

Securing Safer Seas

As a nation that depends on safe shipping lanes to support its trade-based economy, Japan is stepping up its antipiracy efforts not only in its coastal waters but also in Southeast Asia and in the Gulf of Aden and the waters off the coast of Somalia. Japan Echo reports on efforts to counter a growing international menace.

A report by the International Maritime Bureau's Piracy Reporting Center indicates there were 293 reported piracy incidents in 2008, an increase for the second consecutive year. There was a particularly big jump of 60% in Africa, where three of five cases worldwide took place.

The district in Africa where piracy most frequently occurred is off the coast of Somalia and the Gulf of Aden, where 111 cases were reported in 2008.

The rise of increasingly brazen such crimes against mostly unarmed commercial vessels along vital shipping lanes is an alarming development for the entire international community. In response, the United Nations Security Council adopted three resolutions enabling cooperating states to use "all necessary means" to repress acts of piracy in Somalia's territorial waters.

Dispatch of Antipiracy Vessels

Japan was a cosponsor of all these resolutions and is actively addressing this issue. "Piracy in the Gulf of Aden and off the coast of Somalia is a threat to the international community, including Japan, and the issue must be addressed immediately," Defense Minister Yasukazu Hamada noted on March 13, 2009, in issuing the order for the Maritime Self-Defense Force to undertake maritime security operations

in the region. "It is an important responsibility of the government to protect the lives and assets of the Japanese people in the waters that serve as highly critical maritime traffic routes for Japan."

Japan-related vessels account for about 10% of the approximately 20,000 ships passing through this region each year.

Upon the issuance of the order, the destroyers *Sazanami* and *Samidare*, with approximately 400 on-board personnel, including 8 from the Japan Coast Guard to carry out judicial police activities, departed from Kure port on March 14. Two patrol aircraft are aboard each vessel.

Solid Track Record

Japan's antipiracy measures outside its territorial waters to date have focused on Southeast Asia, particularly around the Strait of Malacca. Japan, for example, played a leading role in the formulation of the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP), which was proposed by Prime Minister Jun'ichiro Koizumi in 2001 and came into effect in September 2006.

This cooperative structure among 16 coastal countries in Asia has led to enhanced security and a steady decline in piracy incidents in Southeast Asia. Japan dispatches officers to ReCAAP's Information Sharing Center in Singapore, which is aimed at improving the informa-

tion-sharing system and cooperative framework among the contracting parties to promote antipiracy activities.

In addition to engaging in joint antipiracy exercises with the region's coastal countries, Japan also dispatches experts through the Japan International Cooperation Agency to enhance these countries' capacity to counter piracy attacks in their territorial waters.

Building Trust

In Indonesia, for instance, JICA has been carrying out a capacity-building project since May 2008 for the Indonesia Maritime Security Coordinating Board (Bakorkamla), which is charged with cracking down on piracy and other sea crimes, such as poaching.

"I've found that the most important element in enhancing the law-enforcement capacity of Indonesian maritime authorities is 'trust building'—with both other countries and the domestic public," notes Yuta Enomoto, a Japan Coast Guard officer who is participating in the project as a JICA expert.

Building trust is also a key aim behind Japan's international cooperation activities in general. "The success of our project hinges on winning the confidence of the local staff," Enomoto added. "The strong bonds of friendship we are forging in Indonesia will surely lead to intangible benefits for the country in the years to come."

● Major Recent Piracy Incidents

Date	Where	Incident
October 2007	Somali coast	The <i>Golden Nori</i> , a Panama-registered Japanese chemical tanker, is hijacked, and its 21-member crew is taken hostage.
April 2008	Gulf of Aden	Japanese oil tanker <i>Takayama</i> is attacked by a high-speed boat, and the German frigate <i>Emden</i> intervenes with its helicopter. The <i>Takayama</i> is damaged in the attack, but none of its crew members are injured.
April 2008	Gulf of Aden	French luxury yacht <i>Le Ponant</i> is seized in an attack by a high-speed boat, and its crew is seized and taken to Somalia.
July 2008	Gulf of Aden	The Japanese bulk carrier <i>Stella Maris</i> (flying the Panamanian flag) and 20 crew members are seized.
August 2008	Gulf of Aden	The Japanese-owned vessel <i>Irene</i> is seized and released in September.
September 2008	Somali coast	The Ukrainian-owned, Belize-flagged cargo ship <i>Faina</i> carrying Soviet-made tanks, weapons, and ammunition to Kenya is seized.
November 2008	Kenyan coast	Chinese fishing vessel <i>Tianyu No. 8</i> is seized by pirates while fishing off the coast of Kenya.
November 2008	Somali coast	Japanese-owned oil and chemical tanker <i>Chemstar Venus</i> is hijacked while travelling from Indonesia to Ukraine.
November 2008	Kenyan coast	The Liberian-flagged ship <i>MV Sirius Star</i> , owned by the Saudi oil company Aramco and carrying crude oil valued at US\$100 million, is hijacked.
November 2008	Gulf of Aden	US cruise ship <i>Nautica</i> is attacked by two skiffs hiding while traversing the Gulf of Aden. The ship is able to escape with its passengers and crew uninjured.
April 2009	Somali coast	The Danish-owned <i>Maersk Alabama</i> is captured by pirates. US snipers kill the 3 pirates holding the captain hostage aboard a lifeboat, rescuing the captain.

Sources: Ministry of Foreign Affairs and media reports.

JSDF'S ANTIPIRACY ACTIVITIES IN THE GULF OF ADEN AND OFF THE COAST OF SOMALIA

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Two destroyers of the Maritime Self-Defense Force, the *Sazanami* and *Samidare*, are currently deployed in the Gulf of Aden and off the coast of Somalia for escort duties of Japan-related ships. Each year, about 2,000 Japan-related ships navigate this important sea lane, which links Europe and the Middle East with Asia.

There have been numerous inci-



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dents of piracy in this region in recent years. The number of cases jumped to 111 last year, 2.5 times the year before last. This is a threat to the international community, including Japan, and urgent measures are needed. If this situation continues, it will adversely affect Japan's economy and may even result in the loss of life, disrupting Japan's economy and people's livelihoods.

A cabinet decision was thus made to send escort ships to protect Japan-related ships within the framework of existing laws for maritime security. The basic objectives of our operations, which include helicopter patrol and demonstration of the existence of JSDF destroyers, are deterrence of activities of pirates and to keep pirates from approaching vessels. There have been three cases of deployed destroyers receiving emergency calls from nearby ships—though they were not Japan-related ships—and

potential attacks to those ships were thwarted because of the existence of the JSDF destroyers. I think that the deployed destroyers are performing their duties quite adequately.

The JSDF's antipiracy activities are an emergency measure, but if the antipiracy bill that is now being debated in the Diet is enacted, it will enable the SDF to protect non-Japan-related ships as well, enabling smoother operations.

We are also preparing to dispatch a P-3C patrol plane some time in the future. The capabilities of Japanese patrol planes are highly regarded by other countries, so there will be higher expectation of realizing patrol of a wider area. We, as members of the Ministry of Defense, will do everything we can, within the framework of existing laws and given authorities, to protect Japan's national interests and fulfill our duties to the international community. (Current as of April 30) 