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Lessons from the JSDF's First PKO Deployment: Reconsidering Japan's Participation in UNTAC and Its Implications for Contemporary Peacekeeping Policy

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines Japan's participation in the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) in 1992 as the first deployment of the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) to a United Nations peacekeeping operation (PKO), and analyzes the institutional, operational, and policy lessons derived from this experience. Established under the International Peace Cooperation Law enacted in the post-Cold War international environment, Japan's participation in UNTAC represented a critical starting point for the country's international peace cooperation policy.

This paper first examines the significance of the institutional framework based on the Five Principles for Participation in PKO. Second, it analyzes the development of overseas deployment capabilities and experience in multinational operations through airlift and sealift support by the Air Self-Defense Force and Maritime Self-Defense Force, as well as the activities of the engineering units deployed to Takeo Province. Third, it explores the impact of the death of a Japanese civilian police officer on domestic public opinion and governmental decision-making processes.

In addition, by comparing Japan's experience with that of Germany—another country that initiated overseas deployments under constitutional and historical constraints—this paper highlights the characteristics of peacekeeping participation by states with restricted military roles. Based on these analyses, the paper evaluates the significance of the UNTAC experience for subsequent improvements in Japan's PKO framework and the development of JSDF international cooperation activities, and presents historical insights relevant to the future of United Nations peacekeeping operations.

Keywords: Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF); United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC); UN Peacekeeping Operations (PKO); International Peace Cooperation Law; Civilian Police; Germany–Japan Comparison.

Японы Өөрийгөө хамгаалах хүчний энхийг сахиулах ажиллагааны туршлага, сургамж: UNTAC дахь оролцоо ба орчин үеийн энхийн ажиллагааны бодлогод үзүүлсэн нөлөө

Рюүжи ХОММЁО

Япон Улсын Нэгдсэн штабын коллежийн Энхийг сахиулах ажиллагааны сургалт, судалгааны төвийн Ерөнхий ахлах судлаачийн үүргийг түр орлон гүйцэтгэгч, Тэнгисийн цэргийн ахмад

ХУРААНГУЙ

Энэхүү өгүүлэлд Японы Өөрийгөө хамгаалах хүчин (ЯӨХХ)-ий НҮБ-ын энхийг сахиулах ажиллагаанд оролцсон анхны туршлага болох 1992 оны Камбож дахь UNTAC (United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia) ажиллагааг судлан авч үзэв. Хүйтэн дайны дараахан батлагдсан “Олон улсын энхийн хамтын ажиллагааны тухай хууль”-ийн хүрээнд хэрэгжсэн энэхүү ажиллагаа нь Япон Улсын энхийн төлөөх бодлогын чухал эхлэл цэг болсон юм.

Өгүүллэгийн эхний хэсэгт Японы Энхийг сахиулах ажиллагааны таван зарчимт тогтолцоо, Агаарын болон Тэнгисийн Өөрийгөө хамгаалах хүчний үзүүлсэн агаар болон усан замын тээврийн дэмжлэг, мөн Такео мужид байрласан инженерийн цэргийн салбарын үйл ажиллагаа, тэр дундаа хилийн чанадад хүч байрлуулсан болон олон үндэстний ажиллагаанд оролцсон туршлага, Японы цагдаагийн алба хаагч амь эрсэдсэн эмгэнэлт хэрэг явдал, үүнтэй холбогдуулан олон нийтийн санаа бодол, төдийгүй Засгийн газрын шийдвэр гаргах үйл явцад дүн шинжилгээ хийв. Түүнчлэн Үндсэн хуулинд заагдсан “Зэвсэгт хүчин”-тэй байхыг хориглосон заалт болон түүхэн үйл явдлаас улбаатай хилийн чанадад цэрэг үл илгээх тухай эрх зүйн хязгаарлалт дор Герман, Япон хоёр улсын энхийг сахиулах ажиллагаанд оролцсон бодлого, хэрэгжилтийн онцлогийг харьцуулан судлав.

Түлхүүр үгс: Японы Өөрийгөө хамгаалах хүчин (ЯӨХХ), НҮБ-ын Камбож дахь шилжилтийн үеийн захиргаа (UNTAC); НҮБ-ын Энхийг сахиулах ажиллагаа (ЭСА), Олон улсын энхийн хамтын ажиллагааны тухай хууль, цагдаагийн амь нас, Герман-Японы улсын энхийг сахиулах ажиллагаа.

Introduction

In 1992, Japan enacted the International Peace Cooperation Law (PKO Law) and dispatched personnel to Cambodia for the first time under the framework of a United Nations peacekeeping operation (PKO). Since then, the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) have accumulated experience and established credibility as a member of the international community through participation in operations in various regions around the world. Participation in PKO has become one of Japan’s principal means of contributing to international peace and stability.

Following Japan’s defeat in August 1945, the Constitution prohibited the maintenance of armed forces. Although the Self-Defense Forces were subsequently established as the organization responsible for exercising Japan’s inherent right of self-defense, overseas deployments involving the possible use of force were not conducted for nearly four decades after their establishment. However, the end of the Cold War marked a turning point. After the Gulf War, a widespread perception emerged within Japan’s political leadership and society that Japan’s lack of personnel contributions had been criticized by the international community. As a result, “international contribution” became a major policy issue in domestic political debate.

Against this background, in April 1991, the Maritime Self-Defense Force deployed minesweeping units to the Persian Gulf following the end of the Gulf War. This operation represented the first overseas deployment of the Self-Defense Forces since their establishment. Subsequently, in 1992, amid increasing expectations for Japan's contribution to peacebuilding efforts in Cambodia, Japan decided to dispatch the JSDF under the framework of a United Nations peacekeeping operation for the first time.

This paper provides an overview of Japan's first deployment of the JSDF to Cambodia and examines the lessons derived from this experience in order to offer a basis for considering the future of United Nations peacekeeping operations at a time when they face significant challenges. The ongoing war in Ukraine and the continuing tensions involving Iran illustrate the uncertainty surrounding contemporary international conflicts. In this context, the significance of revisiting the Cambodian case lies in its similarities to the situation immediately following the end of the Cold War, when the prospects for post-conflict reconstruction were equally uncertain. The lessons learned from peacekeeping operations conducted during that earlier transitional period may therefore provide useful insights for addressing current and future challenges.

Furthermore, the peacekeeping operation in Cambodia represented a turning point in the history of UN peacekeeping operations, as it significantly expanded the scope of responsibilities beyond those traditionally associated with conventional ceasefire-monitoring missions. In this sense, UNTAC constituted a landmark example of the transition toward multidimensional peacekeeping operations.

In Japan, the deployment to Cambodia as the first overseas deployment of the JSDF attracted considerable attention. On the tenth and twentieth anniversaries of the deployment, symposiums and various academic presentations were organized, and after more than thirty years had passed, the gradual declassification of official documents has further advanced research on the political and diplomatic history of Japan's participation in UNTAC¹.

In this paper, institutional and international aspects of Japan's participation are examined primarily through English-language sources and publicly available online materials. At the same time, the realities of field operations and policy decision-making processes are analyzed with reference to oral histories and testimonies by individuals directly involved in the mission, many of which are available only in printed form.

The following sections examine the policy decision-making process in Japan, the activities of the JSDF in Cambodia, and the activities of Japanese civilian police officers, including the only fatality Japan has experienced in its participation in UN peacekeeping operations to date. Where appropriate, comparisons are also made with Germany, which—like Japan—had been constrained in overseas military deployment as a result of its experience following the Second World War but began expanding its participation in international peace operations during the same period.

¹ Due to space limitations, a comprehensive listing of relevant Japanese-language literature is not provided here. This study relies primarily on representative works in Japanese political and diplomatic history research on Japan's participation in UNTAC. Many of these sources remain available only in Japanese and are not always easily accessible internationally; however, they constitute an essential foundation for understanding the policy-making process and operational experiences discussed in this paper.

The Institutional Framework for Japan's PKO Participation

Japan's participation in peacekeeping operations (PKO) must be understood in the context of the constraints imposed by Article 9 of its post-war constitution, which has shaped Japan's security policy since the end of World War II. Under this constitution, Japan's military actions are strictly limited to self-defense, and the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) have been primarily tasked with the defense of Japan's territory. As a result, throughout the Cold War, the SDF was not deployed overseas, and Japan's security policy relied heavily on the deterrence provided by the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty.

However, the Gulf War at the end of the Cold War marked a pivotal moment, prompting Japan to reconsider its security policy. While Japan provided substantial financial assistance during the war, the inability to deploy the SDF drew criticism from the international community ([Suzuki, 2017](#)). This experience highlighted the need for Japan to contribute more actively to international peace efforts, which became a significant political issue domestically.

In this context, the Japanese government began working on creating an institutional framework for international peace cooperation. In 1992, Japan enacted the International Peace Cooperation Law (PKO Cooperation Law), which laid the foundation for Japan's participation in peacekeeping operations ([Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, n.d.](#)). The law was passed under the administration of Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa, and Japan's first PKO deployment was initiated immediately thereafter with the dispatch of the SDF to Cambodia under the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) ([Shoji, 2015, p. 102](#)).

The establishment of the law required careful political negotiation, given the cautious public opinion and political party debates regarding the deployment of the SDF abroad. This process led to the introduction of the “Five Principles for Participation in PKO,” which became the core guidelines for Japan's involvement in international peacekeeping. These principles include: the establishment of a ceasefire, consent from the host country, the maintenance of neutrality, withdrawal if conditions are not met, and the limitation of the use of force to a minimum ([Suzuki, 2017, pp. 4–5](#)). These principles served both as a political compromise and as an institutional framework that limited Japan's involvement to traditional ceasefire monitoring-type PKOs ([Fujishige, 2022, pp. 88–89](#)).

However, the PKO Cooperation Law was enacted during a time when the nature of PKO was undergoing significant changes. Traditional ceasefire monitoring was expanding to include other roles such as election monitoring, administrative support, human rights observation, and the facilitation of democratic processes, with UNTAC serving as a prime example of this shift ([Boutros-Ghali, 1992, pp.5-12](#)). The participation in UNTAC was Japan's first deployment in such a new type of PKO and played a critical role in shaping the foundational framework of Japan's PKO policy.

At this point, it is useful to consider the example of Germany, which, like Japan, was cautious about the overseas deployment of its military due to its historical background around World War II. In Germany's case, participation in the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) also marked a significant policy turning point. Both Japan and Germany gradually expanded their involvement in international peace

activities following the changes in the post-Cold War security environment and the Gulf War. However, while Germany was shaped by the “culture of restraint” formed after the war, it expanded its operational scope through regional security frameworks such as the United Nations, NATO, and the European Union. In contrast, Japan has focused primarily on contributing human resources to United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (PKO) ([Yamashita, 2022](#)).

The Activities of the Self-Defense Forces (SDF)

The United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) was established as part of a UN peacekeeping operation under the Paris Peace Agreement, signed in October 1991. The agreement was designed to provide a comprehensive solution to the long-running Cambodian civil war and was realized in the context of the international changes following the end of the Cold War, particularly the political adjustments between the concerned countries ([Kesavan, 2011, pp. 14–19](#)). UNTAC can be evaluated as one of the early examples symbolizing the transformation of UN PKOs after the end of the Cold War.

Unlike the traditional ceasefire-monitoring PKO, UNTAC was designed as a multifaceted PKO, which not only included ceasefire monitoring but also the verification of foreign military withdrawals, monitoring of disarmament and demobilization, administrative support, human rights monitoring, and election support. Under this new attempt by UNTAC, the first Japanese UN staff member to serve as a Deputy Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament, Yasushi Akashi, took on the role of Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General, leading UNTAC. UNTAC had a ceasefire agreement through the Paris Peace Agreement, and except for a part of the Khmer Rouge (Pol Pot's faction), the relevant parties had accepted UN-administered transitional governance. Furthermore, UNTAC maintained neutrality in the execution of its tasks, including election monitoring, ensuring that all five principles for PKO participation were met ([Suzuki, 2017 pp. 6–7](#)). This assignment can be positioned as a specific example of the multi-dimensional peace activities outlined in the “Agenda for Peace” proposed after the Cold War by the United Nations ([Boutros-Ghali, 1992, pp.28-33](#)).

Japan participated in UNTAC by dispatching ceasefire monitoring personnel, SDF engineering units, civilian police officers, and election monitors, marking Japan's first full-scale involvement in UN peacekeeping operations. In particular, the engineering units, consisting of approximately 600 members, carried out road and bridge repairs in Takeo province, playing an important role in establishing infrastructure for the elections. Additionally, civilian police officers contributed to stabilizing the security environment through monitoring and guiding local police activities, while election monitors supported the implementation of democratic elections. In the case of the SDF's deployment to UNTAC, the Japan Air Self-Defense Force (JASDF) and Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) played a crucial role in long-distance transportation of personnel and equipment. Specifically, JASDF carried out personnel and material transportation with C-130 aircraft, and JMSDF handled the transportation of heavy equipment using transport ships, supporting the deployment of forces to Cambodia. These transportation operations provided the foundation for Japan's first full-scale participation in UN peacekeeping activities ([Cabinet Office of Japan, n.d.](#)).

These transportation activities were not merely rear support but were the first instance where the SDF deployed personnel and equipment over long distances to overseas regions as part of a real mission. The continuous airlift by JASDF and sea transport by JMSDF became a pivotal experience in the formation of the SDF's capacity for international peace cooperation activities. This experience was significant not only for Japan's continued participation in UN peacekeeping operations but also for the broader international cooperation activities in which the SDF would engage.

The commander of the 600-member engineering unit was LtCol. Takashi Watanabe (at the time). Due to his limited experience on the ground, his selection seemed unusual, but the decision was based on the flexibility required by the special nature of the mission, considering his wide experience, including studying in the United States and serving as a senior officer in the Ministry of Defense. Tetsuya Nishimoto, the then Chief of Staff of the SDF, recalled this decision ([Nishimoto, 2010, p. 29](#)).

Watanabe, twenty years after his deployment, reflected in a symposium that before the UNTAC deployment, the Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF) had not been organized with the assumption of overseas activities, and opportunities to directly engage with foreign military organizations and operations had been very limited. Although joint training with the US military had been conducted since 1977, that experience was mainly focused on relations with the US military. Therefore, the experience of working with multinational forces other than the US military in UNTAC was the first opportunity for the GSDF to encounter the standard organization and operations of other countries' military forces, and Watanabe claimed that it brought about an important change in the SDF's international military awareness ([Joint Staff College, 2023, p.22](#)).

The engineering unit, led by Watanabe, also faced difficult situations upon arriving in Cambodia. They encountered harsh weather conditions and confusion stemming from the dilemma between Japan's command and the “directives” from the UN. When local NGOs requested help for residents suffering from flooding during the rainy season, the timing of the assistance was lost while the Japanese government was confirming whether the work could proceed ([Watanabe, 2007, p. 152](#)). Although this was a relatively minor incident, Watanabe pointed out that when there is a significant difference between the command of the home country and the directives from the UN, special consideration is needed, and such discrepancies may prevent maintaining fairness with other countries. In the case of the SDF, the use of weapons was restricted to self-defense and emergency evacuation based on domestic law ([Watanabe, 2007, pp. 159–160](#)). As a result, the SDF was assigned to relatively stable areas, with its base in Takeo, which was close to Phnom Penh, but this arrangement was more of a benefit stemming from the presence of the Japanese special representative ([Shoji, 2015, p. 117](#)). Thus, the assignment of missions and areas of responsibility were not always equal to those of other foreign military forces on the ground.

The restrictions on the use of weapons imposed on Japan's SDF became increasingly apparent after Watanabe's term ended and when the second dispatch commander, Yoshio Ishioroshi, took over. The focus of UNTAC activities gradually shifted from ceasefire monitoring to election support. During this process, the need for security in election monitoring became a critical issue, and the SDF was required to carry out its mission under the legal restriction that unit-level weapon usage was not authorized ([Watanabe,](#)

2007, p. 152).

To address these issues on the ground, armed SDF personnel were assigned to transport drinking water to civilian election monitors as a way of demonstrating deterrence. In certain instances, SDF personnel intentionally placed themselves in the front line to create opportunities for self-defense, effectively assuming risks. These patchwork solutions were accumulated to bridge the gap between the legal constraints on weapon usage and the demands of the mission (Murakami, 2007, pp. 143–145). However, it is believed that these experiences significantly influenced subsequent institutional improvements. In other words, in international peace cooperation activities, there were frequent opportunities for SDF units to work alongside other PKO personnel, UN staff, and NGOs, and there were cases where they had to act together with election monitors, surpassing the traditional framework of mission design. In response to these practical developments, subsequent legal revisions allowed the use of weapons not only for self-preservation but also for the protection of the lives or bodies of those accompanying the personnel in the mission (Cabinet Office of Japan, 2001). This change marked a gradual revision of the framework to align with the realities of international peace cooperation activities, and the experiences from UNTAC played a significant role in influencing these reforms.

Despite the various challenges faced, the mission of the engineering units, which primarily focused on road and bridge repairs, was largely carried out without major obstacles and played a crucial role in laying the groundwork for the elections. These activities were highly regarded within the overall UNTAC mission, demonstrating that Japan's PKO participation had achieved substantial success as part of international peace cooperation with human contributions (Watanabe, 2007, p. 163). Notably, like Japan's participation with the engineering units, Germany also dispatched a medical unit, and both countries started their overseas deployments focused on support missions rather than combat operations. However, in Germany's case, one Bundeswehr soldier was killed in an attack by an armed group (Kobashi, 2023, pp. 76–78), which made the start of their deployment more challenging.

Although the activities of the engineering unit achieved certain results (Murakami, 2007, p. 151), it cannot be said that the lessons learned from these experiences were adequately organized and utilized. It was known that the GSDF had compiled detailed records and analyzed lessons learned, but as Tetsuya Nishimoto, the then Chief of Staff, recalled (Nishimoto, 2010, pp. 107–108), the positioning and application of these records were not always clear. This suggests that the process of systematically accumulating and utilizing the lessons from Japan's first full-scale PKO participation may not have functioned properly.

Victims in the Activities of Civilian Police Officers

Japan's participation in the Cambodia PKO (Peacekeeping Operations) was not only the achievement of a goal through the deployment of Self-Defense Forces (SDF) personnel but also a challenge in the dispatch of civilian police officers, a new and complex task. While the SDF successfully completed its mission without any casualties, unfortunately, the mission of the civilian police resulted in one fatality. This unfortunate fact has led to fewer studies on the dispatch of civilian police officers compared to the

dispatch of the SDF (Shoji, 2015, p. 109). However, about 20 years after the deployment, television programs focused on the police officers involved in the mission were created, and books based on these programs were published (Hatate, 2018). In this section, I will analyze the factors that led to the victim's death in contrast to the SDF's activities, and focus on the government's response and the collection of lessons learned.

While the SDF's base of operations was located in Takeo, near the capital Phnom Penh, where the personnel operated collectively, the civilian police officers were deployed in smaller units of five across Cambodia. The area close to the Thai border, in particular, had severe security issues, and for the civilian police, who were restricted in their use of weapons, the environment presented significant risks. The attack on the civilian police in Ampil occurred in a region of Cambodia where anti-government factions were active, and government control was lacking. Despite this, UNTAC designated this area for the deployment of civilian police officers. This area had many landmines left from the civil war and was routinely disturbed by armed conflicts. The contrast between the SDF's collective deployment in relatively stable areas and the civilian police's dispersed placement in areas with unstable security embodies the realities of Japan's PKO participation. In general, police officers are seen as “guardians of the law,” and are empowered to exercise authority based on a rule-of-law system. However, in Cambodia, the law did not exist, and even in tasks such as guiding local police, the police themselves were not functioning, rendering the civilian police officers powerless and in situations not dissimilar to ordinary civilians (Hatate, 2018, pp. 87–98).

In such a context, on May 4, 1993, while preparing for the general elections, the UNTAC convoy in Ampil was attacked by armed groups with rockets and small arms. Five Japanese civilian police officers were caught up in the attack, and Police Sergeant Major Haruyuki Takada was killed. This incident had two major consequences for the Japanese government. First, the Japanese government's instruction to transfer the casualties to a hospital in Thailand was regarded by the UNTAC Civilian Police Commissioner as an abandonment of the mission, which threatened the relationship with UNTAC. Second, public opinion in Japan, which had already been divided over the deployment, reignited intense disagreement following the casualty (Shoji, 2015, pp. 121–122). The government considered the possible collapse of the first PKO principle concerning the existence of a ceasefire agreement and discussed whether to withdraw from the mission.

At this critical moment, Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa faced a difficult political decision on whether Japan should continue the mission or withdraw. After hearing reports and assessments from the Deputy Foreign Minister and other officials, Miyazawa firmly decided to continue the mission while reinforcing security measures and supporting the electoral process. He strongly emphasized the importance of maintaining Japan's “credibility of international contributions” (Shoji, 2015, p. 124) and insisted on “finishing the work that was started” (Takeuchi, 1994, p. 96). His determination and political leadership played a decisive role in sustaining Japan's first full-scale PKO mission despite severe domestic pressure and public criticism.

This process was later recalled by Takahiro Shin-yo, who was Director of the UN Section in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the time. Shin-yo recalled (2024, pp. 172–173) that, based on detailed information from the field, the government judged

that the activities of the armed groups were sporadic and temporary and did not indicate the collapse of the overall ceasefire agreement. This assessment, supported by careful information gathering and analysis, contributed to the political decision to continue the mission. This experience remains a valuable example of how political leadership, operational assessment, and commitment to international cooperation can sustain peacekeeping activities even under difficult circumstances and strong public pressure. Following this, Japan has not sent civilian police officers to any other PKO missions, except for East Timor starting in 1999. This contrasts with the SDF, which continued and expanded its operations in Mozambique and Somalia. Structural factors such as the organization of police in local municipalities and concerns about operating in a drastically different security environment are some of the reasons behind this (IIPS, 2013, p. 13). Additionally, Shin-yo pointed out (2024, pp. 176) the significant impact the death of the civilian police officer had on police officers and their families at the time. The shock and impact this incident had on Japanese society were tremendous.

As with the SDF, it has been revealed that lessons learned from the activities of civilian police officers were not adequately analyzed. The record of the internal review that was conducted is only about eight pages of A4 paper (Hatate, 2018, pp. 310–311), and there were no statements from police officers, as was the case with the SDF. It seems that the treatment of these lessons was unclear. When comparing the subsequent deployment activities of the SDF and the police, the difference in attitudes toward reflecting these lessons in future operations becomes clear.

Conclusion

This paper has examined Japan’s first full-scale participation in United Nations peacekeeping operations (PKO) through the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), focusing on the policy decision-making process, the activities of the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF), and the activities of the civilian police officers.

First, in terms of institutional aspects, the dispatch of personnel to UNTAC was the first major operational case under the International Peace Cooperation Law established in 1992, marking an important starting point for Japan’s PKO participation framework. The activities were carried out under a carefully designed institutional structure based on the Five Principles of PKO Participation, and this became a pivotal moment in establishing the basic operational principles for Japan’s subsequent international peace cooperation activities. Additionally, the constraints on the use of force for ensuring the safety of election monitoring activities, which became evident, led to legislative reforms enabling the use of force not only for self-preservation but also to protect those serving alongside the self-defense personnel. These reforms were shaped by the experiences from UNTAC, which had a significant impact on improving the legal framework.

From an operational perspective, the first-ever deployment of integrated forces including the long-distance transport by the Japan Air Self-Defense Force (JASDF) and the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) was a crucial milestone in the development of Japan’s overseas deployment capabilities. Furthermore, working alongside multinational forces expanded the Japan Self-Defense Forces’ international operational awareness, which had previously been largely centered around cooperation with U.S. forces. This experience was not only important for subsequent PKO operations

but also for broader international cooperation activities.

However, despite the valuable experiences gained through these operations, the way in which these experiences were systematically organized and accumulated as organizational lessons remains insufficient. While it is known that the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force (JGSDF) organized detailed records and analyzed lessons learned, the positioning and application of these records were not always clear. In addition, there was no systematic organizational review based on the significant incident of the death of a civilian police officer, which may have impacted the continuation of subsequent deployments. Furthermore, the lack of a cohesive effort across different government ministries is acknowledged by former Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono, who attributes the difficulty of undertaking a comprehensive review to confusion stemming from the change in government following the shift from the ruling to opposition parties (Hatate, 2018, pp. 316–317). This indicates a need for further reflection on the approach to collecting lessons learned from Japan’s international peace cooperation activities.

Moreover, following the death of a civilian police officer, debates over the application of the Five Principles of PKO were reignited. Despite this, the Miyazawa administration maintained its stance on continuing the mission. This decision was based on an analysis of the local situation by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which concluded that the overall ceasefire agreement remained intact, thus making it a crucial political decision to maintain Japan’s credibility in international peace cooperation. This experience provides important insights into how national international cooperation continuity can be ensured in challenging circumstances and amidst surging public opinion.

While the deployment of civilian police officers became more limited afterward, Japan’s Self-Defense Forces continued and expanded its international peace cooperation activities. This marks a shift in Japan’s emphasis from civilian police officers to Self-Defense Forces as the main contributor to international peacekeeping efforts, with the experiences in Cambodia shaping the direction of future activities.

As this paper has shown, Japan’s participation in UNTAC was not only an important experience for Japan but also a significant turning point for Germany, which similarly faced historical and constitutional constraints regarding overseas military deployment after World War II. Both countries initially participated in UN peacekeeping operations through non-combat support missions. The Cambodian experience became an important starting point for both Japan and Germany in expanding their engagement in international peace cooperation. In this sense, UNTAC can be understood as a shared post-Cold War moment in which states with constraints on military deployment began to contribute more actively to the maintenance of international peace.

In conclusion, Japan’s participation in UNTAC represents a critical turning point in terms of institutional, operational, and policy decisions. It also exemplifies how nations with diverse historical backgrounds and military constraints cooperated in shaping a new international order. While the future of peacebuilding in the international community following the conclusion of the Ukraine war remains uncertain, the experiences from UNTAC, implemented shortly after the Cold War, continue to offer important lessons for countries with military constraints as they engage in international peace cooperation and help guide future peacebuilding efforts.

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