

13. The Maritime Safety Agency (MSA) / Japan Coast Guard (JCG)

The Maritime Safety Agency (MSA), which was officially renamed the Japan Coast Guard (JCG) in April 2000, is effectively a fourth branch of the Japanese military. Originally established as the Maritime Safety Board in April 1948, it has been reorganised many times since then, and its roles and missions have expanded to include not only guarding Japan's enormous coastline and providing search and rescue services, but also constabulary operations in the sea lanes and high seas.¹ In May 1998, two MSA vessels were sent to Singapore ready to evacuate Japanese residents from Indonesia, where the political situation was 'unstable' and 'unpredictable'.² Since 1996, the MSA/JCG has been increasingly involved in protecting the Senkaku Islands and policing other disputed areas in the East China Sea.³ JCG patrol boats sank a suspected North Korean 'spy ship' near Amami-Oshima Island in December 2001.⁴ It is the primary Japanese agency in the US-led Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), which involves the interdiction of ships on the high seas suspected of carrying weapons of mass destruction or related materials.⁵ In September 2003 the JSG represented Japan in the PSI exercise in the Coral Sea off the north-east coast of Australia.⁶ In January 2008, armed JCG officers accompanied Japanese whaling ships being confronted by protest boats in the Southern Ocean near Antarctica.⁷

Although part of the Ministry of Transportation, in reality the MSA functions as a quasi-autonomous and capable maritime defence force, with its own ships and aircraft. Indeed, the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) grew out of the MSA – for its first four months, from April to August 1952, it was organised as the Maritime Security Force within the MSA.⁸ The MSA now has about 500 ships, including 350 patrol vessels and other surveillance vessels, oil boom craft, and aids to navigation tenders; 28 land-based aircraft, including

1 Richard J. Samuels, 'New Fighting Power', pp. 84–112.

2 Maritime Safety Agency (MSA), *Annual Report on Maritime Safety: 1998 Edition* (Tokyo, 1998), pp. 7–8.

3 *ibid.*, pp. 16–17.

4 'N. Korean Spy Ship Shown to Public at Kagoshima Dock', 17 May 2003, at findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_mOXPQ/is_2003_May_20/ai_102043547

5 Samuels, 'New Fighting Power', pp. 108–09.

6 'Address by the Hon Alexander Downer MP, at the Third Australia–Japan Conference Dinner', 11 February 2005, at www.foreignminister.gov.au/speeches/2005/050211_3rd_aust_japan_conf.html

7 'Sea Shepherd Being Pursued by Armed Japanese Coast Guard', *Sea Shepherd News*, 30 January 2008, at www.seashepherd.org/news.media_080130_2.html

8 Auer, *Postwar Rearmament*, chapter 5.

five YS-11As equipped for maritime surveillance and associated tasks; and some three dozen helicopters.⁹ It has about 12,250 personnel, or more than a quarter of the manpower of the JMSDF.¹⁰

The HQ of the JCG is in the main building of the Ministry of Transportation in Kasumigaseki in Tokyo. It has three operational departments: Guard and Rescue, Hydrography and Oceanography, and Maritime Traffic Management (formerly called Aids to Navigation). It is organised into 11 regions, with HQs in Otaru in Hokkaido, Shiogama in Miyagi Prefecture in the north-eastern part of Honshu, Yokohama, Nagoya, Kobe, Hiroshima, Kitakyushu in the north-eastern corner of Kyushu, Maizuru, Niigata, Kagoshima in southern Kyushu, and Naha in Okinawa. It has 66 coast guard offices, 54 coast guard stations, seven traffic advisory service centres, and five district communications centres.¹¹

The Hydrography and Oceanography Department, which has 13 survey vessels, publishes nautical charts, issues bulletins on ocean conditions, and maintains the Japan Oceanographic Data Center (JODC).¹² The JODC archives and disseminates oceanographic data obtained from various Japanese marine research institutes.¹³ It also maintains four hydrographic observatories, located at Hachijo-jima in the Izu Islands, about 300 kilometres south of Tokyo, which specialise in geomagnetic observations; Shimosato, near the southern tip of the Kii Peninsula in Wakayama Prefecture; Shirahama, on the south-eastern side of the Kii Strait; and at the Bisei Astronomical Observatory in Okayama Prefecture, which produces astronomical almanacs for navigational purposes.¹⁴

The Guard and Rescue Department has a network of shore-based communications stations throughout Japan which maintain continuous watch on international maritime distress radio frequencies, as part of the Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (GMDSS), as well as an alerting system designed to provide prompt and appropriate search and rescue actions. It also maintains the Japanese Ship Reporting System (JASREP), established in 1985, which receives and processes information about the positions and sailing plans of vessels as provided to them by HF radio to the JCG's communications stations.¹⁵

9 Sharpe (ed.), *Jane's Fighting Ships, 2000–2001*, pp. 387–96.

10 IISS, *The Military Balance 2007* (London, January 2007), p. 357.

11 Japan Coast Guard (JCG), 'Organization', at www.mlit.go.jp/e/shigoto/soshiki/honcho/index_e.htm

12 JCG, 'Hydrographic and Oceanographic Department', at www1.kaiho.mlit.go.jp/jhd-E.html

13 'Japan Oceanographic Data Center', at www.jodc.go.jp/

14 JCG, 'Geomagnetic Observations at the Hachijo Hydrographic Observatory', at www1.kaiho.mlit.go.jp/KOHO/report/index_gm.html; JCG, 'Shimosato Hydrographic Observatory', 1 September 2004, at www1.kaiho.mlit.go.jp/KOHO/simosato/English/index.htm; JCG, 'Hydrographic and Oceanographic Department'; 'Organization', at www1.kaiho.mlit.go.jp/INFO/Admin/org2.GIF

15 JCG, 'Guard and Rescue Department: Information Gathering System', 海上法案庁 [Japan Coast Guard], at www.kaiho.mlit.go.jp/e/shigoto/keikyu/kainai05_e.htm

A network of HF DF stations was established in the 1970s to maintain a listening watch on marine distress frequencies and to determine the location of emergency transmissions, as well as to monitor suspicious signals. Most of these stations were closed in 1999, or soon after, when the HF watch ceased as part of the GDMSS, having been superseded by VHF radio (Channel 16 on 156.8 megahertz) and satellite communications systems.¹⁶

In August 1980, the MSA monitored ship-to-ship radio communications indicating that at least nine crew had died in a fire on an Echo I-class nuclear-powered attack submarine, K-122, following a reactor accident, about 130 kilometres east of Okinawa.¹⁷

In the 1980s and through the early 1990s, the MSA maintained a 9-element HF DF at Cape Soya, near Wakkanai, for search and rescue purposes. The MSA station at Cape Soya was involved in the aftermath of the shooting down of the KAL 007 jetliner on the morning of 1 September 1983, assisting with the search for debris and monitoring Soviet activities in the search area, although MSA ships and aircraft were initially dispatched to the wrong area.¹⁸

An 8-element HF DF system was established by the MSA near Shiraho, on Ishigaki Island, at the southern end of the Ryukyu island chain, about 200 kilometres east of Taiwan, in 1978. The antenna system consisted of eight masts, about 16 metres tall, arranged in a 24-metre diameter circle, with a small hut in the centre. It was closed in 1999. (The antenna system was dismantled, but the site was still neatly maintained when it was visited in February 2003. The cement blocks which held the masts and the supporting guy wires were still there, as well as the central hut and the sign relating its 'SOS' abilities.)

The local residents of Ishigaki-jima were never impressed with the abilities of the MSA station. They tell a story about the failure of the station, soon after it was built, to detect the distress calls of a sailor in trouble. The failure was especially significant to the Ishigaki residents, many of whom are engaged in fishing and are dependent on safe navigation and reliable search and rescue services. It is said that the station 'malfunctioned'; whatever the cause, it did not detect the signal transmitted on the emergency frequency. The sailor was saved because an amateur ('ham') radio operator picked up his signal.

In 2007–08, the JCG established a 7-element circularly disposed antenna array (CDAA) near the town of Tozato, in the south-eastern part of the island. (Google Earth satellite imagery dated 1 July 2007 shows a normal agricultural field, but

16 US Coast Guard Navigation Center, 'GMDSS Systems', at www.navcen.uscg.gov/marcomms/Gmdss/gmdss_systems.htm

17 *Times* (London), 7 October 1986.

18 R.W. Johnson, *Shoot-down: Flight 007 and the American Connection* (Viking, New York, 1986), pp. 192–93.

TerraServer imagery dated 16 March 2008 shows the complete antenna array and associated small buildings). The site is on flat land about 60 metres above sea level, on the western side of Route 390. It is located between the small villages of Oozato, about 1 kilometre south, and Minami Hoshino, less than 1 kilometre north. The Sokohara Dam is about 2 kilometres to the west, while the coast is about 500 metres to the east. The array is slightly larger than the Japanese Ground Self-defence Force's new 7-element systems installed at Wakkanai, Nemuro, Kobunato and Tachiarai in 2007–10. The circular ground mat is about 120 metres in diameter, and the distance between each of the seven antennas is about 43 metres (see Plates 23 and 24). It is undoubtedly principally concerned with interception and direction-finding (DF) of maritime radio traffic around the Senkaku Islands and other areas in the East China Sea.

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