

# The Achievement and Challenge of the Japan Coast Guard in Giving Foreign Assistance

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## 1. Introduction

There are many Coast Guards and organizations which serve the same functions in the world, but the Japan Coast Guard is unique.

The Japan Coast Guard was established in 1948, and was modeled after the United States Coast Guard. Because of this historical background, the inception of the Japan Coast Guard (JCG) operations started earlier than for the Japan Self Defense Force (JSDF). Therefore, I would say that the Japan Coast Guard, unlike many other countries, is a fully functional organization, not relying on JSDF for their operations. This specific feature has pros and cons, and there are likely some certain disadvantages that exist as well.

We can find this same tendency in instances of Japan's foreign assistance to coast guard organizations of other countries. Long before the implementation of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy, the Japan Coast Guard has solely engaged in capacity building activities, mainly in South East Asian countries.

In this article, I would like to explore the achievements of JCG in the past, and discuss the possibility of further development in their foreign assistance in the future.

## 2. History of Assistances by the JCG

The JCG's international foreign assistance can be categorized into the following two groups. The first is aid for a selected group of multiple countries, and the second is aid for an individual country.

As I mentioned in the introduction, Japan has engaged in capacity building activities for South East Asian countries, and has done so with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), for

many years. The Coast Guard has been regarded as important due to its critical function of maintaining the safety of sea channels.

JCG has sent a maritime advisor to the Philippines since 2000, and from 2004 has continued to implement the "JICA technical cooperation project for Philippines Coast Guard (PCG)," which was established in 1998. In addition, JCG has tried to support the development of various abilities that are intrinsic to its function, including such practices as search and rescue, marine environmental conservation, oil control, navigational safety, and maritime law enforcement. Furthermore, JCG has also provided advice via education and training programs. Since 2013, JCG has started a new project focusing mainly on maritime law enforcement.

In Indonesia, JCG has sent a coast guard officer as an advisor to the Directorate General of Sea Transportation since 2012 to improve the operational ability of the Vessel Traffic System (VTS). In addition to this assistance, JCG has sought the possibility of supporting the Indonesian Coast Guard (BAKAMLA) which has the power to coordinate with other agencies like the Navy, Marine Police and Directorate General of Sea Transportation.

A JCG officer has also been sent as an advisor to Malaysia since 2005 to assist with the establishment of their Coast Guard, and since then has conducted the JICA technical cooperation project for the development of search, rescue, and law enforcement abilities. The capability of the Malaysia Maritime

Law Enforcement Agency (MMEA) has reached quite a high level, and the content of the supporting program has also changed too, from covering basic information to advanced topics like the collection/ analysis/ investigation of organized crime and special rescue techniques, etc.

For assistance targeted to multiple countries, JCG and JICA has invited many officers from various countries, regardless of region, to participate in a course they provide that is typically a month long (the length of the course varies). Courses are largely held in Japan, and consist of lecture, practical training and field study. Please see the following outlines of three courses:

➤ Maritime Law Enforcement Course (Two month-long course)

The goal of this course is to provide knowledge and techniques to deal with issues of piracy in Asia and the waters off of Somalia, as well as other maritime illegal activities. The targeted participants are officers who have command ability at their sites. The course topics consist of countermeasures against piracy; international law; tabletop exercises for apprehending illegal drugs, smuggling, and human trafficking; inspection techniques for suspicious ships; and techniques for forensics.

➤ Maritime Search and Rescue, Maritime Disaster Prevention, and Marine Environment Protection for Coast Guard Officials Course (Three month-long course)

This course provides knowledge and skills for search and rescue on the sea, responses to natural disasters, and the preservation of maritime environments as front-line activists. By the end of the course, each participant composes an action plan which reflects the system and situation of their own country.

➤ Hydrography for Charting and Disaster

Management (Internationally Accredited Category B) (Six month-long course)

The goal of the course is to provide abilities and knowledge to create nautical charts and collect maritime information, especially for officials of developing countries. Additionally, this course awards Internationally Accredited Category B Certification to the participant.

Nautical charts are essential information for safe navigation of ships, and marine information is used for resource development and marine leisure as well.

In addition to these three courses, the JCG started an ambitious program, named the “Maritime Safety and Security Policy Program” in 2017. The purpose of this course, as was written in their annual report, is “to share recognition of the importance of strengthening cooperation among countries, ensure the safety and security of the ocean, and strengthen “the maritime order governed by laws and rules and not coercion.””

Compared with the aforementioned three courses, the objectives and nature of this program is different in that it narrows the targeted participants to those from countries only in Asia. Descriptions of this course mention that this program provides master’s degrees, so the quality of program is high, and that it also would more strongly reflect the diplomatic policy of Japan. I believe that it may be a turning point for JCG capacity building activities.

### 3. Challenge

At the time that JCG started providing foreign assistance, there weren’t other foreign organization who provided support to coast guard agencies of South East Asian countries. We have noticed that even when soft and hard assistances by other countries have occurred, no trace of collaboration in official records or publications has been released.

However, the situation has dramatically changed. Even though the capability and capacity of coast guard agencies have largely developed, the surrounding environment in Asia is getting more complicated and sensitive. Therefore,

the expectation and demand for the role of coast guards have expanded at a very rapid pace.

Another point of significant change is the emergence of other stakeholders like the United States and Australia. In particular, the volume of US assistance is enormous, and their budget and human resources are very abundant. Australia also seems to have their own goals, and have proceeded with capacity building activities in a sophisticated way.

The details of each country's foreign policy and their systems for foreign assistance are different, however, their goals are almost the same. Therefore, it is the urgent agenda of these countries who act as providers to determine how to effectively facilitate communication and promote cooperation and collaboration amongst themselves.

The importance of these actions are recognized, and many agreements have been made on the government level on various occasions. Despite this, we still haven't achieved a status of open information.

Promoting collaboration on a deep level must be challenging. Even domestically, the establishment of substantial cooperative relationships needs time and means overcoming differences to foster mutual understanding. It is clear that cooperation with foreign agencies are that much harder than those with other domestic agencies.

To solve this issue, I believe that understanding foreign counterparts is essential. As an example, the system of foreign assistance between Japan and the US is totally different. In the case of Japan, JICA has responsibility and authority for implementing the ODA budget under the supervision of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. On the other hand, the majority of the policy for assistance in the US is controlled by the Department of States (DoS). However, the Department of Defense (DoD) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) also have their own budgets for different purposes and fields. Furthermore, each organization executes their budgets following their own policies. Without knowing the other systems of its counterparts, the JCG can't even reach the proper organization to

discuss the matter of cooperation.

Additionally, as you might notice, this issue can't be solve by a single organization. In Japan, there are restrictions for the usage of the official development assistance (ODA) budget. In principal, it can't be used to assist military purposes and military organizations. However, other countries do not have this stipulation. In order to stand in accordance with this policy while working with the United States, it is necessary that there is communication with not only DoS but also DoD. Therefore, JCG needs to also work with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and even the Ministry of Defense if it really wants to deepen collaboration with the United States. Of course, because each country has different systems, each nation must understand the unique structures of every other country and decide who they team up with to achieve their goals.

#### 4. Conclusion

JCG is the one of earliest organizations to support the coast guard agencies in South East Asia, and its achievements there are outstanding. However, JCG is facing new and urgent issues that they need to solve regarding capacity building activities in that region. While high level cooperation with other countries providing assistance is not easy, expanding stakeholders to participate in resolving the issues as well as understanding them is key.

Resources and budgets are limited, and maximizing everyone's input would benefit every related party.

I will closely keep observing how those countries achieve their goals, and believe that the day when they are achieved will come in the not too distant future.

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