disaster drills and moves to strengthen cooperation

Prefecture	Before the earthquake	After the earthquake
Hokkaido	Dispatched 18 minutes after request following the Hokkaido Southwest Offshore Earthquake	—
Aomori	About several hundred people. Water supply operations in the 1994 Sanriku far-offshore earthquake as well	—
Iwate	About 150 people participate each year, extinguishing fires from the air, transporting sick people, etc.	—
Miyagi	Participates 5 times a year. Active in rescuing residents after last year’s torrential rains	○
Akita	Also created emergency manuals that stipulate dispatch requests, etc.	—
Yamagata	In charge of transport and water supply; rescue assigned to police and fire department	△
Fukushima	45 people. Produced results in last year’s accidents in the mountains	—
Ibaraki	Material transportation, etc. Also joined the Disaster Prevention Council	—
Tochigi	Participates every year. Support for mountain rescue in the event of a wildfire as well	○
Gunma	Has participated since 1965. Firefighting and cookout drills, etc.	○
Saitama	Positioned activities and roles in the earthquake response plan	—
Chiba	Dozens of people participated. Working to strengthen exchange of opinions, etc.	○
Tokyo	Medical rescue, bridge-building training, and damage assessment from the air, etc.	○
Kanagawa	Since 1980. Transporting supplies, conducting cookout drills, etc.	○

Niigata	Rescue and disaster recovery training with helicopters, etc.	—
Toyama	Last year, 78 people participated, as did members of the Disaster Prevention Council	—
Fukui	Rescuing victims, setting up temporary bridges, supplying food, etc.	—
Ishikawa	Drills for lifting and rescuing, dropping supplies, etc.	—
Yamanashi	Active in providing relief and transporting supplies in the event of rising lake levels and forest fires	△
Nagano	About 40 people participated. Heliport construction and firefighting training	—
Gifu	About 120 people participated. Helicopters and large transport craft participated as well	○
Shizuoka	Besides comprehensive training, disaster simulation exercises were conducted to strengthen cooperation	△
Aichi	About 160 people participated last year. Rescue, transport, and aerial reconnaissance	○
Mie	Increased interaction and collaboration among executives	—
Shiga	Saving lives, building bridges, and firefighting from the air	○
Kyoto	Helicopter surveys of damage, forest firefighting, etc.	—
Osaka	(No participation in disaster drills)	○
Hyogo	Rescues from building fires, bridge building, cookout drills, etc.	△
Nara	About 50 people each year. Frequent exchanges of opinions with the prefecture	—
Wakayama	Results produced in last year's oil spill in Wakaura Bay	—
Tottori	About 50 people. Lifting and rescuing, cookout drills, etc.	○
Shimane	50–60 people. Produced results in water supply to remote islands during drought last year	—
Okayama	Rescue training for buried vehicles in cooperation with the fire department since 1993	△
Hiroshima	Aerial reconnaissance, rescue of isolated survivors, building bridges, cooking, etc.	○
Yamaguchi	Lifesaving, transporting injured people, and building levees, assuming wind and flood damage	○
Tokushima	About 60 people. Material transport, lifesaving, water supply training, etc.	○
Kagawa	About 65 people. Bridge building, communication restoration, cookout drills, etc.	○
Ehime	34 people last year. Aerial reconnaissance, firefighting training for forest fires, etc.	—
Kochi	About 40 people each year. Installation of evacuation bridges, helicopter transport, etc.	—
Fukuoka	About 140 people each year. 10 helicopters and 2 aircraft dispatched	—
Nagasaki	About 70 people. Close cooperation since the eruption of Fugen-dake peak on Mount Unzen	—
Kumamoto	200 people last year. Setting up temporary bridges by helicopter, etc.	○
Oita	Helicopter rescue and river crossing drills, etc.	—
Miyazaki	Dispatched helicopters for rescue drills, etc.	—

Saga	Searching for missing persons and piling up sandbags in the event of a levee failure	○
Kagoshima	Produced results in the search for missing persons in the 1993 torrential rains	—
Okinawa	Strengthening cooperation is an issue to be addressed in the future, taking into consideration citizens' feelings	△

Note: ○ indicates strengthened collaboration, — indicates maintenance of status quo, and △ indicates under consideration

Source: Excerpts from *Yomiuri Shimbun*, January 31, Tokyo morning edition, 2 (1995), with some additions.

Table 3 shows that 17 of the 47 prefectures indicated that they would strengthen cooperation with the JSDF in disaster drills. In addition, six prefectures responded that they were considering the issue, indicating that the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake had prompted them to review their existing relationship with the JSDF.

This evolution toward strengthening cooperation was visible during Disaster Prevention Week in the year of the Great Hanshin Earthquake (August 30-September 5, with September 1 being Disaster Prevention Day). According to the Defense Agency, the JSDF received requests from about 120 local

governments to participate in disaster drills during Disaster Prevention Week, which was double the number of requests received the previous year. On Disaster Prevention Day, 39 prefectures and about 830 cities, wards, towns, and villages across Japan held disaster drills, and about 15 million people participated.³⁹

Let us take a closer look at the JSDF's participation. First, Table 4 shows the number of disaster drills in which the Middle Army Directorate, which covers the Kinki, Tokai-Hokuriku, Chugoku-San'in, and Shikoku regions, participated during the 1995 Disaster Prevention Week.⁴⁰

Table 4. Participation in disaster drills by division, etc., during and after Disaster Prevention Week (August 18–September 10) in 1995

Prefecture	Division, etc., in charge	Number of events
Osaka	3rd Division	10
Shiga		2
Wakayama		4
Nara		2
Hyogo		4
Kyoto		2
Ishikawa	10th Division	3
Aichi		30
Gifu		7
Mie		4
Fukui		1
Toyama	13th Division	1
Tottori		1
Hiroshima		2
Okayama		1
Yamaguchi		3
Kagawa	2nd Combined Brigade	1
Tokushima		1
Ehime		2
Kochi		1

Source: Osaka Defense Association, *Mamori*, No. 113, October 2, 2 (1995).

As Table 4 shows, within the Middle Army Directorate’s zone, the 3rd Division, in charge of the Kinki region, participated in 24 training exercises (the JSDF were participating for the first time for 19 of them), the 10th Division in the Tokai-Hokuriku region participated in 46 (31 for the first time), the 13th Division in the Chugoku-San’in region participated in 7, and the 2nd Combined Brigade in Shikoku participated in 5, for a total of 82 training exercises. This represents a more than four-fold increase from the 18 cases in FY1994. Hence, it can be seen that local governments strengthened cooperation with the JSDF in disaster drills following the disaster.

5 Resumption of JSDF Recruitment Operations

The strengthening of cooperation between local governments and the JSDF in disaster drills also changed the day-to-day relationship between them, including the resumption of JSDF recruitment operations by local governments.

As mentioned, a strong anti-JSDF culture was prevalent in Japanese society before the earthquake. Many reformist municipalities in the 1970s suspended recruitment operations for the JSDF. This situation changed after the earthquake.

For example, according to a survey conducted by the *Asahi Shimbun* targeting a total of 48 prefectural capitals and government-designated cities, seven cities converted into cooperating municipalities in the six years since 1995. These cities include Kawasaki and Osaka, which resumed recruitment operations. In addition, 28 cities, or about 60%, increased the number of recruitment measures (Table 5).

Table 5. Changes in the degree of cooperation by local governments in the recruitment of JSDF personnel before and after the earthquake

Contents	Before the earthquake (end of 1994)	After the earthquake (end of 2000)
Entrusting recruitment counseling to staff, council members, and welfare commissioners	20 cities	40 cities
Publishing recruitment articles in the city's PR magazine	28 cities	37 cities
Placing materials in city offices	21 cities	27 cities
Hanging posters on city bulletin boards	15 cities	19 cities
Allowing access to Basic Resident Registers	14 cities	19 cities

Source: Created by the author from *Asahi Shimbun*, November 24, Osaka morning edition, 3 (2000).

Underlying this was the fact that the JSDF's rescue activities in the aftermath of the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake changed the citizens' perception of the JSDF particularly in disaster response. In other words, local governments became aware of the need to build a good relationship with the JSDF on a regular basis, due to their importance in disaster drills.⁴¹

One specific example is Kawasaki City in Kanagawa. Kawasaki was one of the municipalities that suspended its JSDF recruitment operations after 1973. Then, in February 1995, Mayor Takahashi of Kawasaki City announced at a city council meeting that the city would resume JSDF recruitment operations during FY1995, in response to the success of the JSDF in the earthquake disaster. Mayor Takahashi said, "[we] were able to obtain the understanding of the public." A city official also said, "We cannot stand by and do nothing (in recruitment), considering we would be in the position of asking for help in disaster relief." Thus, on June 15, 1996, Kawasaki resumed its JSDF recruitment operations for the first time in 23 years.⁴²

The deepening relationship between local governments and the JSDF had other impacts elsewhere. The JSDF's participation in community events increased. For example, in the disaster-prone city of Kobe, the JSDF participated in the Kobe Festival for the first time. The Kobe Festival is usually held for three days in May and is the largest event in Kobe City, attracting approximately 2 million visitors. On the final day, a spectacular parade with samba dancers and others moves along Flower Road in front of the city hall.⁴³ Traditionally, the JSDF was not offered the opportunity to participate in the Kobe Festival. However, the activities of the JSDF during the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake deepened Kobe citizens' awareness of the JSDF, and the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) participated for the first time in the Kobe Festival in July 1996.⁴⁴ In the parade, the JSDF was cheered by local residents as the Color Guard, dressed in white and blue costumes, marched down the main street of Kobe City with the JMSDF Tokyo Band playing (Fig. 1).

6 Deepening the Connection between Communities and the JSDF



Fig. 1. JSDF personnel participating in the Kobe Festival
Source: Osaka Defense Association, *Mamori*, No. 117, October 5, 3 (1996).

Such examples were not limited to the disaster-prone Kobe. Similar situations occurred even in areas that did not directly experience the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, including those where the anti-JSDF culture was particularly strong.

For example, Hiroshima is generally regarded as an area with a strong anti-military ideology stemming from its wartime memories. The JSDF participated in the Hiroshima Flower Festival held from May 3, 1996, for the first time in 13 years. At the festival, 34 members of the JGSDF 13th Division Band and 37 members of the JMSDF Band, Kure, marched 1.5 km along Peace Boulevard on the south side of Peace Memorial Park, with applause from the citizens along the way. Since the festival began in 1977, JSDF Band had participated in only three parades, specifically, in 1977, 1978, and 1983.⁴⁵ However, their participation was suspended after 1983 owing to fierce protests from atomic bomb survivors' groups and others who claimed it was not appropriate for a peace festival.⁴⁶

The decision to have the JSDF participate for the first time in 13 years was based on the fact that the city and the Hiroshima Chamber of Commerce and Industry, recognized anew the need for cooperation with the JSDF as a result of the relief efforts following the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake.⁴⁷ The executive director of the city's tourism association, who was in the secretariat of the executive committee, stated that after the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, they decided that "the JSDF would be more closely connected to the residents and we would be able to gain the public's understanding."⁴⁸ Furthermore, the then mayor of Hiroshima, Takashi Hiraoka, who served as honorary chair of the executive committee, justified the participation, saying, "The JSDF are also a part of the local community. We cannot have the idea that we will just ask them to cooperate with us during disasters and then tell them not to come to the festival."⁴⁹

The same was true even in Okinawa, the only region to have experienced ground warfare and is regarded as the

place where the anti-military ideology is the strongest in Japan. In May 1972, the JSDF relocated to Okinawa with its reversion to mainland Japan. However, the people of Okinawa viewed the JSDF as similar to the Imperial Japanese Army and Navy; some even saw them as a potentially invading force. According to the *Mainichi Shimbun*, at the time of Okinawa's reversion, 42% of those in Okinawa considered the deployment of the JSDF "completely unnecessary" and only 12% said it was "necessary for defense."⁵⁰ Opposition campaigns were also waged against individual JSDF officers. For example, Naha city refused to register personnel as residents and dispose of garbage at the base.⁵¹ Being refused registration as residents temporarily prevented children of JSDF personnel from enrolling in elementary and junior high school in the city of Okinawa.⁵² In addition to city halls refusing to perform recruiting duties, JSDF personnel were barred from attending coming-of-age ceremonies and participating in sporting events.⁵³

The Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake changed this anti-JSDF culture. On May 5, 1995, the JSDF were allowed for the first time to participate in the 21st Naha Hārī competition (dragon boat race) sponsored by the city and other organizations. The executive director of the Okinawa Peace Action Center (*Okinawa Heiwa Undō Center*) revealed mixed feelings about this process, saying, "We cannot accept the unconstitutional JSDF, but we are not sure if we can gain the support of the people of the prefecture by opposing the upcoming disaster drills."⁵⁴ Naha mayor Kōsei Oyadomari also said, "The JSDF are questionable in light of the Constitution, and I have not affirmed their existence." However, he added, "After seeing the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, we need cooperation from all organizations to protect the lives and property of our citizens."⁵⁵

Thus, the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake led to the acceptance of the

JSDF by local communities, not only in the affected areas but also throughout the country as cooperation with the JSDF progressed.

7 Conclusion

This research clarified how the JSDF was integrated into the local communities after the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake of January 17, 1995. The following became clear:

Amidst the pacifist mood in post-war Japan, the JSDF was regarded as a "social outcast" and was marginalized by the local communities for long time. In the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake that occurred under such circumstances, the JSDF were dispatched to the disaster area, making it the largest deployment since the establishment of the JSDF.

The public evaluated the JSDF's disaster relief efforts positively. On the other hand, it is also true that the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake revealed many issues. Specifically, this disaster, in which urban areas were devastated by the earthquake, also exposed various crisis management problems, such as delays in local governments' requests to the JSDF for disaster relief. Consequently, the delay in the initial response caused by the lack of communication between the JSDF and relevant agencies stimulated debate over the nature of the JSDF, and a tendency to actively dispatch the JSDF in times of disaster was created.

Learning from the earthquake, local governments recognized the need to strengthen daily cooperation with the JSDF through disaster drills. In the same year as the earthquake, the JSDF received requests from about 120 local governments to participate in disaster drills during Disaster Prevention Week, double the number of requests received the previous year.

Moreover, local governments that sought the cooperation of the JSDF in disaster drills felt indebted to the organization for its cooperation and, in

turn, began to cooperate in recruiting JSDF personnel. In Kawasaki City, JSDF recruitment operations were resumed for the first time in 23 years.

Furthermore, these partnerships became stronger with local governments beginning to invite the JSDF to local festivals in Kobe and Hiroshima, and even in Okinawa, where anti-JSDF culture was strong. As a result, the JSDF became more integrated into local communities.

The above indicates that the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake played an important role in the process of turning the perceptions of the JSDF into positive ones. Indeed, this perception change implies that a social base was formed that would later lead to the “JSDF boom” in the wake of the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 11, 2011.⁵⁶

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