

**The United States-Japan Security Community:
The Case of the 2011 Tohoku Earthquake**

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*Abbreviations

USFJ: United States Force, Japan

USPACOM: United States Pacific Command

31 MEU: The 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit

JSDF: Japan Self-Defense Force

JGSDF: Japan Ground Self-Defense Force

JMSDF: Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force

JASDF: Japan Air Self-Defense Force

Abstract

This paper argues that the United States-Japan relationship can be understood as a security community. According to Karl Deutsch, collective identity is a definite feature of a security community. Hence, this study employs the case of the 2011

Tohoku Earthquake to detect the existence of a collective identity between the United States and Japan. Employing Bruce Cronin's approach, we will examine how the United States and Japan interacted with one another in their discourses and behaviors during the disaster from March 11 to their co-operation for rescue and humanitarian assistance until May 4, 2011. In particular, this paper will focus on the U.S. humanitarian assistance and disaster relief that was the so-called "Operation Tomodachi." This operation mobilized 24,500 services members, 189 aircrafts, and 24 naval ships of the United States Force, Japan (USFJ), which cost \$90 million. This was also the first joint "military operation" with nearly 100,000 servicemen of the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) in their bilateral alliance history. This paper will reveal the political impacts of the operation on the nature of U.S.-Japan relations.

Introduction

This paper will argue that the United States-Japan relationship is a security community by confirming their collective identity in the case of the 2011 Tohoku Earthquake. A security community is defined as a group of states that have become integrated to the point that there is real mutual confidence that the members of that community will not fight one another physically but will settle their disputes by other means. Deutsch distinguishes two types of integration: an amalgamated security community and a pluralistic security community. Whereas the former implies the formal merger of multiple independent units into a single larger unit such as the United States, the latter

retains the legal independence of separate governments.¹ A “we-feeling” or collective identity is the necessary condition in Deutsch’s conceptualization of a security community. A “we-feeling” is formed by communications or a dynamic process among the member states within the community; in fact, peaceful changes cannot be ensured without such a belief.² In this article, “security community” refers to a pluralistic security community.

By employing an approach discussed by Bruce Cronin,³ this paper will examine the discourse and behaviors that occurred between the United States and Japan from March 11, 2011, when the great earthquake and tsunami hit the northeast coast of Japan and the nuclear disaster occurred at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, to May 4, 2011, when the United States Marines finished their humanitarian relief missions and returned to their home base in Okinawa. In doing so, I can analyze how Japan and the United States interacted with one another in their response to great natural disaster that caused 15,000 deaths.

There are several reasons why this paper examines the case of the 2011 Tohoku Earthquake. First, it is a difficult case.⁴ Waltz argues, “If we observe outcomes that

¹ Karl W. Deutsch, Sidney A. Burrell, Robert A. Kann, Maurice Lee, Jr., Martin Lichterman, Raymond E. Lindgren, Francis L. Loewenheim, and Richard W. Van Wagenen, *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area: International Organization in the Light of Historical Experience*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 5-6.

² Deutsch, etl. *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area*, p. 36.

³ Bruce Cronin, *Community under Anarchy: Transnational Identity and the Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

⁴ Harry Eckstein, “Case Study and Theory in Political Science,” in Fred I. Greenstein, and Nelson W. Polsby, eds., *Handbook of Political Science Vol. 7, Strategies of Inquiry* (Reading, CA: Addison-Wesley, 1975).

the theory leads us to expect, even though strong forces work against them, the theory will begin to command belief.”⁵ This case has several unique features. It is not about war or terrorism, which can visibly reveal “reference others” or “reference groups.” “Reference groups” help actors to form judgments about themselves through comparison and standards of judgment, thus promoting the process of self-definition and ultimately identity formation. In other words, actors continually compare themselves to *others*, positively or negatively, in part to better define who they are and, equally importantly, who they are not.⁶ Examples of this include Iraq under the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein during the Persian Gulf War (1990-91)⁷ and Osama bin Laden in the case of the September 11 terrorist attacks (2001)⁸, which can be categorized as reference groups because Japan and the United States collectively perceived that Hussein or bin Laden were violators of humanity, morality or norms of international society. If I can confirm the collective identity of the United States and Japan *without* such groups, it is safe to say that their collective identity is strong. Hence, the state of U.S.-Japanese relations can be judged as being in the “mature” stage of a security community, as referred to by Adler and Barnett. Adler and Barnett argue that the final stage of a security community’s evolution is Phase III, Mature, in which

⁵ Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: Random House, 1979), 125.

⁶ Cronin, 25; Tamotsu Shibutani, “Reference Groups as Perspectives,” *American Journal of Sociology*, 60: 562-69.

⁷ Hidekazu Sakai, “The United States-Japan Security Community--Emerging Collective Identity: The Case of the Persian Gulf War (1990-1991),” *Asian Security* 12, no. 3 (2016): 133-147.

⁸ Hidekazu Sakai, “The United States-Japan Collective Identity in the Aftermath of the September 11 Terrorist Attacks,” the paper presented at the 9th International Convention of Asian Scholars (ICAS 9), Adelaide, Australia, July 6, 2015.

collective identity appears, and *altruism* can be seen among member states.⁹

Second, this case involved the United States Forces, Japan (USFJ). This case will reveal how U.S. military personnel reacted to the earthquake in terms of a collective identity with the Japanese people. Japan can be assumed to be “the second home country” for the U.S. military personnel who are stationed in Japan. Many of them brought their family and have spent a long time in this country. Therefore, I assume that it was natural for them to take actions to help the Japanese people who lost their family members, homes or property.

This is not only about the U.S. side but also that of Japan. This paper assumes that the perception of ordinary Japanese people of the USFJ drastically changed. The public image of the USFJ has been consistently “bad” since its stationing started in 1945, even though the USFJ has pledged its defense of Japan since the Cold War era. The symbol of this negative image of the USFJ is Okinawa, where 75 percent of all USFJ bases are located. The repeated reports by the Japanese news media on the crimes of U.S. military personnel in Okinawa have consolidated their negative images among the Japanese public for a long time. The Japanese general perception of the USFJ has been that their purpose of being stationed in Japan is to use Japan to deploy their offensive forces toward the Middle East (the Persian Gulf War in 1991) or Southeast Asia (the Vietnam War in 1960s) and not to protect the Japanese people.

Finally, this case involved the “first” joint operations of the JSDF and the USFJ in

⁹ Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett, “A framework for the study of security community,” in *Security Communities*, Adler and Barnett, eds., 37-58.

their alliance history. Their activities were not an exercise but “real” operations that were mobilized to respond to emergencies. This paper assumes that it was the changes in perception that occurred between the two entities that led to a collective identity through their mutual interactions. In particular, as this paper will address below, the role of the United States Marines in the operation of humanitarian relief missions was critically important.

Puzzle

The United States

There are some questions about the 2011 Tohoku Earthquake. Why did the United States provide prompt and large-scale assistance to help Japan even though there were several bilateral political issues? The 2011 Tohoku Earthquake also caused a nuclear disaster. Many foreign residents in Japan, including Americans, were in a state of panic, and they chartered airplanes to “evacuate” from Japan. The U.S. government flew the first chartered airplanes carrying a hundred U.S. citizens to Taiwan on March 17. The US government then decided that 600 family members of U.S. diplomats living in Tokyo, Yokohama, and Nagoya were to leave Japan. The US Department of Defense announced that 20,000 family members of USFJ personnel were to leave Japan soon.¹⁰ This was the so-called “Operation Pacific Passage.” Operation Pacific Passage showed enormous U.S. fear of being exposed to radioactive material from the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station.

¹⁰ *Yomiuri Shimbun*, March 18, 2011, Evening Edition, 2.

Furthermore, the U.S. government did not trust the official information that was provided by the Japanese government on the nuclear disaster. This accelerated U.S. fear.¹¹ It is natural for the United States not to become involved in any activities that would endanger U.S. citizens. Nevertheless, the U.S. government not only sent its special units that address nuclear incidents to assist the Japanese government but also decided to execute a major operation to rescue Japanese people despite the danger of being exposed to radiation.

How can I explain these U.S. behaviors? They could be explained by classical realism. As George F. Kennan said during the Cold War, because Japan is one of the five major industrial areas in the world, the United States needs to secure it as its ally against opponents.¹² Kennan aimed at the rapid rehabilitation of the Japanese economy in the postwar period so that it would become an important member of the U.S. grand alliance against the Soviet Union. This scheme affected the occupation policy of the Supreme Commander of Allied Power (SCAP) to re-industrialize Japan to become a fortress against communist threats in Asia. His argument could be applicable to the incidents of 2011. After March 11, 2011, the U.S. Marine Corps took the navigation course from South to North in the Sea of Japan to send an implicit message to neighboring countries that the United States would not allow any country to threaten Japan in such a crisis.¹³

¹¹ *Asahi Shimbun*, March 18, 2011, 5.

¹² George F. Kennan, "The Source of Soviet Conducts," *Foreign Affairs* June 1947

¹³ Robert D. Eldridge, *Tomodachi Sakusen: Kesenuma Oshima to Beigun Kaiheitai no Kiseki no Kizuna*, (Tokyo: Shūei Sha, 2017), 73.

Nevertheless, this possible explanation would not be sufficient. In contrast to the immediate postwar period in the 1940s, by 2011, Japan had become one of the largest economies in the world. Japan was able to afford its own economic rehabilitation without foreign assistance. Indeed, U.S. assistance was merely humanitarian relief rather than economic aid.

Liberalism could account for these U.S. actions. While realism treats alliances as an expedient against common enemies, liberalism considers alliances as a type of “international organization” that fosters bonds among allies. Alliances themselves can be entities that are somewhat independent from member states in international politics. Haas and Whiting noted that today’s alliances have transformed from the calculated alliance of sovereign states into a regional association of peoples united by loyalty to common myths and symbols in addition to concrete interests.¹⁴ This transformation was a product of the twentieth century in that economic welfare and development demanded coordination with military planning because allocations of human resources and finances are limited.¹⁵ This argument suggests that today’s alliance is an “institution” with its own life. It is not necessary to presuppose that all of the behaviors of the alliance are about balancing against a potential enemy. Rather, it is about the self-preservation of the alliance itself. A highly institutionalized alliance is supposed to quickly respond to any emergencies.

However, this possible argument is weak. In the United States-Japan Mutual

¹⁴ Ernst B. Haas and Allen S. Whiting, *Dynamics of International Relations*, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1956), 183.

¹⁵ Haas and Whiting, 183.

Security Treaty of 1960, there was no clause on the duties of the U.S. to assist Japan in the case of a natural disaster. The U.S. activities were *not* a result of an institutional mechanism. As Eldridge, who served as part of Operation Tomodachi for the March 11 Earthquake, confessed, there was no preexisting institutional arrangement between the USFJ and JSDF for emergencies. As is argued in detail below, the USFJ was frustratingly waiting for concrete requests and guidance from the Japanese government for several days even though the USFJ was ready to take action at any time.¹⁶ The Japanese government and even the JSDF did not have much knowledge on the capability and equipment that were possessed by the USFJ.¹⁷

Japan

Why did Japan accept U.S. assistance? This question might seem strange because any country needs help in an emergency. Nevertheless, it is a plausible question because the relations between the Japanese people and the USFJ had *not* been “friendly” since 1945 when U.S. forces were first stationed in Japan. In particular, March 11 was “bad timing.” Immediately before the Earthquake, the Japanese public was in a state of rage against the discriminative statement, “Okinawa people are masters of extortion,” which was made by Kevin Maher, who was a former U.S. Consul in Okinawa and Chief of the Japan Division of the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs of the U.S. Department

¹⁶ Robert D. Eldridge, *Tomodachi Sakusen: Kesennuma Oshima to Beigun Kaiheitai no Kiseki no Kizuna*, (Tokyo: Shūei Sha, 2017), 72.

¹⁷ Eldridge, 80-83.

of State.¹⁸ Regardless of whether his words were true, the Japanese public's anger did not diminish.¹⁹ Maher resigned three days after the news media's reports appeared,²⁰ but he changed his mind and stayed in office because he wanted to utilize his rich knowledge of the USFJ and nuclear power plants in Japan to help with the post-earthquake humanitarian assistance.²¹

The Maher issue was rooted in many years of the Futenma Air Base issue. The return of Futenma Air Base to the local owners was a long-cherished desire for the people of Okinawa; therefore, Japan and the United States negotiated its feasibility. Maher's words complicated this issue. Against such a political backdrop, it is surprising that Japan accepted the large scale of U.S. humanitarian relief.

There was a precedent for Japan to reject the USFJ's disaster relief. It was the case of the 1995 Hanshin Awaji Great Earthquake when Tomiichi Murayama, the president of the Japan Socialist Party (JSP), was prime minister. The JSP historically had not recognized the JSDF and the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty as being constitutional. The JSP maintained unarmed neutrality as a party platform and therefore did not recognize the USFJ as a legitimate force in Japan. It was logical for Murayama not to accept the USFJ's assistance even for disaster relief.

Changes in domestic politics might explain why Japan welcomed U.S. assistance for

¹⁸ Maher himself contended that he never said such insulting words against the Okinawa people. See *Wall Street Journal*, <http://realtime.wsj.com/japan/2011/04/14/>

¹⁹ *Asahi Shimbun*, March 11, 2011, 1, 3; *Asahi Shimbun*, Evening Edition, March 11, 2011, 14.

²⁰ *Asahi Shimbun*, March 11, 2011, 3.

²¹ *Asahi Shimbun*, March 16, 2011, Evening Edition, 2.

the March 11 Earthquake. Prime Minister Kan was the president of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), which recognizes the JSDF and the alliance with the United States as constitutional and a necessary means to defend Japan. Nevertheless, governmental change does not necessitate changes in the Japanese public's emotions against the USFJ. The prolonged base issues and their related problems, including the Maher issue, had never vanished.

Detecting Collective Identity

How can we detect the existence of a collective identity? Cronin proposes two paths. The first is to examine the nature of the *discourse* among specific political actors. Discourses conducted in terms of collective identity are clear acknowledgments of that group's existence. It constitutes a recognition that an actor wishes to be identified with the group.²² The most certain sign that a group has adopted a new concept or understanding is *the development of a new vocabulary* that would then be publicly articulated.²³ Specifically, we must judge whether the groups characterize others with whom they interact, both positively and negatively, or whether they speak of a special bond among specified actors.²⁴ We can hypothesize that the United States and Japan identified each other as like-minded states of liberal-democracies that value international law and Saddam Hussein as a reference group that invaded Kuwait, thus violating the sovereignty of a neighboring country.

²² Cronin, 14-15.

²³ Cronin, 15.

²⁴ Cronin, 15.

The second way is to analyze the *behaviors* of the actors. We must determine whether the specified actors behave in a manner consistent with their identities in circumstances in which they would otherwise not be expected to do so. Several elements serve as evidence of collective identity through behaviors. First, we must ascertain whether specific actors from different states *act as partners rather than adversaries or competitors* in their deliberations and interactions. Second, we must ensure the existence of *a clear concept of a group interest or common good* among member states. Third, we must confirm whether the actors share their *collective strategic perspectives*. Finally, if we recognize that these perspectives *influence the process and outcome of the deliberations*, they will count as evidence for the constitutive power of identity.²⁵

The March 11 Tohoku Earthquake

In the afternoon on March 11 in 2011, a huge earthquake with a 9.0 magnitude and a tsunami hit the northeast coast of Japan. They destroyed sea ports, villages, towns, houses, buildings, railroads, roads, and the public infrastructure. This led to a meltdown and the release of radioactive material at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station, which is recognized by international standards as one of the worst nuclear incidents in history, equal to the Chernobyl disaster in Russia 1986. The event caused more than 15,000 deaths, and it left 2,500 missing and 6,000 injured. This section will examine how Japan and the United States mutually interacted in their

²⁵ Cronin, 16-17.

discourse and behaviors in this natural disaster.

Discourse

Immediately after the earthquake occurred on March 11, U.S. President Barack Obama said,

“This is a potentially catastrophic disaster and the images of destruction of flooding coming out of Japan are simply heartbreaking. Japan is, of course, one of our strongest and closest allies, and this morning I spoke with Prime Minister Kan. On behalf of the American people, I conveyed our deepest condolences, especially to the victims and their families, and I offered our Japanese friends whatever assistance is needed. We currently have an air craft carrier in Japan, and another is on its way. We also have a ship en route to the Marianas Islands to assist as needed... Our hearts go out to our friends in Japan and across the region and we’re going to stand with them as they recover and rebuild.”²⁶

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton offered “immediate disaster relief assistance.”²⁷

U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates said, “We will respond to any need.”²⁸ The Seventh Fleet announced that two U.S. destroyers, the USS McCampbell and USS Curtis Wilbur that were stationed off Boso Peninsula were preparing “to assist Japanese authorities with providing at-sea search and rescue and recovery operations.”²⁹ The III

²⁶ White House, “News Conference by the President,” 12:33 P.M. EST, March 11, 2011, South Court Auditorium,

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/03/11/news-conference-president>

²⁷ *International Business Times*, March 12, 2011, custom wire.

²⁸ *Yomiuri Shimbun*, March 13, 2011, 9.

²⁹ *International Business Times*, March 12, 2011, custom wire.

Marine Expeditionary Force said that it was “prepositioning forces and supplies in support of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations.”³⁰ Three days later, while preparing the operations of these military forces, President Obama said, “We will stand with the people of Japan in the difficult days ahead.”³¹

Here is where the new vocabulary emerged. Paul Wilcox, who was a retired airman working at the Division of Northeast Asia of the United States Pacific Command (USPACOM), named the efforts “Operation Tomodachi,” and USPAC Commander Robert Willard officially adopted it.³² “Tomodachi” means “friend” in Japanese. Wilcox told the Japanese news media that he wanted to inform the Japanese people that the United States would behave in accordance with a proverb, “A friend in need is a friend indeed.”³³ The word “friend” frequently appeared in various phases of U.S. activities. Andrew MacMannis, Commander of the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit (31 MEU), publically stated on the way to Japan from Malaysia that he prayed for the Japanese people who are our good friends and allies.³⁴ Adrian Ragland, the Captain of the USS Tortuga, a dock landing ship, said that this was a good opportunity to demonstrate how the U.S.-Japan relationship is strong.³⁵ George Aguilar, the commander of the HS-4 Black Knights, a helicopter squadron on the Ronald Reagan, an aircraft carrier, said, “What we are doing here is diplomacy. This is our best friend in

³⁰ *International Business Times*, March 12, 2011, custom wire.

³¹ *Jiji Press Ticker Service*, March 15, 2011, newswire.

³² *Yomiuri Shimbun*, May 20, 2011, 4.

³³ *Yomiuri Shimbun*, May 20, 2011, 4.

³⁴ Eldridge, *Tomodachi Sakusen*, 63.

³⁵ *Yomiuri Shimbun*, March 15, 2011, 4.

the region.”³⁶ Captain David Fluker of the amphibious assault vessel said, “What we are here for is to stop the pain and stop the suffering and ensure that life gets back to normal as soon as possible for our friends in Japan.”³⁷ U.S. Ambassador to Japan John Roos visited Ishinomaki city, the quake-hit area, to console victims on March 23, and he said, “The United States will support our Japanese friend with anything.”³⁸ Paul Feather, colonel of the 374 Airlift Wing Commander, stated in a public interview at the Yokota Airbase, “Japan, where I now live, is almost my home. There are many Japanese working here at this base, and I want to do anything to support them.”³⁹ Captain Thom W. Burke, Commanding Officer of the USS Ronald Reagan, said, “All the crew members are proud of helping Japan.”⁴⁰ The Commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, Patrick Walsh, who directed Operation Tomodachi, said, “We rush to the scene of Japan’s crisis without expecting any reward. It is a proof of real friendship... Operation Tomodachi is a symbol of friendship and close cooperation between the Japanese and the American people.”⁴¹ State Secretary Clinton said in April, “We responded to this crisis as a friend, not just as an ally.”⁴²

Japan also expressed its sense of friendship in its public statement. Japanese Defense Minister Toshimi Kitazawa visited the USS aircraft carrier Ronald Reagan on

³⁶ *International Herald Tribune*, March 23, 2011, 2.

³⁷ *New York Times*, March 23, 2011, 13.

³⁸ *Yomiuri Shimbun*, March 24, 2011, 12.

³⁹ *Yomiuri Shimbun*, March 30, 2011, 25; *Japan Economic Newswire*, March 29, 2011, Newswire, 3:35 PM GMT.

⁴⁰ *Asahi Shimbun*, March 23, 2011, 5.

⁴¹ *Yomiuri Shimbun*, April 9, 2011, 2, 4.

⁴² *Asahi Shimbun*, April 18, 2011, 14.

April 4 and said, “We appreciate the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines of the United States for their unusual scale of assistance operations. This is a sign of our bond.”⁴³

He also said, “I have never been more encouraged by and proud of the fact that the United States is our ally.”⁴⁴ Masanori Ide, the captain of the Japan Land SDF and a liaison officer with the 76 mission corps of the U.S. Navy, said in an interview that, “I saw that the marines and seamen were devoted to rescue missions not because they were ordered to do so but because they wanted to do something for their friends.”⁴⁵

Japanese Foreign Minister Takeaki Matsumoto spoke at a press conference and stated that the Japan-United States partnership in disaster relief activities has “greatly encouraged Japan.”⁴⁶

As the Operation entered the terminal phase in April, Kenneth Gluck, the Okinawa Area Coordinator (OAC) said, “The Japan-United States bond has been strengthened under this difficult situation.” Hidetoshi Hirata, a liaison officer in Okinawa, said, “Japan and the United States acted together without any plan and produced a good result. It was very meaningful to build confidence between us.”⁴⁷

Prime Minister Naoto Kan formally stated, “Immediately after the earthquake, the United States, our most important friend and ally, provided swift cooperation.

President Obama kindly called me to convey his strong commitment that the United

⁴³ *Asahi Shimbun*, April 7, 2011, 3.

⁴⁴ *Asahi Shimbun*, April 5, 2011, 4.

⁴⁵ Eldridge, *Tomodachi Sakusen*, 118.

⁴⁶ *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific*, April 15, 2011, transcript. source of Kyodo News Service, Tokyo, in English 1122 gmt 15 Apr 11.

⁴⁷ *Asahi Shimbun*, April 16, 2011, 27.

States stood ready to provide all-out support to the Japanese people during this time of great difficulty. He reaffirmed that the relationship between our nations is unshakable. So many Japanese citizens, including myself, were enormously encouraged by these remarks.”⁴⁸

The USFJ also invented a term “Seoul Train” for the activities to remove debris at Nobiru Station of the Sendai Line, Higashi Matsushima City, Miyagi Prefecture. The Sendai Line in the coastal area suffered extensive damage from the earthquake and tsunami. The USFJ and JSDF worked together to restore the line. Captain Alan Nayland who directed this activity said, “We want to show the soul of Japanese and Americans in the Sendai Line’s restoration.”⁴⁹

Behaviors

Immediately after the earthquake occurred on March 11, U.S. Ambassador to Japan Roos made a wake-up call to President Obama to inform him of the disaster. Roos, who experienced the Loma Prieta Earthquake that hit northern California in 1989, sensed that the March 11 earthquake would be more dangerous than the 1989 one.⁵⁰ At 0:15 AM, March 12, Obama and Kan agreed by phone that the United States would provide all-out support, which was later referred to as “Operation Tomodachi.”⁵¹ At 9:00 AM, USPAC Commander Willard phoned JSDF Chief of Joint Staff Council

⁴⁸ *The Washington Post*, April 17, 2011, A21.

⁴⁹ *Yomiuri Shimbun*, April 21, 2011, Evening Edition, 11; *Asahi Shimbun*, April 22, 2011, Evening Edition, 19.

⁵⁰ *Yomiuri Shimbun*, April 13, 2011, 4.

⁵¹ *Yomiuri Shimbun*, April 13, 2011, 4.

Ryoichi Oriki. Willard volunteered for rescue operations, and Commander of the USFJ Field also announced the immediate commitment of the marines to the affected areas.⁵²

The USFJ had already initiated its own headquarters for disaster control ten minutes after the earthquake occurred and started planning.⁵³ The 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit (31st MEU) now assumed the main role because it had quality equipment. For example, the amphibious assault ship USS Essex is capable of mounting 30 helicopters, which can execute search and rescue missions, deliver shipments, and provide medical treatment at its on-ship hospital. Nevertheless, when the Earthquake occurred, Essex was stopped at a port in Malaysia after a joint naval exercise in Cambodia. USS Harpers Ferry, a dock landing ship, was sailing toward Indonesia to participate in the multilateral disaster drill of the ASEN Regional Forum (ARF). USS Germantown, a dock landing ship, was deployed in another location in Indonesia.⁵⁴ Despite these deployments, Essex left Malaysia for Japan within 24 hours after receiving an emergency phone call from the 7th Fleet.⁵⁵ Harpers Ferry and Germantown approached near the port of Indonesia; however, they quickly changed their routes toward Japan. The marines on board Harpers Ferry were on high alert as they monitored the situation developing in Japan; when they learned that they would sail to Japan to serve in rescue missions, there was an outpouring of joy.⁵⁶ The USS Ronald

⁵² *Yomiuri Shimbun*, April 13, 2011, 4.

⁵³ Eldridge, *Tomodachi Sakusen*, 37.

⁵⁴ Eldridge, *Tomodachi Sakusen*, 62.

⁵⁵ Eldridge, *Tomodachi Sakusen*, 24.

⁵⁶ Eldridge, *Tomodachi Sakusen*, 63.

Reagan was sailing toward South Korea to join the joint exercise but changed its course and arrived off Sanriku in the morning of March 13, and it began its co-operation with the JSDF.⁵⁷ The Ronald Reagan prepared to serve as an afloat platform for refueling aircrafts of the Japan Air SDF and the USFJ for their rescue and recovery activities ashore.⁵⁸ The flag ship of the 7th Fleet USS Blue Ridge in Singapore set its course to Japan.

Operation Tomodachi also involved control of the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station, which caused the second “disaster.” The United States paid enormous attention to this disaster. Japan and the United States recognized the spread of radioactive material as a common threat. The United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission (USNRC) dispatched its two specialists to Japan on March 12.⁵⁹ The U.S. Department of Defense sent nine specialists who would organize a team to evaluate the damage management. USPAC Commander Willard prepared to gather a team of 450 nuclear specialists and was willing to support any activities on the nuclear disaster from surveillance to decontamination.⁶⁰ The United States put pressure on Japan to cool down the nuclear reactor by dropping sea water on it.⁶¹ The United States also flew an unmanned aerial vehicle, Global Hawk, and an ultra-high altitude reconnaissance U2 aircraft to monitor the status of the damaged power plants. The U.S. Marine Corps

⁵⁷ *Asahi Shimbun*, March 14, 2011, 4; *Asahi Shimbun*, March 23, 2011, 5; *Yomiuri Shimbun*, March 15, 2011, 6.

⁵⁸ *International Business Times*, March 12, 2011, Custom Wire.

⁵⁹ *Yomiuri Shimbun*, March 14, 2011, 9.

⁶⁰ *Yomiuri Shimbun*, March 18, 2011, Evening Edition, 2; *Asahi Shimbun*, March 18, 2011, Evening edition, 3.

⁶¹ *Yomiuri Shimbun*, March 18, 2011, Evening Edition, 2.

sent 140 marines from the Chemical Biological Incident Response Force (CBIRF), which can counter the effects of chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, or high-yield explosive (CBRNE) incidents.⁶² The CBIRF publically demonstrated its capabilities and skills at a joint drill on nuclear contamination with the JSDF at the U.S. Yokota Air Base.⁶³ The U.S. Air Force dispatched the Air Force Radiation Assessment Team (AFRAT). AFRAT members performed radiological assessments at Sendai Airport on April 5, 2011.⁶⁴ The U.S. Army sent the 9th Area Medical Laboratory (AML) to Japan. The 9th AML can perform surveillance, confirmatory analytical lab testing and health hazard assessments of environmental, occupational, endemic and chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and explosive threats.⁶⁵ AML checked for the radioactive material contained in the air in Japan.⁶⁶

In contrast to the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake, the Japanese government formally requested disaster relief from the U.S. government on the night of March 11.⁶⁷ Immediately, the USPAC officially announced Operation Tomodachi. According to Robert Eldridge, the Deputy Assistant Chief of Staff, G-7, Government and External Affairs (G-7), Marine Corps Installations Pacific/Marine Forces Japan, because the Japanese government had promptly accepted U.S. assistance, the co-operation of

⁶² *Asahi Shimbun*, April 1, 2011, 2.

⁶³ *Yomiuri Shimbun*, April 9, 2011, Evening Edition, 2; *Asahi Shimbun*, April 10, 4.

⁶⁴ United States Air Force, "Radiation assessment team surveys Sendai Airport," <http://www.pacaf.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/594258/radiation-assessment-team-surveys-sendai-airport/>

⁶⁵ United States Army, "9th AML deploys to Japan," April 14, 2011, https://www.army.mil/article/54919/9th_AML_deploys_to_Japan

⁶⁶ *Yomiuri Shimbun*, April 15, Evening Edition, 2.

⁶⁷ *Asahi Shimbun*, March 12, 2011, 17.

disaster relief between Japan and the United States in the March 11 Earthquake was much faster than in the case of the 1995 Earthquake.⁶⁸ Indeed, the USFJ and JSDF worked closely together from March 11.

In the morning of March 12, an investigation team that consisted of four USFJ officers, including Eldridge, and two JSDF officers investigated the Sendai Airport, which had been rendered useless by the tsunami. Eldridge advised the immediate restoration of the Sendai Airport to transport a vast amount of goods to be supplied to the affected areas.⁶⁹ Collaborative efforts day and night by staff members of Sendai Airport, local business workers, the Japan Air SDF, the U.S. Marines, and the U.S. Air Force restored the function of the eastern half of a runway, and the first flight of a C-130 transport aircraft arrived there on March 16.⁷⁰ Through the efforts of the 353rd Special Operation Group of the U.S. Air Force, Sendai Airport resumed its civilian operations one month later.⁷¹ At the same time, the Japan Air SDF and 31MEU started using the Yamagata Airport to load equipment needed to establish a forward-refueling base there.⁷² The Yamagata Airport then became the main base, was operational 24 hours for the disaster relief of both JSDF and the USFJ.⁷³

⁶⁸ Robert D. Eldridge was the political adviser to the forward-deployed command of U.S. forces during Operation Tomodachi. He was a graduate student at Kobe University when the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake occurred. He was convinced, according to his personal experience, that the March 11 Earthquake proved the significance of close cooperation of the USFJ and JSDF for disaster relief to save victims and in the recovery of the affected area. See Eldridge, *Tomodachi Sakusen* 37.

⁶⁹ Eldridge, *Tomodachi Sakusen* 38.

⁷⁰ Eldridge, *Tomodachi Sakusen* 39; *Asahi Shimbun*, March 18, 2011, 30.

⁷¹ *New York Times*, April 14, 2011, 6.

⁷² Eldridge, *Tomodachi Sakusen* 39.

⁷³ *Asahi Shimbun*, March 21, 2011, 14.

The USS Tortuga, a dock landing ship that carried 273 soldiers of the 5th Brigade of the Japan Ground SDF with a total of 93 vehicles, such as trucks and wreckers, landed at Mutsu City facing the Ōminato Bay. This was the “first” transfer of the Japan SDF by a U.S. ship ever in the SDF’s history.⁷⁴

The United States created the Joint Support Force (JSF) at the Yokota Air Base in Japan for the first time in its history. For the United States, the JSF is identical to the Joint Task Force (JTF) in wartime. The JSF or JTF functions as “the general headquarters” of the front line, which unifies the army, navy, air force and marines. This represented U.S. recognition of the March 11 Earthquake as being equivalent to a war.⁷⁵ Commander of the USFJ Burton Field was initially the JSF Commander; however, he was soon replaced by a higher ranking officer, Commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet Patrick Walsh.⁷⁶

Japan created its own JTF in Sendai that was directed by Lieutenant General Eiji Kimizuka. In accordance with the Guidelines of U.S.-Japan Defense Cooperation in 1997,⁷⁷ Japan created a Bilateral Crisis Action Team (BCAT) office by dispatching a liaison team of 10 officers headed by Defense Division Chief, Ground Staff Office (GSO), JGSDF Koichiro Bansho to the JSF. It was rare for Japanese high ranking defense officers to be stationed at a U.S. military base.⁷⁸ Japan also established BCAT

⁷⁴ *Asahi Shimbun*, March 18, 2011, 14; *Asahi Shimbun*, March 23, 2011, 5.

⁷⁵ *Asahi Shimbun*, April 7, 2011, 3.

⁷⁶ *Yomiuri Shimbun*, March 28, 2011, 2; *Asahi Shimbun*, April 7, 2011, 3.

⁷⁷ Japanese Ministry of Defense, “Higashi nihon daishinsai eno taio ni kansuru kyoukun jiko ni tusite: chukan tori matome,” p. 18; *Yomiuri Shimbun*, April 13, 2011, 4. http://www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/defense/saigai/pdf/k_chukan.pdf

⁷⁸ *Asahi Shimbun*, April 7, 2011, 3.

offices within the JTF, Sendai, and the Ministry of Defense in Tokyo to enhance their linkage with the USFJ.⁷⁹ Thom Burke later said that the BCAT smoothed U.S.-Japan collaborative activities.⁸⁰

The JSDF and the USFJ worked together in search and rescue operations immediately after March 11. Nevertheless, there were still 18,000 people missing at the end of March. From April 1 to 3, 18,000 members of the JSDF, 7,000 members of the USFJ, the Japan Coast Guard, police forces, and fire departments, executed search operations in the coastal areas of Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima prefectures. Japan and the United States mobilized 130 aircrafts and 90 ships for this three-day operation. They found 79 dead bodies during this three-day intensive search.⁸¹

The control of the nuclear reactors at Fukushima Station was another common task for Japan and the United States. However, there was a gap in the sense of crisis between the United States and Japan. United States nuclear power stations had stockpiled cooling devices since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. The U.S. Air Force had been ready to carry this equipment to anywhere in the United States. U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton ordered that this equipment be sent to Japan; however, the Japanese government refused to use them because it thought there was a

⁷⁹ Robert D. Eldridge, ed., *Tsugi no Shinsai ni Sonaeru Tameni: America Kaiheitai no "Tomodachi Sakusen" Keikensha ga Teigen Suru Gunmin Kyoroku no Atarashii Arikata*, (Tokyo: Kindai Shobo Sha, 2016), 27.

⁸⁰ *Yomiuri Shimbun*, April 21, 2011, 2.

⁸¹ *Asahi Shimbun*, April 1, 2011, 2; *Asahi Shimbun*, April 2, 30; *Yomiuri Shimbun*, April 2, 2011, Evening Edition, 1; *Yomiuri Shimbun*, April 4, 2011, Evening Edition, 11.

plenty of nearby sea water.⁸² Japan indeed used sea water; however, the U.S. government strongly urged Japan to stop because the sea salt would corrode the nuclear reactors.⁸³ Ultimately, Japan borrowed a barge from the USFJ that carried a pump that can hold 1,000 tons of fresh water to be used to cool down the reactor.⁸⁴ This issue generated emotional friction between the U.S. and Japanese governments. According to former nuclear scientist Jun Sakurai, the United States has a high capability for risk management, while Japan has no plan to manage a nuclear crisis.⁸⁵ On March 16, the White House decided to move forward with its own measures rather than wait for the Japanese government's requests. The U.S. government became skeptical of Japan's capability to respond to a nuclear disaster.⁸⁶ On March 17, President Obama showed Prime Minister Kan a list of items for radioactive management and decontamination, which the United States could promptly provide to Japan.⁸⁷

These deficiencies in Japan's recognition, knowledge, skills, and equipment in the joint operations were reflected throughout the entire process of the operations. The 31 MEU could have moved a week earlier if a prior consultation system between the JSDF and the USFJ had been established.⁸⁸ As noted above, the JSDF and the USFJ never knew what they had that could be mutually deployed. Further, as noted above, a U.S. military ship had never loaded JSDF vehicles, for example, the USS Tortuga carried

⁸² *Yomiuri Shimbun*, April 1, 2011, 2.

⁸³ *Asahi Shimbun*, March 26, 2011, 5.

⁸⁴ *Yomiuri Shimbun*, April 1, 2011, 5, 31

⁸⁵ *Asahi Shimbun*, May 22, 2011, 1.

⁸⁶ *Asahi Shimbun*, April 7, 2011, 3.

⁸⁷ *Asahi Shimbun*, May 22, 2011, 3.

⁸⁸ Robert D. Eldridge, ed., *Tsugi no Shinsai ni Sonaeru Tameni*, 30

JGSDF vehicles in Ominato Bay. It was the first time that a U.S. Navy aircraft carrier provided a platform for air operations of JASDF helicopters. Even within the BCAT in Sendai, there were often conversations between the JSDF and the USFJ; for example, the USFJ would ask, “What do you need?” and the JSDF would reply, “What do you have?” It was as if the JSDF and the USFJ had never met before.⁸⁹

Andrew MacMannis, colonel of the 31st Marine Expeditionary Corp, later confessed that both the JGSDF and JMSDF knew nothing about the U.S. Marine Corps. The JGSDF simply recognized the U.S. Marines as a naval force, whereas the JMSDF saw it as a ground force; therefore, both of them did not believe that it was necessary to work with the U.S. Marines.⁹⁰ Their lack of recognition delayed the bilateral co-planning of disaster relief. In this sense, Operation Tomodachi was the beginning of U.S.-Japan security institutionalization.⁹¹ Nevertheless, this would be a useful experience for future policy on disaster relief. Coastal communities in Aichi, Mie, Kochi and Hyogo prefectures showed an interest in learning about Operation Tomodachi.⁹²

Analysis

Let us examine the course of interactions between the United States and Japan from March 11 to the beginning of May, 2011 to answer the questions posed at the beginning

⁸⁹ Robert D. Eldridge, ed., *Tsugi no Shinsai ni Sonaeru Tameni*, 29.

⁹⁰ Robert D. Eldridge, ed., *Tsugi no Shinsai ni Sonaeru Tameni*, 47-48.

⁹¹ Masakazu Imai, “Higashi Nihon Daishinsai ni okeru Jieitai no Katsudo Nichibei Kyoryoku: Jieitai no Saigai Haken to Beigun no Tomodachi Sakusen no Kadai,” *Rippo to Chosa*, no. 329 (June 2012): 66.

⁹² *The Japan Times*, March 3, 2012,

of this paper. *Did the United States and Japan behave as partners?* The answer is yes. There are many instances of this. At both civilian and military levels, the United States acted promptly to assist Japan. The swift communication of U.S. Ambassador Roos with President Obama after the earthquake led to the telephone conference between Obama and Kan. The USFJ established its own headquarters for disaster control ten minutes after the earthquake hit Japan. Although the major ships of the 31 MEU, Essex, Germantown, and Harpers Ferry, were deployed in Southeast Asia, they eagerly rushed to Japan. 31MEU Commander MacMannis later said that he began mapping out the disaster relief plan before the 7th Fleet formally ordered him to return to Japan. Essex took six days to reach Japan; thus, crew members used their time to develop the operation plan.⁹³

Japan also acted as a partner. In contrast to the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake, Japan accepted U.S. willingness to assist in disaster relief immediately after the earthquake occurred. This enabled the JSDF to work closely with the USFJ. The establishment of the BCAT in Sendai, Tokyo, and Yokota represented Japan's collective agreement with the United States to counter the effects of one of the worst natural disaster that Japan had ever experienced. Although, there were institutional flaws that impeded the ability of the JSDF and the USFJ to cope with the natural disaster together, Japan showed a willingness to overcome this and maximize the power of bilateral collaborative actions.

Did the United States and Japan demonstrate explicit collective interests or common

⁹³ Robert D. Eldridge, ed., *Tsugi no Shinsai ni Sonaeru Tameni*, 43-46.

goods? The answer is positive. Both Japan and the United States engaged in the search for survivors and restoration of public infrastructure such as roads, railroads, sea ports, airports, electricity, and other lifelines. Japan and the United States shared an awareness of the dangers of the radioactive material from the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station. The U.S. Marines sent the CBIRF to Japan and instructed the JSDF as to how to counter radioactive exposure. Although there was a gap in their threat recognition on measures that addressed explosions in nuclear plants, Japan and the United States nevertheless worked together.

Did the United States and Japan have collective strategic perspectives? The answer is yes. Japan was aware that this crisis needed to be overcome as soon as possible. The loss of 2.5 billion Yen and the unemployment of 120,000 Japanese citizens that resulted from the disaster was perhaps Japan's greatest national challenge after World War II. For the United States, the restoration of Japan was also critically important for both economic and geopolitical reasons. U.S. Secretary of State Clinton visited Tokyo on April 16 to promise U.S. continuous support for Japanese private sectors. Thomas Donohue, president of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, accompanied Clinton in talks with the Japanese Business Federation for this purpose.⁹⁴ The United States was also cautious about the possibility that North Korea or China might exploit this crisis politically. The route from Southeast Asia to the Sea of Japan, which the 31 MEU took in March, was a tacit U.S. message to China and North Korea that the United

⁹⁴ *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific*, April 17, 2011, transcript, source: Kyodo News Service, Tokyo, in English 0438 gmt 17 Apr 11.

States would not allow them to touch devastated Japan.⁹⁵

Did the shared collective strategic perspectives of the United States and Japan influence the process and outcome of the deliberations? This case study revealed that Japan's disaster relief operations required a close relationship with the United States. Before the March 11 Tohoku Earthquake, Japanese experts on natural disasters, the Japanese government, and the JSDF had never considered the USFJ to be Japan's partner with manpower, rich experience, skills, knowledge on disaster relief, and equipment. Rather, Japan had recognized the USFJ as "a foreign aid organization."⁹⁶ However, this perception changed, and the change is reflected in a U.S.-Japan joint statement dated June 21, 2011 that their bilateral cooperation for Operation Tomodachi became a model for future disaster relief operations, such as making the BCAT, counter measures for nuclear accidents, and intimate relationships between the local communities and the USFJ.⁹⁷ This national level of recognition also spread to local communities such as Shizuoka, Kochi, Wakayama, and Mie that have an interest in disaster prevention with the United States.⁹⁸

Conclusion

⁹⁵ Eldridge, *Tomodachi Sakusen*, 73.

⁹⁶ Eldridge, , ed., *Tsugi no Shinsai ni Sonaeru Tameni*, 2-8.

⁹⁷ Nichibei Anzen Hosho Kyogi Iinkai Bunsho, "Higashi Nihon Daishinsai eno taio ni Okeru Kyoryoku, June 21, 2011, U.S. Secretary of State Clinton, U.S. Secretary of Defense Gates, Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs Matsumoto, and Japanese Minister of Defense Kitazawa."

http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/usa/hosho/pdfs/joint1106_03.pdf

⁹⁸ Eldridge, , ed., *Tsugi no Shinsai ni Sonaeru Tameni*, 9-10.

This paper examined the case of the March 11 Tohoku Earthquake to confirm the U.S.-Japan collective identity, which is an essential part of their bilateral security community. By using Cronin's method, this study scrutinized the discourse and behaviors during disaster relief, the so-called Operation Tomodachi. The results are as follows.

In the discourse analysis, I found the development of a new vocabulary of "friendship." The name of the operation itself was "tomodachi," which means "friend" in Japanese. The "friend" phrase was found elsewhere among U.S. political leaders, marines, sailors, airmen and soldiers. This was also true on the Japanese side. Japan gradually recognized U.S. behaviors as an expression of "friendship" rather than simply the expression of an ally.

In the behavioral analysis, this paper raised four questions. Did the United States and Japan act as partners? Did the United States and Japan have explicit collective interests or common goals? Did the United States and Japan have collective strategic perspectives? Did the shared collective strategic perspectives of the U.S. and Japan influence the process and outcome of the deliberations? The answer to these four questions is yes. This confirmation informs us of the possibility of a security community between Japan and the United States.