DE-MILITARIZING MILITARY: CONFIRMING JAPAN’S SELF-DEFENSE FORCES’ IDENTITY AS A DISASTER RELIEF AGENCY IN THE 2011 TOHOKU TRIPLE-CRISIS

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Abstract. Large scale natural/man-made disasters, such as the 2011 Tohoku earthquake, tsunami and nuclear triple-crisis, bear horrible human, social and economic costs. However, they may simultaneously present opportunities for military actors to perform reconstruction and humanitarian efforts, which usually receive considerable media coverage. If performed successfully, and covered substantially, these humanitarian activities may influence, change, or confirm public attitudes and understanding of a nation’s military role and social acceptance. For Japan’s Self-defense Forces, the 2011 Tohoku relief efforts marked the first large-scale domestic opportunity to be successfully utilized, thereby fulfilling its proclaimed mission statement as Japan’s primary disaster relief organization (in comparison to the much criticized response to the 1995 Kobe Earthquake (The Diplomat, March 23, 2011)). This paper provides an overview of literature regarding militarized humanitarianism and disaster relief that has been debated globally since its growing prevalence in the 1990s, and its implications for the SDF’s public image-making and social positioning. It examines the current identity confirmation of the traditionally insecure existence and role of the SDF in several foreign dispatches and the Tohoku relief efforts as a military by emphasizing this non-combatant aspect.

INTRODUCTION

The pre-war Imperial Japanese Army and their offensive military involvement in the Second World War have been perceived as the reason for the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. The Imperial Japanese Army was the catalyst, while the US Military was the perpetrator of the act. Thus, in postwar Japan, both the successor of the Imperial Japanese Army, i.e., Japan’s Self-defense Forces, and the occupying US Forces had been perceived with anti-military sentiments and distrust in the public mind. Nonetheless, sixty-six years later, in the aftermath of the 2011 Tohoku triple-crisis, Japan’s Self-defense Forces and the US Military joined in one of the largest domestic humanitarian relief and reconstruction efforts to date. The once occupiers joined in the relief efforts self-dubbed as Operation Tomodachi (Friend), while most of the available manpower (more than 100,000) and equipment of all three branches (Air, Ground and Naval) of the Self-defense Forces conducted the first-ever joint military operation at such an unprecedented scale in the postwar period. (Japan Defense Focus, 2011, no. 23) In comparison to the overall civilian government (and TEPCO) response, which received critical to mixed reviews, the military relief and reconstruction efforts of the SDF and USARJ have been greatly lauded and appreciated in the media. (Asia Pacific Defense Forum, April 26, 2011) Consequently, pertinent questions that emerge in the aftermath are how, if at all, the media hype effected the public perception of the SDF, and how to interpret its implications.

Large-scale disasters are not anticipated or premeditated publicity stunts, however, in this research it is assumed that they may provide public relations opportunities for militaries if carried out successfully. This is because humanitarian/disaster relief missions are (usually) not depicted/perceived as military or militarist in nature. As outlined in the literature regarding the Berlin Airlift and the Atoms for Peace campaign, the humanitarian utilization of militaries has been documented to enhance public perception by de-emphasizing the “military” aspect of militaries. The hereby attained “de-militarized” image may then provide the public acceptance/support space for further military action/development, which is a cycle that can also be identified with regards to previous SDF humanitarian activities and foreign dispatches.

Nonetheless, so far, the majority Japanese public never supported, and thus the SDF’s gradually expanding scope of military action, remained confined to non-combatant, humanitarian/disaster relief, and rear-end supportive roles. The 2011 Tohoku triple-disaster, however, is deemed worthy of “special” consideration because of its unprecedented scale of destruction and the consequent
unprecedented scale of SDF response in addressing it. (World Politics Review, April 13, 2011) What are the PR implications for the SDF, then, after this major humanitarian mission in the domestic theater? If they were largely positive, what would this entail for the expansion of future scope of military activity? In the attempt of answering these questions, this research will expand the review of literature, and thus, develop a pertinent conceptual framework. Based on this theoretical background then, will (in this pilot study) the viability of further media analysis of the aforementioned media representation and discourse of the SDF activities in the Tohoku crisis examined, proposed, and subsequently evaluated against opinion polls and interviews.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Existing literature on SDF activity and the gradual expansion of its scope since the 1990s focuses predominantly on domestic and regional concerns or expectations regarding re-militarization and constitutional revision. These concerns largely emanate from studies that at times overemphasize legislative changes, foreign dispatches or overrate pertinent Japanese public support for re-militarization. (Inoguchi, 2006, Matthews, 2003; Tanter, 2005) Conversely, there is a trend of simply discarding such concerns all together, which is partially reflected in the relative lack of critical analysis regarding public relations affairs of the SDF (minus Sabine Fruehstueck’s (2007) work maybe); in comparison to the plethora of such research on US military and PR, for instance. Thus, recent works such as Paul Midford’s (2011) comprehensive analysis of Japanese public opinion on security policy provides rare and valuable insight into the development of both the SDF, expansion of its activities, and genealogy of pertinent public opinion.

The Pacific Frame of SDF dispatches and Public Opinion in Japan

“Pacifism” in Japan’s public opinion and attitudes toward the Self-defense Forces during the Cold War period: For the purpose of this paper, diplomatic or foreign policy choices, are assumed to be shaped and influenced by domestic variables, such as national institutions, internal party struggles, and most notably, public opinion. Public opinion toward security issues, specifically regarding the scope and development of foreign dispatches of the SDF, has been a significant indicator of loosening or tightening of “pacifist” public attitudes in Japan, which in turn have enabled or restraint elites’ foreign policy options. Paul Midford (2011) defines this so-called “pacifism” in Japan as “defensive realist” rather than strictly “pacifist.” This is based on the assumption that a “pacifist” Japan would not have believed in establishing and maintaining even a limited defensive force such as the SDF, while in fact public opinion polls reveal that the public, even as early as in the 1950s, deemed it necessary to maintain limited defensive military capabilities. (Midford, 2011, chap. 3)

Midford further continues to explain that, “Japanese public opinion during the Cold War was never especially pacifist.” (Midford, 2011, p. 50) He explains that as early as during the occupational period, the majority of Japanese public displayed rather a variant of realism in their attitudes toward security, which he refers to as “nascent attitudinal defensive realism.” According to Midford, this refers to public attitudes that realistically assume that a minimal defensive capability is necessary while simultaneously refusing both over-armament and unarmed neutrality. (Midford, 2011, p.58) This attitude that is commonly referred to as “pacifist” public opinion in Japan, consists of a strong historic distrust of the government’s capability of controlling the military, and the military apparatus itself, in addition to fears of entrapment in US war efforts. (Midford, 2011, p. 50) Thus, this paper argues, following Midford’s analysis, that “pacifism,” in terms of military distrust and entrapment fears, has had foreign policy implications in Japan because “…rises in entrapment fears make the Japanese public more opposed to SDF overseas deployments and other policies that could increase the risk of entrapment,” while simultaneously “elites recognize that their range of choices in security policy is limited by the Japanese public’s attitudes, attitudes characterized as defensive realist.” (Midford, 2011, chap. 3)
Japan’s “pacifist” public and emerging SDF dispatches in the post-Cold War Period. This, self-imposed and public “pacifist” restraint in foreign policy range, has been especially evident in continued US demands for, and Japanese responses to overseas dispatches of the SDF in military missions under the rubric of alliance commitment and burden sharing. Continued efforts to thwart unconstitutional entanglement regarding US military demands, as former-Prime Minister Sato accomplished during the Vietnam War, solidified the pacifist security stance of Japan’s foreign policy, which developed non-military, highly attuned economic and diplomatic alternatives. However, with the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent 1991-1992 Gulf War (Operation Desert Storm), the newly emerging security environment of the post-Cold War era intensified demands for a more pro-active security policy stance on Japan.

Thomas Berger (1996) writes that the demands of the Gulf War in the midst of this newly emerging security environment of the early 1990s caught Japan (as well as Germany) by surprise. According to him, Japan’s elite as well as its public were by then highly opposed to the idea of aiding the US war effort and potentially increasing their international military standing beyond the immediate perimeter of Japan. Despite the financial contribution and non-military mine-clearing mission in the aftermath of the war, US pressure demanding for more than the so-called “checkbook diplomacy” increased tremendously. Thus, alliance considerations as well as strategic search for a new security role are considered to have factored into the subsequent Japanese (and German) elites’ decision to push for controversial legislative changes allowing for the SDF to engage in PKO missions (1992), for the first time in its postwar history. (Berger, 1996, p. 185) Berger’s article was written in 1996, and as of that time, he stresses that despite the fact that the engagement in PKO missions “…signal a major departure from established German and Japanese policies and an important shift in their political-military cultures… it is [nonetheless] important to emphasize the incremental nature of this shift and to avoid overlooking the extent to which the old core values of their political-military cultures, especially their anti-militaristic character, remain intact.” (Berger, 1996, p.186) Although he emphasized the political opposition and media criticism in both countries for even the non-combatant Blue-Helmet activity and its limitations, he mentions public opinion evidence that was surprisingly supportive of the PKO missions.

This is a characteristic that is highlighted in Midford’s (2011) analysis regarding the emerging trend of post-Cold War SDF overseas dispatches as well. He writes that public as well as elite opinion in Japan has been highly skeptical about military approaches in addressing terrorism, humanitarian crises or post-conflict nation building, an attitude potentially solidified due to its defensive realist, or so-called “pacifist tradition,” which has denounced the utility of military approaches and has emphasized non-military alternatives. However, Midford argues that ironically, it is precisely this disbelief in military approaches in addressing these security concerns that have made non-combatant SDF dispatches surprisingly popular among the Japanese public. (Midford, 2011, p. 39) Thus, this popularity of non-combatant foreign dispatch experiences, in turn, has “…encouraged the government to resubmit an amendment to the 1954 SDF law that would elevate overseas operations to the status of a “primary duty” alongside homeland defense…eventually passed in late 2006, together with legislation elevating the Japanese Defense Agency to ministry status.” (Midford, 2011, p. 40) Hence, based on his analysis of public opinion and security policy in postwar Japan, it can be assumed that non-combatant foreign dispatch activities carried out successfully, initially restraint in its scope by the “pacifist” tradition in Japan, has enabled further expansion of the scope of domestic and international “military” or “non-military” SDF activities.

Does this emerging trend of public acceptance of SDF dispatches in Japan then translate into acceptance of “military” activities, and thus, signal the emergence of a “normally” militarized Japan?

Japan’s “Pacific Military” and the future of Japan’s foreign i.e. security policy in the Post-911 period: Berger (1996) and Midford (2011) stress the fact that compared to the popularity of non-military humanitarian dispatches, missions involving the possibility of combat activities for the SDF remain highly unpopular. As Midford states “Support for overseas humanitarian operations does not
translate into support for a larger military role overseas.” (Midford, 2011, p. 41) As a matter of fact, Midford concludes that though the missions in response to 911 remained within the “negligent line” of public opinion (i.e., absence of severe public opposition), they were by far not as popular as previous non-combatant PKO or disaster relief missions, instead stoked entrapment fears, and “Consequently, in the wake of Iraq [Operation Iraqi Freedom] the Japanese public pushed for retrenchment,” (Midford, 2011, p. 146) which probably factored into the removal of physical Japanese military presence from Iraq by January 2010. (Hein, 2011, p. 136)

Thus, the authors reviewed so far, emphasize the fact that it may not be in the near or even medium future that Japan will consider shedding its self-imposed restraints of “pacifism” and pursue overtly assertive security policy or force projection regarding its national interests. On the contrary, based on the literature reviewed, it can be argued that, the implications of Japan’s political-military culture, will most likely continue to restrain such radical departures from its “pacifist” traditions in its foreign policy choices for the foreseeable future. How does this assumption then, affect Japan’s security policy? “Pacific” implications for Japan’s security policy, in terms of SDF foreign dispatches, has expanded into a publicly accepted foreign policy option, encompassing a wide variety of missions (PKO, humanitarian, disaster relief, anti-terrorism/piracy, nation-building, etc.), though it will probably remain limited to non-combatant operations for the near future. The underlying dynamic that has generated the current range of foreign policy options seems to emanate from the volatile, sixty-year old interaction of Japanese public opinion and elite policies based on its “pacifist” traditions. While Article IX of Japan’s constitution has restrained its security policy options, it should be noted that it has probably also enabled the development of “human security” and other sophisticated alternatives to military approaches, in which the SDF may emerge as a potent force in future international security considerations. (Soeya, 2005)

In short, with Japanese public opinion having evolved in the postwar period into receptive to, and supportive of the domestic and even foreign role of the SDF regarding non-combat disaster/humanitarian relief operations, this in turn has been re-confirming the SDF’s identity as a “pacifist military.” (Midford, 2011) Based on Midford’s (2011) analysis of public opinion and security policy in postwar Japan, it can be assumed that this image/perception of a non-offensive military has eased the gradual expansion of the scope of military activities that are either supported, or lie within the “negligent line” of public opinion in Japan. Thus, it can be argued that the mediated, large-scale domestic militarized disaster relief efforts in response to the 2011 Tohoku triple-crisis, has had yet another reassuring “demonstration effect” on the Japanese public, thereby reinforcing the public image of the SDF as Japan’s primary disaster relief agency, and hence further expanding the scope for future military action.

The basic argument pursued in this research, is that the de-emphasis of the military aspect, by repeated emphasis on the humanitarian/positive aspect of the SDF, enables its continuation and expansion as a military, because it is not perceived as “military.” This may be considered unique to Japan’s military due to its pacifist constitution, however, the application of the humanitarian veil for PR purposes is far from unprecedented in global military affairs. Consequently, several such instances deemed relevant should be analyzed and compared to the Japanese case in order to highlight and support the aforementioned argument by constructing a larger conceptual framework.

**The Humanitarian Frame of Military Technology Discourse**

To begin with, two major symbols emerged from, and henceforth dictated the military prowess of any nation in the post-WWII period, namely, aerial and nuclear technology. However, it was these very symbols of military might, in the immediate aftermath of the war, that mark the most publicized “media event” and public relations campaign that succeeded in de-militarizing military technology and/or operations. Pertinent literature on these two symbols is thus reviewed, taking into account the PR benefits of 1) unintentional media events, and 2) intentionally orchestrated propaganda in de-emphasizing the combatant aspect of said two symbols of warfare.
The Berlin Airlift and the “Candy Bomber.” The Cold War ensued within three years of Japan’s surrender, of which first major crisis emerged in the Soviet announcement of the Berlin blockade in June 1948. As a response to the blockade, the Allied Forces airlifted coal and food supplies for fifteen months until September 1949. Roger Miller (2008) provides detailed accounts of the operation’s success in conducting the first globally publicized provision of humanitarian aid via military airlift that amounted to a propaganda victory for the Allied Forces and effectively pressured the Soviets into lifting the blockade. The significance of the Berlin airlift for this paper, however, lays in the unanticipated PR effect for the (then) recently established US Air Force, as well as the remaking of military symbols through the involvement in humanitarian relief missions. This PR significance of the airlift was apparent to William H. Tunner, the man in command of the operation, as quoted by Miller that this was the greatest PR opportunity in history for the “air transport story.” (Miller, 2008, p. 114) Apart from the overall feat, he was referring to the “Vittles” story that he himself expanded into a major side-operation named “Operation Little Vittles” which involved dropping candy and chocolate to children in Berlin.

This operation, which was expanded from a single pilot, Halverson, dropping chocolate tied to handkerchief parachutes, became the dominant media image that remains to this day about the operation. Military transport planes took of airfields formerly used by the Luftwaffe (the Third Reich’s Air Force) to bomb chocolate on Berlin, which downtown was almost completely annihilated in the aerial bombing campaigns during the war. (Miller, 2008, p. 60) The frame of aerial bombing of German cities perpetrated by the Allied Air Forces, were rivaled by the newly emerging image of the chocolate/candy bomber, henceforth providing a frame apart from destruction in connection to aerial technology.

The “Atoms for Peace” campaign and the “Friendly Atom.” On a related note, Kenneth Osgood (2006) analyzes Eisenhower’s public relations campaign dubbed “Atoms for Peace,” crystallized in his famous UN speech in 1953 that was launched with the objective to win the “hearts and minds” of the domestic and global public for the “friendly atom.” An atom not to be connected to fears of the bomb, but peaceful, useful and friendly; an atom stripped of its military application and destructive force in the apocalyptic thermonuclear age that was emerging. (Osgood, 2006, chap. 5) According to Osgood, “The United States needed to create psychological space for continued nuclear weapons development by exploiting the nonmilitary applications of atomic energy to the fullest...the development of atoms for war required the cultivation of atoms for peace.” (Osgood, 2006, p. 156) Osgood further explains how the speech was distributed around the world in the comprehensive follow-up campaign that spanned the globe. This follow-up campaign that included everything from stamps, to aid and staged events, culminated in the successful public reconstruction of the atom to be understood as an “atom for peace;” “In seizing upon the peaceful uses of atomic energy, Eisenhower tapped into a psychological need to find something redeeming and worthwhile in this technological marvel threatening the very existence of humanity.” (Osgood, 2006, p. 180)

Thus, the atom, which was almost exclusively associated with the “bomb”, the “mushroom cloud” in the public discourse until then, was veiled, baptized with a rivaling image; which was peace, life and familiar, replacing the images of war, death and horror. This shift in public perception ultimately enabled the continued development of atom as weapons, while the friendly atom permeated the daily lives of citizens around the world henceforth.

OBJECTIVES

Militarized disaster relief/humanitarian missions are nothing new, though they have been more prominent since the 1990s, and have had public relations benefits/losses for militaries. Most notably, in the powerful images of the Allied PR victory with regards to the Berlin Airlift in the late 1940s; the first time that the military took on such a major, visible humanitarian role that henceforth opened new
horizons for humanitarian operations as well as military public affairs. (Peaceful use of air-power, in
the aftermath of the WWII aerial bombing campaigns against German cities) In addition, the Atoms
for Peace campaign, which was initiated by Eisenhower, successfully de-emphasized the disastrous
military application that was evident in Hiroshima and Nagasaki by emphasizing its positive, friendly
and peaceful aspects. Thus, the nuclear technology discourse was steered away from the sole military
aspect, in turn enabling/legitimizing the continuation of both commercial and military nuclear
development and application. There exists opulent research on the aforementioned cases and US
military, but limited research on militarized humanitarianism and its potential PR implications for the
SDF.

Thus, this research attempts to provide a pilot study in order to enhance the understanding of
contemporary militarized humanitarianism, specifically in terms of disaster relief, and its impact on
the SDF public image and identity development in Japan. By referencing foreign cases and tracing the
public opinion genealogy regarding the SDF in Japan, this research (and subsequent researches)
investigates the dynamics of non-military roles, pertinent public support, and various scopes of action
enabled by said public support. The ultimate objective of this paper is to provide the basis for further
detailed, expanded and full-scale media analysis of SDF media representation with regards to public
relations. Assuming that this non-combatant role of military actors has been an expanding global trend,
the eventual objective and rationale for this type of research would be in highlighting both the vantage
points as well as the perils of “de-militarizing” militaries.

METHODOLOGY

In order to attain the aforementioned objective, this research will employ a combination of several
research methods. To begin with, a critical literature review of pertinent foreign and domestic cases
was conducted, as to provide a conceptual framework by analyzing precedents regarding
humanitarian/disaster relief and military PR. Against this conceptual backdrop, then, will the PR
potential of the disaster relief in the 2011 Tohoku triple-crisis for the SDF be addressed in order to
examine its validity before conducting a full scale media analysis on a larger sample of documents; by
applying qualitative methods of research. Thus, frames and themes of relevant Ministry of Defense
PR documents will be reviewed based on qualitative media analysis models such as Altheide’s (1996)
ethnographic content analysis, as a preliminary probe for further expanded analysis of television news
coverage, PR material, media events, and the like. If results of the examined material in this pilot
study confirm or support aspects of the proposed hypothesis, it could be considered valid to further
analyze media representations in a full scale media content analysis, based on media studies, public
relations and military-social relations theory, thus expanding and enhancing the validity and
persuasiveness of the hypothesis.

In addition, considering opinion changes of the Japanese public, by analyzing opinion polls regarding
any changes in public perception of the SDF, would be vital in assessing the actual PR efficiency of
the humanitarian/disaster relief frame, an approach which is based on evolving media studies’
arguments of media-audience relations. Such opinion polls are regularly conducted by various
Japanese news and government agencies on a large scale, of which results are made available to the
public and were also utilized in other academic research such as Paul Midford’s (2011) analysis as a
valid indicator of public attitudes toward military matters in Japan. Inherent shortcomings of opinion
polls such as biases due to varying political orientation of agencies and wording differences may be
curbed by conducting future individual in-depth interviews targeting relevant populations and experts.

PROPOSED ANALYSIS OF MEDIA DOCUMENTS

Preliminary Study of Ministry of Defense/SDF PR Material of the 2011 Tohoku Response
Apart from the direct link to material regarding the 2011 Tohoku response from the main starting site,
there are roughly 50 video clips of the SDF posted or linked in the “PR and Events” (広報・イベント) video section (動画配信) of the Japan Ministry of Defense/JSDF website. The videos were produced and/or posted between 2006 and 2012, and are available on the site, linked to the MOD YouTube channel (YouTube 防衛省動画チャンネル), or the government’s internet TV (政府インターネットテレビ). For the purpose of this paper, which is to conduct a pilot study determining the validity of conducting a full scale media analysis of disaster relief related PR effects for the SDF, a preliminary examination of the list, type, and/or theme of the videos was made.

Under the assumption that media documents of (unintentional) activities may be used in the (intentional) production of public relations material if they bear PR potential, 52 items posted from 2006 to 2012 were divided into four categories according to their title and roughly corresponding theme. This was based on Altheide’s (1996) ideas of reflexive media content analysis, i.e., categories are not rigidly predetermined but may be influenced and formed from the process of data collection. Thus, in table 1, the material was divided into roughly four theme-based categories: Disaster relief/aid/humanitarian missions; Anti-terrorism/piracy/peace; Display of military equipment; and MOD records, speeches, and other.

### Table 1: Japan Ministry of Defense/JSDF Website Listed PR Videos
(Source: 防衛省・自衛隊の動画配信. (n.d.). Japan Ministry of Defense)

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<th>Year</th>
<th>MOD record, speech, etc</th>
<th>Military display</th>
<th>Anti-terrorism/piracy, PKO</th>
<th>Disaster relief/aid</th>
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Overall, despite some of the inconsistency and irregularity in the postings, the majority of the material depicts non-combatant and strictly defensive activities that are humanitarian/aid, UN PKO or “world peace” oriented. It can further be observed that the number of videos titled/themed on disaster/humanitarian relief experienced an increase in 2011. Among the nine items posted after March that year, three were exclusively about the SDF rescue, relief and reconstruction activities in Tohoku, while four were about the SDF dispatch and activities in Haiti. The 2011 Tohoku response is available in a 15 min 49 sec full version, a 6 min 59 sec version, documenting the actual rescue and reconstruction activities, and a message from the Minister of Defense regarding the dispatch. This production of a separate clip in various versions is similar to the documents depicting overseas dispatches such as Haiti or Somalia, however, whereas the titles of foreign disaster missions are relatively to the point and “dry,” the 2011 Tohoku response is tilted “~ただ、目の前の命のために~全国民の「想い」を胸に、被災地へ” (Only, for the life in front of [our] eyes, [carrying?] the thoughts/hopes of all Japanese in our hearts, to the victims.) Moreover, it differs from previous domestic relief activity documents, as the SDF activities in the 1995 Kobe Earthquake and subsequent activities are not listed separately, but only briefly mentioned in clips that focused on the general...
history of the SDF.

Thus, it could be argued that the 2011 Tohoku response is relatively more represented and stressed in the list of available documents of the Ministry of Defense/JSDF PR video website. Further, its formatting into a “public relations” video, officially posted in such category, may be understood as evidence for PR potential of the 2011 Tohoku response footage.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

SDF and Public Opinion in Post-Tohoku Japan

Government surveys, conducted by the Cabinet Office on the SDF’s image prior to the 2011 Tohoku relief efforts, resulted in a combined 75.5 percent that stated “neutral” to “negative” image, while regarding preferred activities for the SDF, “disaster relief activities” surpassed “national defense” as the primary objective for its existence at 78.4 percent. (Cabinet Office, 2009) However, in post-2011 Tohoku, survey results conducted by news agencies such as Yomiuri Online (Cabinet Office survey results after March 11, 2011 are not yet available at the time of writing), reveal that 82 percent rated SDF response as “positive” compared to 6 percent that regarded government response as positive. (Yomiuri Online, September 10, 2011) Further, survey results of the three most affected areas (Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima Prefecture) show that 72.4 percent stated the activities of the SDF as their “major source of post-disaster encouragement,” compared to 27.2 percent that stated the central and/or local government as such. (RENGO, November 7, 2011) Whereas the populations in the aforementioned worst-affected areas probably based their opinions by witnessing and experiencing the SDF activities first-hand (in addition to media outlets), for the majority of the Japanese population, it can be assumed that the substantial media coverage following the earthquake was the major source of information and perception of the SDF. Thus, a tentative analysis of increase in coverage, i.e., simple counting of times the word “Jietai” (自衛隊, Self-defense Forces) appeared in six nationwide television networks without (yet) considering concrete context, was conducted (see Table 2).

| Table 2: News Mentionings of "Jietai" (SDF) on Japanese TV Stations |
| Source: NHK, Nihon TV/Nittele, TBS, Fuji TV, TV Asahi/Tele-Asa, TV Tokyo/Teleto |

Interpreting the Analysis Findings

In the four days preceding the disaster the SDF was mentioned an average of 4.5 times daily on all six
channels combined. However, in the four days after the earthquake struck (including the 11th), the SDF was mentioned, or referred to in some way or form, 159 times on average per day. Considered in combination with the increase in popularity related to the Tohoku relief efforts evident in the aforementioned public opinion surveys, it may be argued that the 1) the SDF 2011 Tohoku relief efforts were covered substantially, and thus 2) favorable public perception increased. This is also supported by fact that the Ministry of Defense/JSDF lists the response in its PR section. Therefore, it can be argued that a full-scale, detailed and expanded analysis of the media documents of the SDF 2011 Tohoku response is valid and is planned to be conducted in the next phase of this research project.

SIGNIFICANCE AND CONCLUSIONS

Ultimately, expected findings of this research would consisted of supporting evidence of 1) favorable public perception regarding the SDF as a result of the 2011 Tohoku disaster relief operations and that this in turn 2) will eventually expand the scope of military activity of the SDF. By doing so, this (and further expanded) research would ideally substantiate the initial hypothesis that de-militarizing by accentuating non-combatant functions of the military is not only possible but also expands the scope of publicly acceptable military activity based on this image. Currently, the results remain limited as to empirically support the positive link between 1) favorable public perceptions and 2) expanding the scope of military activity. Thus far, based on the findings of this current analysis, it can be argued that there exists a correlation between the SDF activities in Tohoku, its media coverage, and increase of popularity, i.e., PR potential, in post-2011 Tohoku Japanese society. Hence, it seems valid to conduct an expanded media analysis, and pertinent follow-up research in the next stage of this research project, in order to solidify the arguments by substantiating data/evidence, address limitations, and also to improve the credibility in relations to the second part of the hypothesis, i.e., expanded scope of action.

Previous academic literature has either underscored or understated the evolving role and image of the SDF in Japan. Consequently, studies tend to simply overplay the threat of re-militarization and constitutional amendment, or overlook momentous developments in Japanese society and military affairs. It is for this reason that the focus on the SDF is valuable. No other military has had to depend on the de-militarization of their image to the extent of the SDF in the postwar period. Thus, the dissecting of militarized humanitarian/disaster relief in terms of military public relations for the SDF may not only enhance understanding of the dynamics and implications for Japan. It may provide the basis for further research into the benefits and limitations of militarized humanitarianism, which has become a prominent feature in the post-Cold War period, and military-social relations beyond Japan. Finally, momentous developments may not emanate from a single incident even as monumental as the 2011 Tohoku relief efforts. The continued trend of militarized humanitarianism, however, may culminate in considerable ramifications for national, regional and global military-social dynamics, and hence deserve specified academic scrutiny.

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Word Count: 5734 words.