

The Antipiracy Achievements of the Japan Coast Guard

*Maritime trade accounts for as much as 99% of the total merchandise trade of Japan, so problems with the security of the sea lanes would have a huge impact on the country's economic activities and people's livelihoods. Piracy poses an enormous threat to Japan's maritime transportation as well as the security and economic development of the international community. The Japan Coast Guard has been collaborating with other countries on piracy countermeasures in Southeast Asia for many years and has achieved notable success in this area. **Teiji Iwasaki**, commandant of the Japan Coast Guard, describes some of the country's initiatives.*

In 1999 a heinous incident involving the Japanese-affiliated cargo ship *Alondra Rainbow* occurred. The vessel was attacked by pirates, and contact with the ship was lost. The Japan Coast Guard responded by dispatching patrol vessels to the region and conducting search operations in cooperation with surrounding countries. At the time, piracy was becoming a serious problem in Southeast Asia, and the number of piracy acts in the Malacca and Singapore Straits was rising.

Enhancing the level of maritime security capabilities of coastal countries is without a doubt a vital part of piracy countermeasures. Since most incidents take place in a country's territorial waters, the coastal countries are responsible for dealing with armed robbery and other acts of piracy. The main countries along the Malacca and Singapore Straits are Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia, and Japan's role is to support their efforts. These three countries have been

taking active and earnest steps to fight piracy, and Japan's cooperative activities are in perfect alignment with their initiatives.

For more than 30 years, Japan has been dispatching Coast Guard officers to Indonesia and other countries and providing capacity-building assistance in the field of maritime security. I had the opportunity to visit Malaysia last year and Singapore the year before that. In both countries, Japanese assistance was held in high regard. It is vital that these projects continue over the long term.

Concerted Action

Helping build a stronger coast guard is not a matter of just providing ships. We need to provide support for their management as well, including training for the crew members. The success we've achieved in the Malacca and Singapore Straits has chiefly been due to the extraordinary efforts made by the coastal countries themselves to find a resolution to this grave problem.



Teiji Iwasaki

The number of piracy incidents has been declining in Southeast Asia. Although a few dozen incidents still occur each year, very few are heinous crimes in which ships are hijacked or crew members are taken hostage. While this is not due to the contributions of the Japan Coast Guard alone, concerted action by Japan and the countries of the region has gone very smoothly, as has our cooperation with other Japanese government agencies and the private sector. I believe these are major factors behind the decline.

Japan has been collaborating with the countries in the region for

many years. In the case of Indonesia, for example, two officers have been sent there on long-term assignments. Coordinated efforts are being made on a regular basis with the host country to draw up joint capacity-building plans with the officers of relevant organizations and to build a shared understanding. Twice a year, Japanese patrol boats are deployed for joint exercises, which provide practical opportunities for capacity-building. Officials from Indonesia are also invited to Japan, where they undergo training.

Some programs are long term, while others are short term; some are comprehensive in scope, while others focus on a certain topic, like water contamination countermeasures. A range of options are offered so that participants can acquire knowledge in a new area. We recently received requests for training from countries outside Southeast Asia, including Pacific island nations and Timor-Leste, and we're taking steps in order to respond to these requests.



Taking part in joint exercises in Southeast Asia.

©Japan Coast Guard

JAPAN SPEARHEADED THE INITIATIVES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA, AND WE CAN TAKE PRIDE IN OUR ACHIEVEMENTS THERE.

International Framework

In 2006 an Information Sharing Center opened in Singapore under the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia, or ReCAAP. Countries that are party to the agreement work together to share information on suspected perpetrators, victims, and hijacked ships; the arrest of suspects; the seizure of pirate ships; and rescue requests.

Members of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Japan Coast Guard are dispatched to the center, and this cooperative framework has enhanced capacity. Japan Coast Guard patrol vessels cannot take part in operations in the ter-

ritorial waters of other countries, but there may be circumstances under which they are deployed when an act of piracy occurs against a Japanese-affiliated ship. Fortunately, we have not seen any such incidents lately. Currently, the situation in Southeast Asia is under control, but it is important that we not let our guard down.

Future Contributions

One major international concern right now is the problem of piracy incidents in the waters off Somalia. There is no effective, permanent government in Somalia right now, and I think this is one of the main reasons for the current situation. At present, the Japanese Self-Defense Forces have been deployed to Somalia, and members of the Coast Guard are aboard those vessels to carry out judicial police activities. Under current conditions, though, I'd say it would be difficult for the Coast Guard to replace the vessels of the Self-Defense Forces.

At the same time, given the success we've achieved in Southeast Asia through the well-coordinated efforts and solidarity among the countries concerned, we hope to do whatever we can in other parts of the world by drawing on our experiences there. Japan spearheaded the initiatives in Southeast Asia, and we can take pride in our achievements there. As for Somalia, this is a region that requires the cooperation of all interested countries.

