

EDITORIALS

Refueling cover-up

It seems clear civilian control has been eroded.

Commenting on the reported cover-up in May 2003 concerning the Maritime Self-Defense Force's refueling mission in the Indian Ocean, an irate Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda told the media on Monday: "What (the MSDF officers) did was unconscionable. It even raises suspicions about my role in the matter." Fukuda's anger is understandable. But we actually feel more apprehensive than angry. The crucial question is this: Where is the civilian control?

The shocking truth is that MSDF officers were aware a data-entry mistake had been made, but did not report it to the top brass. As a result, Shigeru Ishiba, the chief of what was then the Defense Agency, and other Cabinet officials, including Fukuda, who was chief Cabinet secretary at the time, repeatedly gave erroneous information when they were asked to explain the situation.

The first inkling of the cover-up emerged over suspicions that 800,000 gallons of fuel, supplied by the MSDF to U.S. Navy vessels in the Indian Ocean, may have been diverted to a U.S. aircraft carrier in February 2003, a month before the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq began. The flatp in question was later deployed in the Iraq war.

The government initially explained that the volume of fuel supplied by the MSDF was only 200,000 gallons, and that this volume was nowhere near enough to be diverted for Iraq operations. But a Japanese citizens group later checked U.S. Navy documents under the freedom of information act, and confirmed that the volume was 800,000 gallons. The government admitted last month that a "data-entry error" had been made. The official figure has since been corrected to 800,000 gallons.

According to the latest Defense Ministry explanation, however, the MSDF's department chief and other officers became aware of the entry error on May 9, 2003, which was only one day after Toru Ishikawa, then chairman of the Joint Staff Council of the Self-Defense Forces, told a news conference that the correct volume was 200,000 gallons. Yet, these officers did not report the error to the top brass. As one individual explained, this was "because their section was not directly involved in the refueling mission, and they were

also of the understanding that the controversy over the suspected use of Japanese fuel for the war in Iraq had subsided."

But it was also on May 9 that Fukuda fielded questions on this issue during a news conference. And on May 15, Ishiba was questioned in the Diet about this. The Defense Ministry's claim that the controversy "had subsided" is totally at odds with what was actually happening. Misinformed as they were, Fukuda and Ishiba kept asserting that Japanese fuel could not have been used for the Iraq war.

If the volume was 800,000 gallons, the possibility that the fuel was diverted cannot be ignored. What we suspect happened is that the SDF covered up what was deemed to be an "inconvenient truth." This leads to further suspicions. The logbook of the refueling vessel in question was said to have been destroyed before the retention period expired. The ministry explains the logbook was "put through the shredder by mistake," but that does not sound credible.

As for the Air Self-Defense Force activities in Iraq, next to nothing has been disclosed. Are all the activities within the law? According to the Defense Ministry's report, some SDF officers withheld inconvenient information from civilian bureaucrats. The Diet and the public were lied to by military officers. That state of affairs clearly demonstrates a lack of civilian oversight.

To reinforce civilian control, the ministry on Monday hastily set up a committee to strengthen civilian control of the SDF. The committee must get to the bottom of the problem and come up with recommendations. What has transpired is definitely not just an internal ministry problem. It has also come to light that former Vice Defense Minister Takemasa Moriya apparently did favors for the owner of a company with which the ministry had business dealings, in exchange for being treated to golf outings.

The government is reportedly eager to speed up deliberations on a new bill for refueling operations, which come under the jurisdiction of the Defense Ministry. But with the ministry under a thick cloud of suspicion, including its disregard of the principle of civilian control, the Diet's top priority now should be to fully investigate these suspicions.

—The Asahi Shimbun, Oct. 23

Hepatitis C victims

Offer relief right away in this public health disaster.

It's a stunning example of the government's failure to act. Hundreds of people who were exposed to the hepatitis C virus through tainted blood products were never told about the risks—even though the health ministry was notified of the related facts at least five years ago.

If these patients had been alerted immediately, they could have received proper treatment earlier and avoided developing more serious conditions. Their personal tragedies are all the more painful because these people were totally blameless. The Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare has acted in an incredibly irresponsible manner.

In 2002, the ministry received reports on 418 patients who had apparently been exposed to the hepatitis C virus after being treated with tainted fibrinogen, a blood product provided by former Mitsubishi Pharma Corp. The ministry did nothing to warn these people.

Under the ministry's order, the drugmaker, now called Mitsubishi Tanabe Pharma Corp., conducted an investigation into hepatitis C cases linked to fibrinogen and reported back on its findings.

Some of those affected may still be unaware of their risk of developing the disease, and thus are not seeking proper treatment. Some doctors might have not even told their patients they were being treated with fibrinogen.

Hepatitis C is a serious illness that inflames the liver and, if left untreated, can lead to cirrhosis or liver cancer. Early treatment is crucial to prevent hepatitis C from becoming life threatening. All those at risk should be told right away.

Reports to the ministry on medical problems usually don't use patients' real names. But the documents submitted to the ministry five years ago contained the real names of two people, and the initials for 116 others who received the tainted fibrinogen.

Reportedly, the drug company knew the

names and initials of nearly 370 patients, including those listed in the reports submitted to the ministry.

But it seems that neither the ministry nor the firm cared about those individual patients. Especially baffling is the health ministry's response to the drugmaker's reports. All it did after receiving the reports was issue a general warning to the public urging anyone who may have received fibrinogen to see a doctor for a hepatitis C test.

In 2001, the ministry published a list of some 800 medical institutions that purchased different blood products tainted with hepatitis viruses. It urged at-risk people to get medical checkups.

But it postponed action on the fibrinogen problem. It didn't publish the names of the nearly 7,000 medical institutions that had used the product until three years later—December 2004. Its excuse was the large number of institutions involved.

Meanwhile, many of the 418 victims have sued the government and the drugmaker over their infection with hepatitis from fibrinogen. But the government said two of the plaintiffs had not been treated with the product.

Lawsuits against the government and drug companies have been filed in five district courts, including the Osaka District Court. In five consecutive rulings, the drugmakers were held responsible for the hepatitis infections, while the state was blamed in four.

A clear picture of this public health disaster has thus emerged. As the Osaka High Court begins hearing the appeal, both the plaintiffs and the government are showing willingness to reach out-of-court settlements.

In fact, it was the Osaka lawsuit that shone a spotlight on the health ministry's disastrous negligence. Without it, the facts would have remained buried. The ministry must conduct a thorough investigation to find out how such a serious mistake occurred. It also needs to offer fundamental relief to the hepatitis patients right away.

—The Asahi Shimbun, Oct. 23

POINT OF VIEW / Robert Dujarric

Japan needs to keep its military close to home

Special to The Asahi Shimbun

The fate of Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) operations in the Indian Ocean remains uncertain. What is already clear, however, is that observers have over-dramatized the refusal of Minshuto (Democratic Party of Japan) leader Ichiro Ozawa to support the renewal of legislation authorizing Japanese refueling of allied navies involved in the Afghan war and related naval activities.

In fact, the struggle over the fate of the MSDF in the Indian Ocean is a "tempest in a teapot" with little impact on Japan's security and the country's contribution to the Japan-U.S. partnership.

Japan plays a vital role in Northeast Asian security. The SDF, Asia's most advanced military, deter Japan's potential enemies in conjunction with their U.S. allies. Moreover, Japan allows the United States to station forces in the country while providing them with logistical and infrastructure support. Without the SDF and American bases, Japan would be weaker and the United States would cease to exist as an Asian power.

But beyond Northeast Asia, Japan's military potential is extremely limited. Despite rising North Korean and Chinese capabilities, and regional conflicts in Southwest Asia, Japan has cut its Defense Ministry appropriations. Since most of Japan's military must

be available to handle possible contingencies involving Korea or China, Japan's resources do not provide the SDF with much "surplus" to project power beyond the region. It is noticeable that even as he backed America over Afghanistan and Iraq, former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi refused to spend more on defense.

Nor is there any indication that Japanese voters want more money to go to the SDF. Therefore, there is no reason to believe that in the foreseeable future Japan will invest the resources necessary to be more than a (very) marginal player in security issues beyond Northeast Asia.

In addition, Japan remains committed to sending its servicemen and women where they will not be in harm's way. This further diminishes its contribution, since those who fight have more input on policy than those who remain in safe areas. This policy led to the humiliating situation for Japan's military, whose dedication and bravery is widely recognized, where their government ordered them to seek foreign protection (from Australia and the Netherlands) when they were dispatched to Iraq.

Though Ozawa's original idea of joining the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan raised the possibility of the SDF participating in a war, there is actually very little chance that Japan's Cabinet—LDP or Minshuto—will send

forces to fight, except if the nation is directly threatened.

This analysis does not imply that Japan is a midget in international affairs. In Northeast Asian security, it is America's key partner. In the realm of economics and finance, it is one of the world's most important participants. It is inconceivable, for example, to imagine global discussions on currency movements taking place without Japan being at the head table.

Nor is Tokyo avoiding a more active role in military activities overseas necessarily bad for its interests and those of the United States. Japan faces serious security challenges in its neighborhood that require its attention.

This situation makes the calls for Japan to be the "Britain of Asia" illogical. Besides the fact that Germany, not the United Kingdom, has been the linchpin of American power in Europe, western European states face a different threat environment.

Thanks to the demise of the Soviet Union, they confront neither a major power nor a North Korea-type menace. While the Balkans requires their attention, European NATO members can afford to deploy a large proportion of their air and naval



Robert Dujarric

forces, and some of their ground forces, to out-of-area theaters. Northeast Asia is far less benign, and thus Japan needs to focus its military on its own region. Hoping that Japan will solve this dilemma by a massive rise in funds allocated to defense is not realistic.

Consequently, those who wish to develop the U.S.-Japan alliance beyond Northeast Asia should think of other roles for Japan rather than hope it will become a major participant in U.S.-led wars far from Japanese shores. Alternative roles for Japan can include government and NGO programs in countries in need of reconstruction assistance.

The SDF also have important disaster relief and humanitarian assistance capabilities that can be used outside of Japan. Japanese activities need not focus exclusively on Southwest Asia.

There are many areas of the world, such as the former Yugoslavia and Africa, were both Japan and the United States have an interest in regional security, where non-military Japanese participation could easily be increased for the benefit of Japan's international standing and of its relations with America.

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POINT OF VIEW / Vinod Thomas

Magnificent symbol of Asia nearing extinction

The mesmerizing tiger has inspired poets, induced corporations and nations to adopt it as their emblem, and been used to sell everything from gasoline to sporting goods and children's books.

But this animal's universal appeal has not secured its fate in the wild. Now on the brink of extinction, the only way to save the tiger is through dramatic action by China and India, and their neighboring countries, which include Thailand.

The foremost reason for the tiger's plight is relentless poaching to satisfy demand in Oriental medicine in China and East Asia. Another reason is that its habitat in India and South Asia have fallen by some two-thirds, with intense competition for land, water and forests, and the endless encroachment of villages onto protected land.

In its natural place at the helm of the animal kingdom, the tiger is an indicator of the health of biodiversity and environmental sustainability. If the tiger and other precious examples of biodiversity are lost forever, we must discount some of the impressive economic gains reflected in the 9-10 percent growth rates of India and China, or the high growth of the rest of Asia.

Several tiger subspecies—the Bali, Javan and Caspian cats—have completely disappeared in the last few decades, while others in South China and Indochina (of Thailand) are on the brink. The latest census confirms that the number of Bengal tigers in India have plummeted by more than 50 percent in the last five years to fewer than 1,500, which experts say could be the tipping point for extinction.

What is worse, there are now plans to legalize the sale of tiger parts from tiger farms in East Asia. Lobbyists pushing to legalize the tiger trade argue that flooding the market with farmed animals will reduce the price of tiger goods and thus the profits from poaching. A cited analogy is that people don't hunt wild turkeys for Christmas because supermarkets overflow with farmed supplies.

But tigers are different. Opening even limited trade will only increase hunting of tigers in the wild. The reason is that poaching in India (by poisoning or with steel traps) costs less than \$100 (11,470 yen) per tiger (plus transport and other costs), while maintaining one in captivity in East Asia costs some \$3,000. This cost difference makes it improbable that wild-tiger

parts will be priced out of the market.

Evidence in ivory markets also suggests that legalizing trade could rekindle demand from new buyers, raising the prices of tiger products (as with ivory). In response, farm investors say that certification of farmed tiger parts could reduce the laundering of black-market tiger parts.

But the high cost of certification would further increase the price of legal tiger products, making it even more tempting to go after those in the wild.

So there really is no alternative to confronting poaching. The World Federation of Chinese Medicine Societies has declared that tiger parts are not necessary in traditional medicines—alternatives are available and effective.

That provides solid ground for East Asian countries to mount campaigns against the tiger trade for medicinal purposes and for China to strongly maintain the domestic 1993 ban.

Equally, India and others need to conserve tiger habitats. Crucial are sufficient protection staff with motivation and adequate remuneration for facing the battle against poachers. They also need modern conservation methods. Models of conservation need to be modernized, bringing in commercial

operators working alongside or under official wildlife agencies.

Forest-based communities also must have a stake in protecting the tiger. A part of the gains from eco-tourism could be directed to such forest communities. There could be free cameras and prizes for community dwellers who track and photograph tigers. In the reserves of Periyar in southern India, there has been success in working with former poachers now turned into tourist guides.

Finally, these efforts will require sizable financing. Corporations featuring the symbol of the tiger, such as Exxon Mobil (they have a Save the Tiger fund) or Asia Pacific Breweries with its Tiger beer could support the cause.

The drive could also get a boost if celebrities would lend their prestige—imagine a campaign fronted by the Thai-American golfer Tiger Woods.

The tiger is an integral part of Asia's culture. Unless urgent action is taken, that magnificent symbol of these countries' heritage will be lost forever.

The Bangkok Post

The author is director-general of the World Bank's Independent Evaluation Group. The views expressed are his own.

POINT OF VIEW / George Junus Aditjondro

Authorities must return displaced Javanese to Aceh

The Helsinki peace agreement made on Aug. 15, 2005, between the Indonesian government and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) left some "home-work" for elected Aceh Governor Irwandy Yusuf and his North Sumatra counterpart Rudolf Pardede.

This homework involved deciding the fate of thousands of Javanese transmigrants stranded in North Sumatra and Riau in the late 1990s and early 2000s after fleeing violent attacks by armed groups.

Unfortunately, Governor Pardede perhaps forgets his province harbors thousands of Javanese refugee families from Aceh living in very poor conditions.

Aceh Governor Irwandy, a former GAM leader, also may not realize the Javanese transmigrants were evicted by units of armed men, who they believed were GAM combatants.

Irwandy presumably also doesn't realize under the Helsinki agreement, the

Javanese transmigrants are entitled to "an allocation of suitable farming land, employment or, in the case of incapacity to work, adequate social security from the authorities of Aceh".

And how do these internally displaced persons live in North Sumatra, and what is in store for them in the future?

I recently visited a community of 72 families of Javanese refugees from Aceh who had settled in the Sibatulotung mountain range. They sought safety there coming from different parts of Aceh. Now only 10 of these families remain in the Jati Mulia hamlet of Bosar Nauili Village. Their entire hamlet was destroyed allegedly by bulldozers and excavators from pulp producer Toba Pulp Lestari (TPL) in the neighboring district of Toba Samosir.

The incident occurred while 29 of the refugees and 24 other Bosar Nauili villagers, accused of being "forest plun-

derers" by local authorities, were imprisoned in Pematang Siantar, the district capital. This was after they were officially settled in the village by the same authorities, who had given them IDs and had collected land and property taxes from them for seven years.

But no local politicians complained against TPL's land acquisition, even though the residents were helpless Javanese transmigrants who had previously fled powerful and armed groups.

The Sibatulotung case is merely the tip of the iceberg. Nobody seems to care about the tens of thousands of Javanese transmigrants who were moved to Aceh by the national administration during the armed conflict between GAM and the Indonesian military.

Neither the government agencies of North Sumatra or Aceh, or Jakarta for that matter, seem to care about these people, most of whom have not been able to return to their homes in Aceh. So, it is high time for Governor Ir-

wandy to visit and discuss this matter with Governor Pardede. Irwandy must also bring this case to the attention of the central government.

If the Indonesian government and former Aceh rebel group GAM are to honor the Helsinki agreement they need to enable the Javanese transmigrants to return to their former homes in Aceh.

Similarly, if the Finnish government wants to maintain its reputation as peace broker in armed conflicts worldwide it must talk to Indonesia and help these poor folks who were expelled to remote areas in North Sumatra to return to their sweet Aceh home.

The Jakarta Post

The author, a guest lecturer at the Sanata Dharma University postgraduate program in Religious and Cultural Studies, is currently researching the political economy of post-Helsinki reconstruction in Aceh.

VOX POPULI, VOX DEI

Time for Moriya to show 'a sense of mission'

Fall is a dewy season. When we start walking, we try not to get our shoes wet. But once they get damp, we tend not to care and become bold. The old Japanese saying "People should avoid even a dew before they get wet" is a warning that once we err, even when we repeat mistakes, we tend not to feel guilty.

Did former Vice Defense Minister Takemasa Moriya continually resort to immoral conduct as many civil servants have done in the past? It became clear that Moriya was golf buddies with an executive of a trading company that had dealings with

the ministry. He is said to have played golf on more than 100 occasions with the man, who, it turns out, had vested interests. Such conduct is beyond common decency.

It also became clear that Moriya had the executive do favors for his family. In exchange, Moriya is suspected of helping the executive raise funds for his company. Treated as a "big shot vice minister" to be reckoned with, Moriya lorded over the ministry for many years.

Could it be that he became conceited with his power? The way he overstepped professional ethics is be-

yond reason.

The Self-Defense Forces were dispatched to Iraq when Moriya was vice minister. The Defense Agency was also upgraded to a ministry.

At the time, addressing those in uniform, Moriya demanded that "each one of the 240,000 SDF members possess a strong sense of mission to carry out their responsibility in their own divisions."

The way he contradicted his words with action reminds me of a World War II lieutenant general. Serving as the commander of a unit on the southern front, he raised a saber,

shouting "I will not let you die by yourselves" and ordered his men to carry out suicide aircraft attacks. However, once attacks by U.S. forces were imminent, he fled, leaving his men behind.

Some SDF members must feel betrayed by Moriya. Moves to summon him to testify in the Diet are also advancing. Moriya is urged to show a sense of mission to account for his actions. If he does nothing but wait idly for his clothes, damp from dew, to dry, he would contradict his own instructions.

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