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# **In Nomen Omen: How Intra- and Inter-Organizational Politics Undermined the Development of Amphibious Capabilities Within the Japanese Mine Warfare Force**

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# In Nomen Omen

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How Intra- and Inter-Organizational Politics Undermined the Development of Amphibious Capabilities Within the Japanese Mine Warfare Force

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**Abstract:**

Most scholars agree that the Japanese amphibious strategy is fundamentally flawed by the lack of cooperation between the Japanese Self Defense Forces' (JSDF) ground and maritime branches, as well as the latter's lack of dedicated amphibious capabilities. However, while the struggles of the Japanese Ground Self Defense Force (JGSDF) have been extensively documented in papers and interviews by academics, retired JGSDF and United States Marine Corps (USMC) officers, research on its Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force (JMSDF) counterpart has lagged behind. The JMSDF's amphibious warfare unit, counterintuitively or perhaps fittingly called the Mine Warfare Force (MWF), is only mentioned contextually, and portrayed as an inadequate JMSDF counterpart to the JGSDF's marines. Yet, the archipelago nation, standing as the greatest obstacle to China's seaward expansion, cannot afford to possess ineffective amphibious forces. Whether it is from the perspective of containing, deterring, or fighting the People's Liberation Army (PLA), for Japan, the ability to quickly deploy and sustain forces on its islands is essential. Why was arguably the most professional Navy in Asia unable to develop an effective amphibious counterpart for Japan's naval infantry? By conducting a comprehensive analysis of Japanese naval literature from official and quasi-official sources, this thesis aims to demonstrate that, contrary to common wisdom, neither Japan's pacifist nature nor a preconceived lack of JMSDF interest in amphibious capabilities shaped this result. Instead, the deeper reasons for this failure must be sought in intra- and inter-organizational politics within the JSDF. To prove this point, the thesis will analyze the MWF's evolution from its inception to the present day, focusing on three transformational moments that occurred in the periods of 2011 to 2013, 2014 to 2017, and 2018 to 2023.

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Index of Acronyms:

**A2/AD:** Anti-Access/Area-Denial

**AAV:** Amphibious Assault Vehicles

**AF:** Amphibious Force

**ARDB:** Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade

**ASW:** Anti-Submarine Warfare

**ATLA:** Acquisition, Technology & Logistics Agency

**BMD:** Ballistic Missile Defense

**C2:** Command and Control

**C4ISR:** Command, Control, Computers, Communications, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance

**DDH:** Helicopter Destroyer

**DBP:** Defense Buildup Program

**DMO:** Distributed Maritime Operations

**DPJ:** Democratic Party of Japan

**FEF:** Fleet Escort Force

**FFM:** Frigate, Multipurpose/Mine-Warfare

**FFG:** Guided Missile Frigate

**HA/DR:** Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief

**IJA:** Imperial Japanese Army

**IJN:** Imperial Japanese Navy

**JCG:** Japanese Coast Guard

**JGSDF:** Japanese Ground Self Defense Force

**JMSDF:** Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force

**JMoD:** Japanese Ministry of Defense

**JP:** Joint Publication

**JSDF:** Japanese Self Defense Forces

**LDP:** Liberal Democratic Party

**LST:** Landing Ship, Tank

**MCSC:** Maritime Command and Staff College

**MOOTW:** Military Operations Other Than War

**MSO:** Maritime Staff Office

**MST:** Minesweeper, Tender

**MWF:** Mine Warfare Force

**NDPG 16:** National Defense Program for Fiscal Year 2005 and Beyond

**NDPG 22:** National Defense Program for Fiscal Year 2011 and Beyond

**NDPG 25:** National Defense Program for Fiscal Year 2014 and Beyond

**NDPG 30:** National Defense Program for Fiscal Year 2019 and Beyond

**NDPO:** National Defense Program Outlines

**NDS:** National Defense Strategy

**NSC:** National Security Council

**NSS:** National Security Strategy

**PLA:** People's Liberation Army

**PLAN:** People's Liberation Army Navy

**SDF:** Self Defense Forces

**SSG:** Strategic Studies Group

**TF76:** Task Force 76

**US:** United States

**USMC:** United States Marine Corps

**USN:** United States Navy

**VLS:** Vertical Launch System

**WAIR:** Western Army Infantry Regiment

## Introduction:

While the debate on how Japan's grand strategy should be interpreted in light of the Japanese Self Defense Forces' (JSDF) new offensive capabilities rages on, the discussion on how the capabilities themselves should be judged has been mostly confined to technical military journals, brief policy commentaries, and media reports. Japan's amphibious forces are no exception to this pattern. Even scholars who have researched them have mostly focused on the developments in the Japanese Ground Self-Defense Force's (JGSDF) naval infantry unit. Far less attention has been directed towards its Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) counterpart, the Mine Warfare Force (MWF), and its struggles. This thesis aims to bridge this research gap by explaining why the JMSDF was unable to establish an effective amphibious counterpart to the JGSDF marines.

In discussing amphibious operations, the paper will adopt the definition provided by the United States (US) Joint Publication (JP) 3-02, which outlines the fundamental principles governing US amphibious doctrine. The document was chosen not only in consideration of the US's status as the world's leading military power but more so because the definition of amphibious operations it presents is adopted by all JMSDF authors discussing amphibious capabilities. According to the JP 3-02, an amphibious operation "is a military operation launched from the sea by an amphibious force to conduct landing force operations within the littorals" (U.S. Department of Defense, 2019). All amphibious operations are carried out by an Amphibious Force (AF) composed of a naval and ground component, the second usually being a marine unit, making amphibious operations "complex and inherently joint or multi-Service" (U.S. Department of Defense, 2019).

Consequently, coordination between the naval and ground components of the AF is of primary importance. To ensure unity between them, both the US Marine Corps (USMC) and United States Navy (USN) are placed under the unified control of the Department of the Navy, despite remaining separate services. Other countries achieve the goal of unity between their navies and naval infantries by making the latter a branch of the former. This is the case for the oldest marine unit still in existence, the Spanish Marine Infantry, but

the same goes for China's People's Liberation Army Navy Marine Corps, for Russia's Naval Infantry, for Italy's "San Marco" Brigade, for South Korea's Republic of Korea Marine Corps, and for almost every other country's amphibious forces.

The JSDF, however, divided its ground and naval components between the JMSDF's Mine Warfare Force (MWF), which was placed in charge of amphibious operations in August 2013, and the Japanese Ground Self Defense Forces' (JGSDF) Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade (ARDB), officially established five years later, in March 2018. Japanese scholars argued that the unconventional choice of establishing a naval infantry unit within the JGSDF does not constitute a major problem: "As it turns out, between the Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) and Navy (IJN), it was the Army that expressed strong interest in amphibious operations. The relevant equipment of the Army was superior by far" (Ishizu, 2014). However, considering the IJA's past record of poor collaboration with the Imperial Navy, the JSDF's decision to divide its amphibious forces between different branches suggests that the services have not learned from Japan's Showa-era military history, when a lack of inter-service cooperation plagued the armed forces of Imperial Japan.

Yet, for the archipelago nation, effective amphibious capabilities are a must-have requirement. Due to its geographical position, Japan constitutes the northern half of the "first island chain", a string of islands completely closing off China's coast and stretching from the Japanese home islands to the island of Borneo. Even inside this "impassable maritime great wall" (Yoshihara, 2020), as some Chinese defense analysts call it, Japan's Nansei Islands arguably constitute the strongest link of the chain. It is also a forced passageway "that the Chinese Navy must break through to enter the oceans" (Yoshihara, 2020). Furthermore, the benefits that controlling the Nansei Islands grants to the US-Japan alliance are not only defensive in nature. In the vast maritime region of the Western Pacific, even small islets offer precious real estate that allows Japanese and American forces to project power towards Taiwan and the Chinese mainland.



However, the advantages offered by Japan's geographical configuration should not be taken for granted. This "Great Wall in reverse" (Yoshihara, 2020) will serve as an effective obstacle to contain, deter, and fight the People's Liberation Army (PLA), but only so long as US and Japanese forces man its sentinel towers. In other words, any US-Japan contingent stationed in the Nansei Archipelago, which sits squarely inside the Chinese Anti-Access/Area-Denial (A2/AD) sphere, would be virtually useless without the necessary amphibious capability to be sustained, relocated, and reinforced. Conversely, thanks to the multitude of islands dotting the Western Pacific, land forces supported by adequate amphibious capabilities could still prove vital in the theater.

The Western Pacific's geography as well as the threat from China's A2/AD capabilities collectively place a premium on developing amphibious capabilities within the JSDF. However, for the JGSDF's marines to successfully accomplish their mission, they would need an effective JMSDF counterpart with robust Command-and-Control (C2) and sealift capabilities. Regrettably, as discussed later, multiple scholars point to the absence of both as core weaknesses of Japan's amphibious forces. Why was the oldest professional navy in Asia unable to assemble an effective counterpart to the JGSDF's marines? This thesis will argue that the reasons behind the MWF's failure can be traced to "inter-organizational" rivalries between the JMSDF and JGSDF, as well as "intra-organizational" dynamics within the JMSDF itself.

Inter-organizational struggles within the Japanese armed forces are a recurring phenomenon. Many scholars point to the services' strained Cold War-era relations and even those of their predecessors, the IJN and IJA, as the foundation of the JSDF's persistent lack of "jointness" (Goldman, 2013; Harold & Koichiro & Hornung, & Koichi, & Simcock, 2018; Hornung, 2020; Kallender-Umezu, 2015; Newsham, 2017; Schreer, 2020). However, while the influence of the JSDF's legacy on the present-day services is undeniable, attributing the entirety of their challenges to their Showa-era past, whether it involves broader interoperability issues or specific concerns regarding amphibious capabilities, is a tendency that invites oversimplification. This thesis will argue that much more contingent inter-service struggles over budget allocation and personnel distribution, against the backdrop of internal political instability during Japan's

"revolving door cabinets" era, significantly contributed to the decline of the MWF as an amphibious unit in the mid-2010s.

Moreover, while rivalries might be easier to identify when examining inter-service relations, it does not imply that within the same service, different organizations cannot have distinct and competing priorities. In line with this reasoning, the thesis aims to introduce a new variable to the discourse surrounding Japan's amphibious capabilities: intra-organizational dynamics. The paper will argue that organizational considerations within the JMSDF not only influenced the service's decision to designate the MWF as its amphibious unit, but they also continue to shape the debate on the JMSDF's strategy to this day.

## Literature Review:

As the Japanese Self Defense Forces (JSDF) keep evolving, acquiring new offensive capabilities that would have been considered taboo not long ago, a debate unfolds inside international and domestic policymaking as well as academic circles as to how these changes should be interpreted. Many have considered these developments in line with Yoshida Shigeru's doctrine, characterized by a bare-bones defense posture, a focus on economic priorities, and dependence on the United States' (US) conventional and nuclear umbrella (Hornung & Mochizuki, 2016; Liff, 2015; Oros, 2015). According to these scholars, the new JSDF's capabilities must be seen as the natural adjustment of Prime Minister Yoshida's post-war defense policy, slightly adapted to keep up with the declining security environment surrounding the country. On the other hand, others have argued that Japan has abandoned its minimalist defense posture and is returning, if it has not already, to geopolitics (Gustafsson & Hagström & Hanssen, 2018; Hugues, 2017; 2022; Maslow, 2015; Samules, 2007). According to these scholars, the argument that Japan is still a pacifist country restrained by its population's anti-militarism struggles to keep up with the systematic dismantlement of almost every legal or customary restraint on the use of military power in the last decades. However, while the debate on Japan's grand strategy continues, considerably less effort has been directed towards researching the tactical level of JSDF capabilities and their broader implications.

The JSDF's amphibious capabilities are no exception to this rule, as emphasized by Scott W. Harold (Harold et al., 2018), in a recent policy roundtable. Nevertheless, the few scholars who did delve into the topic consistently pointed out two recurring critical issues: an entrenched lack of "jointness" between the Japanese Ground (JGSDF) and Maritime Self Defense Forces (JMSDF) and the latter's lack of dedicated amphibious capabilities, especially sealift assets. This analysis successfully achieves the challenging task of reconciling viewpoints from American, Japanese, and Chinese authors. Indeed, analyzing the opinions of Chinese defense scholars, Toshi Yoshihara (2020) discovers their strong skepticism regarding the JMSDF's amphibious capabilities. They assess that even under peacetime conditions, the most the JMSDF could accomplish is to deploy one battalion of marines. If deterrence was one of the main motivations for

establishing the JGSDF's marines in 2018, also known as the Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade (ARDB), the intended effect was not realized. Why is it that in the past 13 years, since the 2010 Defense Guidelines called for the establishment of amphibious capabilities within the JSDF, Japan has not been able to produce an effective amphibious force? The existing literature presents two primary arguments to address this issue: Japan's pacifism and the historical lack of cooperation between the JGSDF and JMSDF during the Cold War.

The "Japanese pacifism" argument is relatively straightforward, asserting that Japan's lackluster amphibious capabilities can be attributed to its history as a peace-oriented nation and the limitations imposed on the JSDF by the country's constitution. Goldman (2013) states clearly that "the relatively limited strategic lift and the short range of key capabilities central to amphibious operations, such as ship-to-shore connectors, reflect the constraints of Japan's postwar constitution" and that previous attempts at acquiring similar capabilities, even at the height of the Cold War, were shut down due to the country's "aversion to military matters" (Goldman, 2013). Hornung & Mochizuki (2016) echo this sentiment, underscoring that successive Japanese governments have refrained from pursuing power projection capabilities due to the "bitter experience that led to the Pacific War," a restraint compounded by Japan's pacifist constitution. Benjamin Schreer (2020) also highlights how "Japanese experts are at pains" to emphasize how the JSDF's emerging amphibious capabilities are merely defensive in nature. According to this thesis, the country's pacifist nature not only hindered the introduction of dedicated amphibious assets at a political level but also directly influenced the JSDF's approach to amphibious operations.

However, the "Japanese pacifism" argument does not acknowledge the evolution of Japan's security policy that has been unfolding since the early 1990s (Maslow, 2015). This process became most evident with the 2007 Abe administration, which implemented significant policy changes, such as elevating the Japanese Defense Agency to ministry status (Samules, 2007). Even after the Abe cabinet fell, the subsequent Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) administration continued in its footsteps, introducing the "Dynamic Defense Force" concept (Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, 2010) in its 2010 National Defense

Program for Fiscal Year 2011 and Beyond (NDPG 22), the importance of which will be explored later. The DPJ administration also paved the way for many of the security reforms championed by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), proposing the establishment of the National Security Council (NSC) and relaxing the Three Principles on Arms Exports (Liff, 2015).

The subsequent Abe legislation pursued a "normalist" defense policy, achieving important milestones in rapid succession, including the establishment of Japan's first National Security Council (NSC), the creation of its first National Security Strategy (NSS) document, the implementation of the secrets protection law, and the reinterpretation of the Japanese constitution to allow for collective self-defense (Kitaoka, 2014; Hughes, 2017). This "normalist" trend continued through successive LDP governments, culminating in the adoption of long-range "defensive" stand-off missiles, the purchase of 5th generation fighter jets, and the commissioning of two aircraft carriers for their deployment (Japanese Ministry of Defense, 2018).

The Japanese public too, has gradually come to accept the relaxation of self-imposed restrictions on the armed forces. Although pacifism was seen as an intrinsic part of Japanese national identity during the Cold War (Gustafsson & Hagström & Hanssen, 2018), by the early 2000s public involvement in the peace movement had decreased to the point where it was merely "a shadow of its former self" (Samuels, 2007). Even the demonstrations against the reinterpretation of the constitution in 2014 and 2015, which reached a scale not seen since similar protests in the 1960s and 70s, ultimately did little to impede the systematic erosion of nearly every constitutional restraint on the military (Gustafsson & Hagström & Hanssen, 2018; Hughes, 2022; Maslow, 2015). Given these conditions, it becomes challenging to believe that pacifism is what has been preventing the JSDF from forming an effective amphibious force over the past 10 to 12 years.

The second argument centers on the Cold War-era lack of cooperation between the JGSDF and the JMSDF as the reason behind Japan's lackluster amphibious capabilities. Goldman (2013) notes how "the three services within the Self Defense Forces (SDF) do not have a history of training and operating together"

(Goldman, 2013), which led each SDF to develop its own take on Japan's amphibious strategy. Former USMC Liaison Officer to the JGSDF, Colonel Grant F. Newsham, identifies the "history of lack of coordination with land forces" as a significant challenge facing Japan's amphibious forces (Newsham, 2017). The historical argument is especially emphasized by Hornung (Hornung et al., 2018), who identifies the roots of the SDF's lack of "jointness" in the JSDF's Showa era heritage. During the Cold War, the JGSDF focused on deterring a land invasion from Hokkaido, while the JMSDF prioritized Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) and mine warfare. This led to a situation where each service "focused on specific challenges within their domains... ..amphibious operations were never part of the calculus" (Harold & Koichiro & Hornung, & Koichi, & Simcock, 2018).

Later, Hornung (2020) reaffirmed this statement, arguing that the present state of the JMSDF's amphibious capabilities is "largely a function of the SDF's history... ..most of the GSDF forces needed to counter that threat [the Soviet Union] were already stationed in Hokkaidō, making the need for maritime transport of equipment and personnel a minor concern" (Hornung, 2020). Hugues (2022) also aligns with this thesis, suggesting that the Cold War-era JGSDF "represented the apotheosis of Japan's essentially static deployment... .. [making] the need for maritime transport of equipment and personnel a minor concern" (Hugues, 2022). Ultimately, according to this argument, the Cold War legacy of departmentalization inside the JSDF led to an underlying lack of cooperation between services on top of the historical absence of amphibious capabilities inside the JSDF. However, Hornung, Newsham and Patalano take this analysis one step further, arguing that, consequently, the JMSDF did not see the value in developing amphibious capabilities in the first place.

In his insightful paper, Hornung asserts that "despite the changed strategic environment, there is no plan to increase the number of LSTs (Landing Ship, Tank) anytime soon", due to JMSDF's budgetary and personnel considerations (Hornung, 2020). He further reinforces this point, noting that some within the JMSDF consider sealift capabilities to be "resource burdens with relatively limited usage" (Hornung, 2020). Newsham is also critical of the JMSDF's attitude towards amphibious operations. Interviewed by "Defense

News" on the state of the ARDB development, he explains that "in the MSDF, Japan's amphibious plans seem relegated toward the bottom of the pecking order" (Kallender-Umezu, 2015). The JMSDF not only refrains from investing in amphibious capabilities but also demonstrates reluctance "to a joint effort with the GSDF to establish a joint task force to coordinate the amphibious mission" (Kallender-Umezu, 2015). Newsham would later restate this viewpoint on the occasion of the joint USMC-ARDB amphibious exercise "Iron Fist 2018". He remarks on the lack of JMSDF involvement in Japan's amphibious strategy, stating: "It's kind of done in parallel (amphibious planning), and that's the wrong way to do things. Look around at Iron Fist and ask where the MSDF is" (Fuentes, 2018). Alessio Patalano (2014), defense scholar and JMSDF expert, further contends that even when introducing its three oversized LSTs, the JMSDF's interest did not lie in amphibious operations. Instead, the large vessels were intended to "complement existing assets," adding an extra layer of capabilities "for ad hoc overseas dispatches", such as humanitarian assistance operations (Patalano, 2014). Ultimately, according to Newsham, Hornung, and Patalano, the JMSDF was never interested in amphibious operations.

However, while the influence of its past legacy on the current JSDF cannot be denied, attributing the entire responsibility for Japan's lackluster amphibious capabilities solely to the JMSDF and JGSDF's Cold War-era rivalries, or even to those of their predecessors, the IJN and IJA, risks oversimplification. If it is true that the Japanese armed forces' history of departmentalization, combined with the absence of amphibious capabilities during the post-war period, led to a lack of JMSDF's interest in amphibious doctrine, then how can the service's initial interest in amphibious capabilities be explained? Articles produced by the Maritime Command and Staff College's (MCSC) Strategic Studies Group (SSG) from 2011 to 2013 clearly show that the JMSDF was giving some serious consideration to a Japanese amphibious strategy (Nakaya, 2012; Shimodaira, 2012; Ushirogata, 2013; Watanabe, 2012). Newsham himself, despite later becoming one of the harsher critics of the JMSDF stance on amphibious capabilities, highlights how, in the 2011 to 2013 period, "senior MSDF and GSDF officers who supported amphibious development were in key positions" (Newsham, 2014) and that the "then head of the Self-Defense Fleet, Adm. Katsutoshi Kawano, was a supporter" of the new amphibious mission (Newsham, 2014). The notion that the JSDF's legacy of

departmentalization and lack of experience with amphibious operations led the JMSDF to cultivate a preconceived lack of interest in them is contradicted by the actual debate occurring within the JMSDF during the early 2010s.

Ultimately, the two arguments proposed by the English-language literature fail to explain the lack of effective Japanese amphibious capabilities. To address this gap in the literature, the paper will study the evolution of the MWF through an analysis of Japanese naval literature from both official and quasi-official sources. The thesis will focus on three key transformational moments: the 2011-2013 period, during which the MWF, a declining unit deprived of its Cold War-era mission, was tasked with amphibious operations after a heated debate inside the JMSDF; the 2014-17 period, characterized by the sudden disappearance of amphibious capabilities from the JMSDF's focus immediately after the approval of the new National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG); and finally, the 2018-2023 during which the discourse on the MWF and its future has been dominated by the introduction of the Mogami-Class frigates. This new class of compact-hull vessels, with an ambiguous role, is presently a central point of contention within the JMSDF. One faction argues for their incorporation into the MWF, potentially leading to its transformation into an "amphibious and mine warfare" fleet. In contrast, another faction believes they would be better employed within the Fleet Escort Force (FEF).



## Methodology:

This thesis will approach its analysis from a positivist, problem-solving perspective studying the evolution of the Mine Warfare Force (MWF) as the Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force's (JMSDF) amphibious warfare unit, through the empirical research method of process tracing. The paper will aim to uncover the underlying reasons, as well as recurring behavioral patterns, that led to the MWF's failure. This analysis will be conducted through the examination of three fundamental case studies in chronological order from 2011 to 2023.

The proposition of analyzing critical case studies in chronological order, heavily influenced the choice of using process tracing as the paper's research method. Process tracing as a research methodology originated in cognitive psychology, where its purpose was to investigate the intermediate steps involved in cognitive mental processes (Bennett & Checkel, 2015). However, subsequent works by Andrew Bennett and Alexander L. George expanded the scope of process tracing beyond cognitive psychology, leading to the method's current form, where it retains the fundamental meaning of "the examination of intermediate steps in a process to make inferences... ..on how that process took place and whether and how it generated the outcome of interest" (Bennett & Checkel, 2015). This quality renders process tracing an ideal method for this thesis.

Discussing process tracing as a research method, Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey T. Checkel (2015) propose that researchers should engage in deductive reasoning before employing this research tool, asking themselves, "if my explanation is true, what will be the specific process leading to the outcome?" (Bennett & Checkel, 2015). Based on this hypothesis, the researcher should establish beforehand which actors are most likely to have been involved in the process they are trying to unveil and how they should have acted to accomplish their goals. In the context of this thesis, the proposed hypothesis is that the underlying causes of the MWF's failure to become an effective amphibious unit are rooted in both intra- and inter-organizational politics that unfolded within the Japanese Self Defense Forces (JSDF) during the 2011-2023

timeframe. If this hypothesis is accurate, then by analyzing the discourse on amphibious capabilities within Japanese naval circles during this timeframe, the thesis should find evidence of how key decision makers within both the JMSDF and JGSDF acted not purely out of rational and strategic considerations, but rather prioritized the interests of the specific organizations they represented.

Process tracing, however, is not immune to shortcomings. According to Andreas Dür (2008), even in small-N case studies, researchers often struggle to provide a complete causal chain from interest group activities to organizational outcomes. Therefore, in such cases, the absence of proof might be considered evidence that lobbying did not take place. This limitation is particularly applicable to the research presented in this thesis, as it relies on information provided by officers reluctant to discuss the internal struggles within the service due to concerns about their reputations and careers. To overcome this issue, Dür suggests methodological triangulation, which involves applying different approaches to a single study, to address the limitations of individual methods. In the case of the MWF, if process tracing is susceptible to misinterpreting the absence of proof as evidence of absence, it will be beneficial to complement it with the "preference attainment" method. This method involves comparing the outcomes of organizational processes with the ideal results of relevant agents, often resulting in an overestimation of their agency (Dür, 2008). By combining these two approaches, a more balanced perspective can be achieved.

However, studying organizational struggles within the armed forces raises a more fundamental theory-building question: Can there be room for dissent within hierarchical structures such as the military? As Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow (1999) observe in their book *Essence of Decision*, decision-making processes in complex organizations are never linear or simple. To explain them, the authors propose three explanatory models. The first is the "Rational Actor" model, where governmental behavior is explained as the rational choice of a completely informed, and centrally controlled actor. However, vast organizations are not individuals, instead, they are a "conglomerate of loosely allied organizations, each with a substantial life of its own" (Allison & Zelikow, 1999). Hence the second model of Allison and Zelikow's book,

the "Organizational Behavior" model, according to which governments' behaviors are the results of "outputs", products of precedent and standard operating procedures.

The final "Governmental Politics" model proposed by the authors, which informs the analysis presented in this thesis, further elaborates on this concept. Allison and Zelikow argue that the plurality of these organizations leads to inherently diverse and competing priorities, making government decisions the "resultant" of the bargaining process between them. The armed forces are no exception, as even within their clearly defined hierarchies, complex decisions require policy makers to consult with other "agents" from within the services. These agents are individuals possessing specialized information and expertise that advise the "principal" making the decision, but they are also "players", or "individuals that feel a special burden as the ambassadors representing their organization" (Allison & Zelikow, 1999). The armed forces possess as many of these players as they have branches, services, and different cliques branching within them. As Richard Betts aptly wrote: "Where officers stand depends on where they sit, but soldiers sit in different places" (as cited in Allison & Zelikow, 1999).

In line with this reasoning, the thesis will study the MWF's evolution through an analysis of Japanese naval literature, translated by the author. These articles will come from both official and quasi-official sources. Official sources will primarily be from the Maritime Command and Staff College (MCSC) Strategic Studies Group (SSG) Journal. Quasi-official sources will mainly come from the monthly periodical "Ships of the World", which despite being aimed at a non-specialist audience, "has however longstanding ties with the JMSDF, and is informally used by senior retired officers as a public forum to debate naval affairs" (Patalano, 2014). Furthermore, the thesis will draw on information gathered by the author during two anonymous interviews. The first interview was with a retired Japanese Ground Self-Defense Force (JGSDF) general, who shared the JGSDF's point of view on the MWF and the JMSDF's amphibious strategy under conditions of anonymity. The second interview was with an active-duty JMSDF senior officer, who commented on the intra- and inter-organizational struggles that led to the present JMSDF amphibious capabilities.

## 2011-13: The Early Debate on Amphibious Capabilities —The Importance of Intra-Organizational Politics —

This chapter will illustrate the process that led the Mine Warfare Force (MWF) to become the Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force's (JMSDF) amphibious unit. Having established that by the time the JMSDF had begun considering amphibious capabilities the MWF was facing a deep crisis, the chapter will detail the internal debate that took place within the JMSDF over which unit should oversee the new amphibious mission, pitting the MWF against the Fleet Escort Force (FEF). The MWF justified its claims by underscoring the usefulness of amphibious capabilities in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) operations, seemingly highlighting their peaceful purposes. However, as the chapter will reveal, this argument was merely camouflage aimed at hiding the true concerns of MWF officers, namely that the constant downsizing of the unit could ultimately lead to its disbandment.

Arguing that the MWF had entered a phase of decline, and that by 2011 it had lost nearly half of its Cold War era strength, may initially seem absurd. On top of being the unit with the longest history within the JMSDF, the MWF has played a crucial role in safeguarding Japan's critical sea lines of communication since the immediate aftermath of World War II. Throughout the Cold War, the number of mine warfare vessels within the service shrank, yet while their numbers decreased, there was a simultaneous improvement in their quality. By the time the Japanese government announced the fourth National Defense Program Outlines (NDPO) in 1976, Japan boasted two Minesweeping Flotillas, regarded as some of the best in the world (Martin, 1995).

Ironically, the Flotillas' true decline began with their historic deployment to the Persian Gulf from June to September 1991. On top of marking an important milestone for the JMSDF, the mission helped mitigate the international criticism the country had faced for contributing to the Gulf War through financial aid only, a controversial strategy often referred to as "checkbook diplomacy". However, reports written by the

mission's commander, Captain Ochiai Taosa, highlighted how the assignment brought to light important deficiencies. While western mine warfare units were already digitalized, MWF officers were still using paper, pencils, and electronic calculators to carry out their mission (Fukumoto, 2018). To address these issues, the construction of the Sugashima-class minesweepers began in 1996, but modernization comes at a price. Up until that point, the typical cost of building a minesweeping vessel was around 5 billion yen. In comparison, the new model came in at 15 billion. Simultaneously, the 1995 NDPO marked a period of budgetary contractions as the threat from the Soviet Union evaporated and the Japanese bubble economy collapsed. However, cuts did not affect all JMSDF services equally. During the 1995-2010 period, the fleet's overall tonnage grew by almost 30 percent, and the Submarine Force expanded by 37 percent (Patalano, 2014). To accommodate these investments, cuts had to be made elsewhere within the fleet.

In the end, despite the minesweeping operations in the Persian Gulf, the minesweeping flotillas underwent a substantial downsizing. Their number decreased from 38 in 1993 (Martin, 1995) to just 28 three years later (Strategic Studies Group, 2018). The two minesweeper flotillas were consolidated into one and renamed the Mine Warfare Force. The position of MWF commander was also elevated to the rank of Rear Admiral, but these changes were purely honorary and did not curb the unit's decline. With new threats from North Korean ballistic missiles and spy vessels emerging, the JMSDF continued to allocate most of its limited resources to the Fleet Escort Force and the Fleet Submarine Force. To ensure the unit's continued existence, the MWF's officers recognized the need to "set aside the pride for past achievements and transform the MWF into a unit capable of adapting to Japan's new security environment" (Fukumoto, 2018).

Indeed, Japan's security environment had undergone a significant shift in just a few years. Compared to the previous decade, in 2010 China was a much more significant threat. The two countries had been at odds over the sovereignty of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands since the 1970s, but tensions reached new heights after a Chinese fishing trawler intentionally rammed a Japanese Coast Guard vessel in September 2010. The incident triggered a diplomatic crisis and a significant increase in Chinese military and paramilitary presence

around the Nansei Islands. Thus, the National Defense Program Guidelines for Fiscal Year 2011 (NDPG 22), announced in December 2010, introduced the "Dynamic Defense Force" concept, calling for an increasingly mobile, flexible, and versatile Japanese Self Defense Force (JSDF). Directly concerning the defense of Japan's offshore islands, the document mentioned how the JSDF would need "mobile units to prevent and reject invasion, in cooperation with other permanently stationed units" (Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, 2010). Inside the JMSDF, this was seen as a clear call to establish amphibious operations forces (Nakaya, 2012; Shimodaira, 2012; Tokumaru, 2017; Ushirogata, 2013), leading to debate on which unit should shoulder the new mission, the MWF or the FEF.

To MWF officers, amphibious capabilities presented a golden opportunity to revitalize their unit, and they wasted no time in advocating for their cause. The chance for the unit to demonstrate its affinity for amphibious operations came with the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 11th, 2011, and the subsequent HA/DR operations. Under the leadership of MWF Commander Vice Admiral Fukumoto Izuru, the JMSDF's minesweepers actively participated in HA/DR operations. Writing for "Ships of the World" Fukumoto (2018; 2018) recounts how approaching the disaster-struck areas by sea proved to be a challenge due to both the natural geography of the area as well as the vast amounts of debris cluttering bays and harbors. The FEF's Destroyers, due to their size and lack of maneuverability, were completely inadequate for the task, while the MWF's highly maneuverable minesweepers were naturally equipped for the mission. Together with the 1<sup>st</sup> Transport Division's Ōsumi-class Landing Ship, Tank (LST), on loan from the FEF, the MWF projected men and materiel from ship to shore while overcoming littoral obstacles. To Fukumoto, these activities carried out together with the United States Marine Corps (USMC) "were nothing else if not an amphibious operation" (Fukumoto, 2018).

Yet, as challenging as they may be, HA/DR operations are typically conducted under peacetime conditions, while amphibious assaults involve "adversaries, rapidly changing conditions, and operations across multiple domains, represent an entirely distinct and more intricate type of operation than HA/DR operations." (Hornung et al., 2018). Hence, it proves challenging to correlate the MWF's success in disaster relief

operations with an aptitude for executing forcible landings in contested environments. Furthermore, the notion of amphibious capabilities as "peaceful" disaster relief assets established in response to the March 11th "Triple Disaster", is largely absent from the Japanese government's security discourse. Japanese policymakers should have been keen on portraying the JSDF's new amphibious capabilities as eminently HA/DR assets to placate Chinese and Korean concerns about the country's militarization. Yet, both the NDPG 22 and NDPG 25 (2014-18) unmistakably portray Japan's amphibious assets as capabilities established to deter and fight a possible invasion of the country's offshore islands (Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, 2010; 2013).

However, Vice Admiral Fukumoto's perspective was widely embraced within MWF. In December 2012, MWF Captain Watanabe Hiroshi (2012), writing in the Maritime Command and Staff College Strategic Studies Group (SSG) Journal, examined how recent trends in US amphibious doctrine placed significant emphasis on disaster relief activities. While during the Cold War US amphibious capabilities were mainly associated with ship-to-shore assaults, according to Watanabe, HA/DR operations are now clearly considered a core USMC capability. The implied message is clear: the MWF's success during 2011's HA/DR operation shows that the unit is currently the closest to US amphibious doctrine. Yet, this data must be taken in its context. In 2012, the USMC was primarily engaged in Iraq and Afghanistan, acting as what US Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates critically referred to as America's "second land army". This does not mean that the USMC abandoned forcible entries in contested environments. On the contrary, Gates was asking the Marines to regain their maritime soul and place greater focus on traditional amphibious operations.

Watanabe's argument was supported by another MWF officer, Captain Nakaya Jun. Writing in the SSG Journal, Nakaya (2012) highlighted the importance of HA/DR operations in US amphibious strategy. According to Nakaya, out of 107 amphibious operations conducted by the US military from 1990 to 2010, 78 were HA/DR operations. Nakaya even suggested that HA/DR operations are fundamentally related to amphibious assaults, implying that a unit proficient in HA/DR activities would also excel in amphibious

assaults. Captain Nakaya also mentions the presence of mine warfare units inside US Amphibious Ready Groups (ARGs), to protect marines during their approach to the objective. He suggests that the MWF could naturally fulfill this role. Instead, one asset that the US ARGs possess that Japan's amphibious force would not require is aircraft carriers. Nakaya believes that the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands are close enough that, in case of emergency, the Japanese Air Self Defense Force (JASDF) could provide support by scrambling from Naha.

Interestingly, this perspective is not echoed by JASDF officers (Oguro, 2019). Instead, Nakaya's statement can be better understood within the framework of intra-organizational rivalries. During that period, the Escort Force had just unveiled the new Izumo-Class Helicopter Destroyer (DDH). Although it would take another six years before the Izumo was officially converted into an aircraft carrier, foreign media outlets were already reporting on it with headlines such as "Japan Unveils Aircraft Carrier in Disguise" (Keck, 2013).

Vice Admiral Fukumoto, Captain Watanabe, and Captain Nakaya all point to the MWF's achievements during 2011's HA/DR operations as evidence supporting their arguments. Additionally, their essays all implicitly challenge the Escort Force's ability to conduct amphibious operations. However, the FEF also asserted its own claims over amphibious operations, presenting its arguments in the same SSG Journal. In a paper called "The Future of Sea Basing", FEF Captain Shimodaira Takuya argues that the real amphibious assets of the JMSDF are the Ōsumi-Class LSTs, which also played the most important role in 2011's HA/DR operations. However, as the three LSTs alone are insufficient, the JMSDF needs to introduce dedicated amphibious assault vessels. In the meantime, the service would have to combine the command and communications capabilities of the Hyūga-class DDHs with the sealift capabilities of the Ōsumi-class LSTs. At the time, both vessels were still under the purview of the Fleet Escort Force.

Commander Ushirogata Keitarō (2013), another FEF officer writing in the SSG Journal, also calls for the introduction of new transport vessels and aircraft carriers to the fleet. Furthermore, while MWF officers advocate the importance of HA/DR operations, Ushirogata argues that they should be seen as an additional



capability that will develop naturally while perfecting the true mission of Japan's amphibious forces, ship-to-shore power projection. Consequently, while minesweepers proved effective in 2011's HA/DR operations, they would be unable to participate in contested landings as they lack the necessary equipment to survive confrontation with the enemy. The Japanese amphibious forces should instead be centered around a strengthened 1st Transport Division and new aircraft carriers. Contrary to Patalano's (2014) arguments, by 2013 interest in offensive capabilities within the JMSDF had become strong enough that officers like Shimodaira (2012) and Ushirogata (2013) could openly advocate for the introduction of amphibious assault vessels and aircraft carriers to complement the Ōsumi-Class LSTs, which were designed at a time when power projection was not a consideration for the service (Patalano, 2014).

Shimodaira's and Ushirogata's papers also reflect the prevailing opinion within the JMSDF that the responsibility for amphibious operations should rest with the FEF. Indeed, by Vice Admiral Fukumoto's admission, the most likely candidate for the new amphibious mission was not the MWF but the FEF's 2nd Escort Flotilla (Fukumoto, 2020), and with good reason. Each JMSDF flotilla is paired with a corresponding "sister unit" from the USN 7th Fleet; they are stationed in close proximity and cooperate on a regular basis. The 2nd Flotilla's "sister unit" was the USN 7th Fleet's Task Force 76 (TF76), which is the 7th Fleet's amphibious operations task force. Both units were stationed in Sasebo, fostering a close working relationship between them. Furthermore, the Japanese Ground Self Defense Force (JGSDF) Western Army Infantry Regiment (WAIR), which would later become the present-day Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade (ARDB), was also based in Sasebo.

The JSDF and the Japanese Ministry of Defense (JMoD) understood the importance of proximity between amphibious units. During the preparatory stages of establishing a Japanese amphibious force, JMoD and JSDF officials conducted an interview with Major General Julian Thompson, who had served as the Commander of the British Royal Marines' 3 Commando Brigade during the Falklands War. In this interview, General Thompson clearly emphasized that "the Navy and this designated force (i.e., Marine Corps) must be situated in the same location. This is because two-way communication is critical" (Ishizu, 2014). Lastly,

the 2nd Flotilla also possessed a Hyūga-Class DDH, which, despite not being specifically designed for amphibious operations, proved equally vital as it possessed the necessary communication equipment and sheer size to serve as a Command and Control (C2) center. In contrast, the three Ōsumi-class LSTs alone, although useful for transportation, lacked the necessary connectivity to perform C2 functions (Hornung et al., 2018).

Ultimately, despite the 2nd Flotilla's strong position as a candidate for amphibious operations, organizational considerations, and pressure from MWF officers ultimately tipped the scales in favor of the Force. Vice Admiral Fukumoto himself recounts how, during his tenure as MWF Commander he personally appealed to the commander of the Self Defense Fleet, Vice Admiral Kawano Katsutoshi, advocating the MWF's case (Fukumoto, 2018; 2020). Fukumoto highlighted how the diminishing threat of large-scale enemy mine blockades, such as "Operation Starvation," would likely lead to further downsizing and possibly the abolishment of the MWF, a possibility Kawano was also aware of.

Indeed, despite being a FEF officer, due to an unexpected series of developments, Kawano had recently experienced a brief tenure as Commander of the MWF. As a Rear Admiral, Kawano was originally assigned to the Maritime Staff Office (MSO) serving as Head of the Operations and Plans Department, a position reserved for the brightest officers of the JMSDF General Staff and antechamber for promotion to Vice Admiral. However, Kawano's career received an abrupt setback when, in 2008, the destroyer "Atago" collided with a Japanese fishing boat. The defense minister of the time, Ishiba Shigeru, immediately asked the JMSDF to determine accountability, going as far as summoning the Atago's Navigator from the scene directly to his office, despite ongoing JCG's investigations (Tsujiata, 2020). A scandal ensued, and Minister Ishiba was asked to explain his conduct in the National Diet. There he testified he was not trying to cover the incident; on the contrary, he wanted to hear what happened directly for the Navigator before the JMSDF's upper echelon could get to him and begin their coverup (Tsujiata, 2020). Rear Admiral Kawano, who was at the time in charge of handling the incident's aftermath as well as serving as the JMSDF spokesperson for the media, became the scapegoat for Ishiba's statement. Kawano's promotion to Vice Admiral was

uspended, and instead he was reassigned to the MWF (Ishii, 2019). Eventually, after the scandal died down, Kawano was promoted to vice admiral anyway. However, the lull in his duties as FEF officer and the few months he spent with the MWF gave him a chance to assess the dire state of the unit. Furthermore, as the top FEF officer, Kawano was also aware that while the MWF was united in seeking amphibious capabilities, some FEF commanders believed that given its current strength, no single Escort Flotilla could bear the entire burden of the JMSDF's amphibious strategy alone (Tokumaru, 2017).

Ultimately, during his tenure as Self Defense Fleet Commander, from 2011 to 2012, the Vice Admiral designated the MWF as the primary unit responsible for research on amphibious operations and changed the TF76's "sister unit" from the 2nd Flotilla to the MWF (Fukumoto, 2018; 2020). Immediately after serving as Self Defense Fleet Commander, Kawano became the 31<sup>st</sup> MSO Chief of Staff. Unsurprisingly, during his mandate, the MWF would be officially designated as the service's amphibious unit in August 2013. Together with the new mission, the unit gradually took command over the Escort Force's 1st Transport Division. The final step in this transition towards becoming an amphibious unit should have involved changing the Mine Warfare Force's name to avoid an embarrassing "in nomen omen" situation (Fukumoto, 2018; 2022; Sasaki, 2016; Tokumaru, 2017). However, resistance from MWF officers who wanted to preserve the unit's heritage prevented the name change from ever happening (Tokumaru, 2017), a stance that casts doubt on the unit's real commitment to the new mission.

Regardless, the MWF had been supposedly saved from further downsizing. However, the JGSDF as the other partner in Japan's amphibious strategy, was less than enthusiastic about this outcome. In an interview conducted in November 2022 under conditions of anonymity, a retired senior JGSDF officer commented that the MWF was chosen as the JMSDF amphibious unit not for strategic reasons but rather to ensure its continued existence as an organization. According to his perspective, this decision revealed a lack of interest from the JMSDF towards developing amphibious capabilities. Furthermore, the Ōsumi-Class LSTs would be based in Kure, which lies quite a way from Sasebo, where the USN TF76 and JGSDF marines are still located. Major General Thompson's recommendations on the importance of proximity and two-

way communication between amphibious units had gone unheard. Lastly, from now on, every time the MWF would participate in amphibious maneuvers, it would need to borrow a DDH to serve as a Command-and-Control platform for the Japanese amphibious forces. Not only would this be rarely possible, but the fragmentation of amphibious assets throughout different units inside the same service added a further level of complexity to the already difficult coordination process between SDFs.

## 2014-18: How the JGSDF's Lobbying Revived Inter-Service Rivalries with the JMSDF and Their Consequences on the MWF's Amphibious Capabilities

The last chapter showed how intra-organizational politics influenced the Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force's (JMSDF) decision to designate the Mine Warfare Force (MWF) as its amphibious unit, despite strategic considerations making the Fleet Escort Force (FEF) the natural choice. Although this initial decision hardly set up the service's amphibious strategy for success, there should have still been hope for the JMSDF's amphibious unit. Instead, after 2014, amphibious capabilities disappeared almost completely from the JMSDF's official debate as the service grew increasingly disinterested in them. This chapter will discuss the reasons behind this sudden JMSDF change, pointing to the 2013 Guidelines' publication and the preceding political pressures from the Japanese Ground Self Defense Force (JGSDF) and related interest groups as the catalysts for this change.

Indeed, although the JMSDF's initial choice was far from optimal, the enduring failure of the JMSDF's amphibious strategy cannot be solely attributed to one decision taken 10 years ago. Many of the issues afflicting the MWF as an amphibious unit could have still been overcome with time, joint training with the JGSDF, and an increase in the JMSDF's manpower and budget. After all, the JMSDF was still interested in developing amphibious capabilities. Furthermore, the new National Defense Program Guidelines for Fiscal Year 2011 and Beyond (NDPG 22), published by the ruling Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), promised a revised budget allocation within the Japanese Self-Defense Forces (JSDF), prioritizing the JMSDF and Japanese Air Self-Defense Force (JASDF), the services that would logically play the primary role in defending the Nansei Islands. However, to finance the JMSDF's and JASDF's new capabilities, the document called for a reduction in JSDF personnel to free up budget resources. It was evident that the JGSDF, as the most populous service in the JSDF, with 155,000 soldiers, would be the primary target of these personnel cuts.

Naturally, the JGSDF opposed the new policy. An anonymous JGSDF officer interviewed by the Mainichi Shinbun argued that further manpower cuts would push the deployment of additional units to the Nansei

Archipelago “beyond the limits of what we can manage with our troops” (“Defense Guidelines: Revision,” 2010). Using its influence on the Japanese Ministry of Defense (JMoD), the JGSDF opposed the DPJ’s plans to reduce its current authorized strength to “only” 147,000 personnel. In December 2010, just before the NDPG 22’s final approval, Defense Minister Toshimi Kitazawa and Finance Minister Yoshihiko Noda met at the Ministry of Finance to negotiate the last outstanding point blocking the Guidelines approval, the reduction of JGSDF personnel (“Defense Guidelines: Major Disagreement,” 2010). In the end the JGSDF managed to contain its losses, maintaining an authorized strength of 154,000 soldiers. Commenting on the new guidelines, an anonymous officer from the JGSDF Northern Army stated: “At first I heard talks of manpower cuts for 20,000 men; thank goodness it was contained to only 1000” (“Ground Self-Defense Force Personnel Reduction,” 2010). Nonetheless, it was undeniable that the current JGSDF posture, based on heavy, armored units mostly stationed around Hokkaido, was already behind the times.

Much to the JGSDF’s relief, the policy of "drastic reviews" of budget allocations within the JSDF would prove to be short-lived, coinciding with the DPJ government's limited term. Not even a month after the general elections of December 2012 and the Liberal Democratic Party’s (LDP) victory under Shinzō Abe’s leadership, the newly appointed Defense Minister, Itsunori Onodera, expressed the intention to reevaluate the NDPG 22, freezing the JGSDF’s downsizing (“Defense Guidelines to be Revised,” 2013). The revision officially came in December 2013, with the publication of the National Defense Program Guidelines for Fiscal Year 2014 and Beyond (NDPG 25). As the document did not change Japan’s focus on the Nansei archipelago’s defense, the main SDF players should have logically remained the JMSDF and JASDF. Instead, in the 2013 Guidelines, the Japanese marines, mentioned here for the first time with the name Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade (ARDB), were firmly placed under JGSDF control. Alongside the new amphibious mission, the JGSDF received a significant manpower increase, from 154,000 to 159,000 soldiers. This allowed the service to offset cuts to its core armored capabilities. Reductions in capabilities should logically translate to personnel cuts and ultimately budgetary ones, but thanks to the new LDP policy, the JGSDF was spared from both.

This raises the question of why the Japanese government would prioritize the heavily Hokkaido-based JGSDF while maintaining a Nansei Island-centered defense posture. According to Japanese diplomat and scholar Kitaoka Shinichi (2013; 2014), this policy could only stem from “pure and simple anti-DPJ sentiment and from unquestioning acceptance of the claims of the GSDF” (Kitaoka, 2013). Kitaoka had acted as the chairman of the “Council on Security and Defense Capabilities”, the panel of experts that had advised the LDP government in drafting the 2013 Guidelines. As such, he had been heavily involved in the document’s creation, advocating for further reductions in the JGSDF’s strength to invest in JMSDF and JASDF capabilities (Kitaoka, 2014). When the Abe government decided to go against the panel’s advice and increase the JGSDF’s strength instead, Kitaoka knew why. Organizational considerations internal to the LDP, specifically the administration’s desire to protect its substantial electoral base within the JSDF’s most densely populated service, were behind the new NDPG 25 strategy (Kitaoka, 2014).

Indeed, despite ultimately witnessing an overwhelming LDP victory, the December 2012 elections were characterized by a record number of “swing voters” who remained undecided until the very last days before the election. Polls conducted by the Asahi Shinbun just two weeks before the election day of December 16th placed the LDP at 20%, the DPJ at 15%, and undecided voters at 41%, “which, compared to the 27% registered before the lower house elections of 2009, is significantly higher” (“LDP (20%) leads polls,” 2012). Even the Yomiuri Shinbun conducting a poll in the Hokkaido prefecture —that is, a newspaper traditionally supportive of the LDP conducting a poll in a LDP stronghold— placed undecided voters at 24%, two percentage points higher than LDP supporters (“House of Representatives Election,” 2012). This is particularly interesting, considering that local communities in Hokkaido, as will be shown later, were especially sensitive to the issue of JGSDF personnel cuts.

The results of these polls show how the party lacked a strong electoral base aligned with its policies. Instead, its victory in the 2012 elections was driven by a vast number of voters who, dissatisfied with the DPJ government, resolved to vote for the opposition shortly before the elections. The lack of support for the LDP’s policies became especially clear when the Abe Cabinet began pushing for a series of controversial

security reforms. In March 2013, shortly after taking office, the newly elected government reached its peak popularity with a 70% approval rating. However, less than a year later, approval ratings for the Abe administration plummeted to just 49% due to controversial reforms such as the special state secrets protection legislation ("Approval Rating for Abe Cabinet Falls," 2014). The government's approval ratings suffered further blows in 2014 as the Cabinet approved two unpopular consumption tax hikes—one that took effect in April 2014, the first in 17 years, and another that was postponed due to popular opposition. Concurrently, the government pursued the contentious reinterpretation of Article Nine of the Constitution to enable the exercise of the right of collective self-defense, which triggered significant internal opposition. Amidst these challenges, Japan was grappling with an economic recession that cast doubt on the effectiveness of Prime Minister Abe's "Abenomics" policy. This situation, unfolding as Japan was exiting the "revolving door cabinet" era during which the country changed six prime ministers in six years, further underscores the LDP's need to consolidate its support within its conventional electoral base.

One such LDP stronghold was the Hokkaido prefecture, home to the vast JGSDF's Northern Army. For the local communities, this substantial JGSDF presence constituted a crucial source of income that they could ill afford to lose. Already during the DPJ administration, 179 towns across the island united under the "Hokkaido JSDF Bases Liaison Council." This initiative, backed by the then LDP Hokkaido governor Harumi Takahashi, aimed to pressure Tokyo into revising its JGSDF policy ("Hokkaido's GSDF Shrinking," 2010). The Council rallied in Tokyo in 2010 to protest the reductions, and once again in 2012, when they had the chance to present their views to top JMoD officials ("Hokkaido Residents Fear GSDF Relocation," 2012). To the Council's relief, the DPJ's policy of downsizing the JGSDF came to an abrupt halt with the LDP victory in December 2012. Following the 2013 Guidelines, which confirmed the new LDP policy of increasing JGSDF manpower instead, the Council's president expressed satisfaction during a press conference: "Our demands have been accepted, it's a huge success" ("Liaison Council Approves," 2013). When questioned about the reduction in the number of the service's tanks, the president showed indifference, as the reductions wouldn't affect personnel numbers. Clearly, tanks did not contribute to the Hokkaido local government's revenues.



The JGSDF maintained its status quo inside the SDF, but this decision led to significant contradictions in the Japanese amphibious strategy. Not only did the JMoD assign the command of the Japanese marines to the JGSDF, but JGSDF commanders also ended up overseeing most of the SDF's amphibious exercises, even though the nature of this mission would suggest prominent JMSDF leadership. (Heginbotham & Richard, 2018). Consequently, by the time the ARDB was officially formed in March 2018, there were strong suspicions inside the JMSDF that rather than strategic considerations, the decision "may be best understood from the lens of bureaucratic politics" (Pollmann, 2018). Having interviewed an anonymous JMSDF officer in 2019, Benjamin Schreer also reported on "looming suspicion among senior JMSDF officers that the ARDB is predominantly the result of GSDF lobbying" (Schreer, 2020). This enduring hostility towards the JGSDF's marines was also observed in a recent interview the author conducted with an anonymous JMSDF commander in June 2023, who strongly suggested that the JGSDF should acquire its transport vessels on its own budget. "To put it in simple terms, they can do that much on their own; we have no intention of handing over our ships," commented the officer.

Given the circumstances, it is no surprise that after December 2013, the JMSDF began to reconsider its attitude towards amphibious operations. While all JMSDF authors agreed on the importance of enhancing the service's amphibious capabilities during the initial 2010-2013 period, with FEF Captain Shimodaira (2012) even outlining the ideal characteristics of a new class of JMSDF amphibious assault vessel, by 2014 this stance had completely changed. When Defense Minister Itsunori Onodera announced in July 2014 the government's intention to "seriously consider the introduction of a new vessel to the JMSDF, which could be employed in remote islands' recapture operations" (Ministry of Defense Considering, 2014), the JMSDF met the JMoD's plans with silence. Speaking on the Japanese amphibious capabilities during this same period, former USMC liaison officer to the JGSDF, Colonel Grant Newsham, commented, "In the JMSDF, Japan's amphibious plans seem relegated toward the bottom of the pecking order" (Kallender-Umezu, 2015).

The sudden change in the JMSDF's attitude was clearly felt inside the service. Captain Sasaki Shunya, former 1st Transport Division Commander, writing on "Ships of the World" in 2016, noted a lack of interest in the newly reorganized MWF. Sasaki suggested that "as the [MWF's] reorganization comes amidst a difficult situation for the JMSDF, where troop increases are not readily approved, we can get a sense of the service's enthusiasm towards amphibious operations" (Sasaki, 2016). Even Commander Ushirogata (2016), who called for the introduction of large transport vessels and aircraft carriers in 2013, wrote in the SSG Journal in 2016 that large ships such as amphibious assault vessels would not prove survivable inside the enemy Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) sphere. Ushirogata only dedicates a brief paragraph of his paper to this assessment of large amphibious vessels. After the initial enthusiasm of the 2012-13 period, the debate on JMSDF amphibious capabilities had all but disappeared from the SSG's publications.

The downward trajectory of the amphibious vessel introduction plans continued in 2017. Writing in "Ships of the World", Captain Sasaki (2017) felt that the absence of news on the new amphibious assault vessel suggested that the JMSDF had changed its mind about amphibious capabilities. Rear Admiral Tokumaru Shinichi (2017) agrees with Sasaki and suggests that the plans for a Japanese amphibious assault vessel have already been scrapped. Tokumaru is one of the very few FEF officers who also served in the MWF, and he is hesitant to discuss the topic, as he believes that "it might sound presumptuous for a non-MWF officer to discuss the ideal state of this unit" (Tokumaru, 2017). However, despite his diplomatic tone, in his article for "Ships of the World," he openly questions the necessity of having amphibious capabilities in the first place. Tokumaru contends that if any of Japan's remote islands were occupied by the enemy, the JMSDF in collaboration with the JASDF, could achieve aerial and maritime superiority and defeat the enemy through long-range strikes. Therefore, instead of "forcibly" pursuing amphibious operations, it would be more logical for the JMSDF to continue cooperating with the JASDF, as it has done so far. However, Tokumaru still believes that amphibious capabilities should be maintained to address "unexpected situations" and carry out disaster relief operations in cases of emergency.

In just four years, amphibious operations went from being crucial for demonstrating Japan's determination to defend its own territory (Nakaya, 2012; Ushirogata, 2013) to becoming a capability that should, at best, be maintained to handle "unexpected situations" (Tokumaru, 2017). The turning point in this attitude shift was the publication of the NDPG 25, which, contrary to the JMSDF's expectations, maintained the traditional allocation of manpower and resources, strongly favoring the JGSDF. The JMSDF, resentful of the Army's decision, lacked the necessary resources and, more importantly, the willingness to invest in amphibious capabilities for the MWF. As a result, the MWF reverted to its original state of declining unit. In contrast, the JGSDF, which was officially tasked with forming a naval infantry unit, began to show a growing interest in amphibious capabilities.

During this same period, JGSDF Colonel Ninomiya Atsushi wrote an article in the JMSDF's SSG Journal titled "Imperial Japan's Transoceanic Landing Operation: A Reassessment from the Perspective of Amphibious Warfare" (Ninomiya, 2016). If the timing, topic, and venue chosen by the Colonel were not telling enough, in his article Ninomiya clearly argues that, unlike the mere ferrying of troops to the continent, island warfare will require constant and strict cooperation with the JMSDF. Therefore, the JMSDF should assume responsibility for the maritime transport of the JGSDF marines, highlighting that the current "JMSDF Ōsumi-Class... ..is not suited for island recapture operations" (Ninomiya, 2016). Former JGSDF Major General Yoshitomi Nozomu (2016; 2017) also joined Ninomiya's appeals. While the Colonel took his advocacy to the JMSDF's official journal, the Major General approached the service through "Ships of the World," where he repeatedly advocated for the urgent introduction of new amphibious transport vessels. However, both officers' appeals were met with silence, and the plans to bring new amphibious assault ships to the MWF gradually faded away. Ironically, despite eventually becoming the most fervent champion of amphibious capabilities, the JGSDF inadvertently became the catalyst for this shift in the JMSDF's stance.

## 2018-2023: The Mogami-Class Case — The Current State of Amphibious Capabilities in the JMSDF —

As feared by Sasaki (Sasaki, 2017) and prophesied by Tokumaru (Tokumaru, 2017), the new National Defense Program Guidelines for Fiscal Year 2019 and Beyond (NDPG 30) did not include any provisions for the construction of large amphibious assault vessels. However, the Mine Warfare Force (MWF) was nevertheless set to undergo a complete transformation due to the introduction of 22 new Mogami-Class Frigates, Multipurpose/Mine Warfare (FFM). The new 2018 Guidelines announced that the declining unit would be divided into "two groups consisting of a new type of destroyer (FFM) with improved multi-mission capabilities and minesweeping vessels" (Japanese Ministry of Defense, 2018), essentially transforming it into a second surface fleet.

Does the introduction of the new FFMs mark a turning point in the Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force's (JMSDF) attitude towards the MWF and amphibious operations? Through an analysis of the FFMs' developmental history and capabilities, this chapter contends that their integration into the Self-Defense Fleet only reinforces the JMSDF's decision to forgo the development of amphibious assets. However, even though amphibious capabilities have now been excluded from the service's agenda, the internal debate regarding them persists. In a pattern reminiscent of the 2011-2013 events, the MWF is using amphibious operations to support its claims to the new vessels. Meanwhile, the Fleet Escort Force (FEF), no longer interested in amphibious operations, is vigorously opposing the relocation of assets originally intended for its own units under the pretext of strengthening the MWF's mine and amphibious warfare capabilities. Regardless of the ultimate outcome of this intra-organizational struggle, in the present phase, amphibious capabilities are poised to remain just a bargaining chip in intra-service politics.

From the very beginning, there seemed to be a surprising amount of confusion regarding the FFMs' role within the Self-Defense Fleet. Former Self-Defense Fleet Commander Vice Admiral Ikeda Tokuhiko (2019),

speaking a few months after the 2018 Guidelines' publication, argued that the "two groups" mentioned in the NDPG 30 would most likely reflect the MWF's twofold mission, being divided into a "Minesweeping Flotilla" and an "Amphibious Warfare Flotilla" (Ikeda, 2019). On the other hand, the current Self-Defense Fleet Commander, Vice Admiral Saitō Akira (2019), writing in the Strategic Studies Group (SSG) Journal in the same period, agrees with Ikeda on the second fleet's broad composition; however, he calls it the "Destroyer/Minesweeper Fleet" (Saitō, 2019). Furthermore, Saitō argues that the FFM's will be primarily in charge of Intelligence Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) duties. The two different names proposed by Saitō and Ikeda reflect two very different operational concepts for both the MWF and the FFM's. The second fleet's denomination is not its only mystery. Both Vice Admirals fail to explain why the MWF, as the JMSDF's amphibious unit, would require a fleet of 22 frigates, especially since the need for it had not emerged once throughout the entire debate on JMSDF amphibious capabilities.

Writing on "Ships of the World" in 2022, former Self Defense Fleet Commander Vice Admiral Yamazaki Makoto attempts to address some of these interrogatives by examining the FFM's developmental history. According to Yamazaki, by the time of their adoption, the FFM's had been in development for over a decade under several different names, each reflecting a different operational concept. However, one underlying principle had been consistently guiding the frigate's evolution. The vessels would need to relieve the FEF's destroyers of their surveillance duties, allowing them to focus on their Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) and Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) missions (Yamazaki, 2022). However, the JMSDF could not easily increase the number of destroyers in its fleet, which had already been defined by the NDPG 22. As a loophole to overcome this organizational constraint, the service opted to introduce a new class of small Offshore Patrol Vessels (OPVs) instead. However, doubts about the seaworthiness of such small vessels led to an increase in their planned tonnage by adding minesweeping capabilities to their design, thus laying the foundations of the current Mogami-class. At this point, however, the ships were no longer small OPVs, but rather compact-hull destroyers. The JMSDF needed to reach a compromise with the Japanese Ministry of Defense (JMoD) on its fleet structure. Under the NDPG 25, it was decided that the Escort Force would acquire seven new FFM's, reaching a strength of 54 vessels, but as the 2013 Guidelines did not increase the JMSDF budget,

an equal number of minesweepers would be retired from the service, downsizing its minesweeper fleet from 25 to 18 vessels (Japanese Ministry of Defense, 2014).

The Mogami-Class FFM's were not originally intended to be part of the MWF, nor was any role envisioned for them within the JMSDF's amphibious strategy. Furthermore, the addition of minesweeping capabilities to the FFM's design was an afterthought, and their effectiveness compared to specialized minesweepers is questionable. An analysis of the FFM's capabilities reveals that its steel hull makes it an easier target for sea mines in comparison to conventional wooden or fiber-reinforced polymer-hulled minesweepers. They also lack a powerful integrated anti-mine sonar and have limited minelaying capabilities (Tokumaru, 2022).

Additionally, due to their compact design, the frigates are naturally unable to transport vast amounts of troops and equipment, a long-standing weakness of the MWF. It could be argued that they might still serve an auxiliary role in amphibious operations by providing naval gunfire support to the landing force.

However, since each frigate is designed to accommodate only one Vertical Launch System (VLS), to be equipped at a later date, each FFM can only carry a maximum of 16 missiles at any given time (Tokumaru, 2022). Out of these 16 missiles, a significant portion would need to be Anti-Submarine Rockets (ASROCs) to fully utilize the vessel's sophisticated ASW equipment. However, even if all 16 cells were loaded with ship-to-surface weaponry instead, the entire fleet of 22 FFM's would not match the firepower of four Maya or Atago-Class Guided-Missile Destroyers (DDGs) combined. Furthermore, the FFM's lack the advanced fire-control equipment of these high-end destroyers, necessitating targeting information to be provided by the rest of the fleet (Tokumaru, 2022).

If the FFM's capabilities make them less than optimal as minesweepers and inappropriate for amphibious warfare, what prompted the NDPG 30 to overturn the initial decision to attach the frigates to the FEF and instead allocate them to the MWF? Vice Admiral Yamazaki has no doubts: "In the present condition, where the MWF's strength is in the middle of downsizing, this was also a necessary measure to maintain our mine warfare capabilities" (Yamazaki, 2022). Statements from former MWF Commanders Tokumaru Shinichi (2017) and Fukumoto Izuru (2018; 2020; 2022) also confirm this thesis. Both officers repeatedly argued that

the new FFMs should be assigned to the MWF while remaining available for deployment to the FEF if necessary; a complete reversal of the original plans outlined by the JMoD. Fukumoto especially expressed his frustration, noting that despite becoming the service's amphibious unit, the MWF continued to lose its vessels. The Vice Admiral lamented that the only increase observed was in the Force's responsibilities. To improve this situation, Fukumoto suggested that the MWF should transform into a second fleet, divided into an amphibious and a mine warfare flotilla, consisting of both mine warfare vessels and FFMs. Shortly after Fukumoto's articles, in a remarkable coincidence, the new NDPG 30 announced this exact policy. While it is unlikely that Fukumoto directly influenced the JMSDF's decision-making process this time around, as former MWF Commanders and retired Admirals, both he and Tokumaru were aware of the Force's demands, and their articles reflected them closely.

The reasons behind the deployment of the FFMs to the MWF are also an area of agreement between JMSDF and JGSDF officers. In the previously mentioned November 2022 interview, the retired senior JGSDF officer also unequivocally stated that the FFMs' introduction to the MWF must be interpreted as yet another attempt by the JMSDF to revitalize the declining unit. The JGSDF's irritation is understandable. In 2014, when the JMSDF was still formally considering the introduction of amphibious assault vessels, the service planned to acquire only seven frigates. However, come 2018, the amphibious vessels' introduction plans had been thoroughly dismissed, while the number of FFMs that the service planned for acquisition suddenly rose from seven to an impressive 22. Furthermore, this decision was announced the very same year when the JGSDF officially launched its naval infantry unit, the Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade (ARDB). While JGSDF officers such as Major General Yoshitomi (2020, 2021) repeatedly advocated for the introduction of new sealift options to support the ARDB, highlighting the necessity of a small fleet of landing crafts to replace the only two possessed by the JMSDF, the JMSDF was instead introducing a small fleet of ISR vessels.

However, although Fukumoto advocated for the creation of an amphibious warfare flotilla under the auspices of a strengthened MWF, this does not change the fact that the Mogami-class frigates are not

suitable for the task, and even the Vice Admiral himself could not find a clear role for the FFM in the MWF's amphibious strategy (Fukumoto, 2020). This suggests that the MWF is not pursuing amphibious operations in earnest. Instead, they are using them as a bargaining chip in their negotiations with the FEF on the ownership of the Mogami-class frigates.

After amphibious operations became a secondary concern following the 2014-17 period, FEF officers were far from pleased to hear "exaggerated names such as second fleet" being whispered in "certain circles" of the JMSDF (Kōda; 2023). Especially as this Amphibious/Minesweeper fleet would be assembled by redirecting to the declining MWF vessels originally earmarked for the FEF's Escort Flotillas (Ikeda, 2019). Instead, the FEF had very different plans for the FFMs. Already in 2021, one year before the first FFM was commissioned into the MWF, Vice Admiral Ōmachi Katsushi advocated for the creation of a small fleet of stealthy vessels to carry out Distributed Maritime Operations (DMOs). DMOs call for dispersing fleet forces over large areas, avoiding detection by the enemy while maintaining lethality through multidirectional, coordinated attacks. Clearly, a fleet of comparatively small frigates with a stealthy design, equipped with state-of-the-art ISR equipment, and a Mk. 41 VLS would be more useful in DMOs than working as impromptu minesweepers or amphibious vessels.

The topic of DMOs is also brought up by Vice Admiral Yamazaki Makoto (2022) as the rationale for deploying at least 40% of the 22 FFMs to the FEF. Former Maritime Staff Office (MSO) Chief of Staff, Admiral Tomohisa Takei (2022), writing for "Ships of the World," also agrees with Ōmachi's and Yamazaki's arguments. According to the Admiral, in a potential conflict in the Western Pacific, the ability to deploy dispersed fleet forces will be fundamental for operations inside the vast Chinese Anti-Access/Area-Denial (A2/AD) sphere of influence. However, according to Tomohisa, changes to the current Mogami-Class design are necessary. Specifically, the FFMs will need to drop the Multi-Purpose/Mine-Warfare's "M" from their designation and become an FFG, or Guided Missile Frigate.



Shortly after Admiral Takei's article was published, the Japanese Acquisition, Technology & Logistics Agency (ATLA) announced that it is currently seeking formal design proposals for a new type of FFM from Mitsubishi Heavy Industries and Japan Marine United. In line with this decision, the production of the current FFM model will be interrupted by the FFM 10. The remaining 12 models will be built based on the new design (Uchijima, 2023). No detail has been published on this new design yet, but according to the anonymous JMSDF officer interviewed in June 2023, the momentum inside the JMSDF currently leans towards the introduction of a new class of FFGs and a new affiliation for the frigates where "they will be able to display their capabilities as destroyers."

While the outcome of this intra-organizational struggle remains uncertain, one thing is clear: amphibious capabilities are poised to emerge as its primary casualty. Should all 22 FFMs be assigned to the MWF, they would only alienate the unit from its amphibious warfare mission further. Should the frigates be split evenly between the MWF and the FEF, with the first receiving the FFM variant and the second receiving the future FFG iteration, this might placate the intra-organizational struggles within the JMSDF, but it wouldn't transform the Mine Warfare Force into an Amphibious Warfare Force. Lastly, should the frigates be exclusively assigned to the FEF, on top of being unable to carry out amphibious operations, the JMSDF minesweeper fleet would also struggle to effectively carry out its original minelaying and minesweeping duties.

In conclusion, the introduction of the FFMs to the Self-Defense Fleet does not mark a shift in the JMSDF's attitude towards the MWF or amphibious operations; instead, it reinforces it. It is hard to tell if the choice was conscious; however, announcing the introduction of 22 frigates instead of new amphibious assault vessels in the same year when the JGSDF established the ARDB is symbolic of the JMSDF's attitude towards the JSDF's joint amphibious doctrine. Nevertheless, the vanishing of amphibious capabilities from the service's plans did not imply their disappearance from intra-organizational politics. Instead, just as in the early 2010s the MWF used its success in the 2011 disaster relief operations to justify its affinity with amphibious operations, now it uses its status as the service's amphibious unit to justify its claims over the

frigates. In both instances, it is challenging to argue that the MWF has genuinely pursued amphibious capabilities. Rather, drawing from the insights derived from Japan's naval literature on the subject, coupled with confidential interviews conducted with JSDF personnel, amphibious capabilities emerge as a bargaining chip that the unit has been utilizing in its negotiations with the rest of the service, with its primary aim being to ensure its continued existence as an organization.

## Why the MWF Could Not Become an Amphibious Unit: Intra- and Inter-Organizational Politics

In conclusion, this thesis has examined the evolution of the Mine Warfare Force (MWF) as an amphibious unit from 2011 to 2023. It divided this 22-year timespan into three distinct periods, each of which can be explained through the lenses of two explanatory variables: intra- or inter-organizational politics.

Intra-organizational politics provided the key explanatory variable for the first period, from 2011 to 2013, during which the Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force (JMSDF) began to consider the adoption of amphibious capabilities. The decision was preceded by an internal debate that pitted MWF and Fleet Escort Force (FEF) officers against each other. The MWF's arguments centered around the "peaceful" use of amphibious capabilities, such as in the disaster relief operations that followed the Triple Disaster of March 2011, in which the unit played an important role (Fukumoto, 2018; 2020; Nakaya, 2012; Watanabe; 2012). However, as the chapter argued, this idea was merely a facade aimed at concealing the true concern of MWF officers: the unit's continuous downsizing since the end of the Cold War, which could ultimately lead to its disbandment.

Eventually, despite strategic considerations favoring the FEF, the JMSDF chose the MWF. This decision was largely due to MWF Commander Fukumoto Izuru's intervention, who used his influence to secure an outcome favorable to the organization he represented. In studying organizational politics, Allison and Zelikow (1999) argue that "when researching case studies, one can nearly always pinpoint a particular person, or at most a few persons, who are central in moving a subject up on the agenda and into position for enactment." In the 2011-2013 debate on the JMSDF amphibious strategy, this person was undoubtedly Vice Admiral Fukumoto. In his capacity as MWF Commander as well as "policy entrepreneur" (Allison & Zelikow, 1999), Fukumoto persuaded Vice Admiral Kawano of the necessity to assign the new amphibious capabilities to the MWF. This choice was not driven by strategic factors, which heavily favored the FEF, but by organizational concerns –specifically, the need to preserve the JMSDF's minesweeping capabilities and expertise, which would take decades to rebuild once lost.

However, the persistent challenges faced by the MWF as an amphibious unit cannot be solely attributed to a single choice made by the JMSDF a decade ago. As argued by Allison and Zelikow (1999), policy is not formulated in isolated instances; instead, most issues emerge gradually over time, eventually converging to create governmental policy on a relevant issue. Similarly, the current state of Japanese amphibious capabilities is the result of a broader and apparently unrelated conflict for resources between the JMSDF and Japanese Ground Self Defense Forces (JGSDF), which would end up shaping the JSDF's joint amphibious doctrine in unexpected ways.

As this thesis argues, the establishment of a JMSDF amphibious unit occurred within the wider context of budgetary allocation reforms within the JSDF. In this context, the second chapter introduces inter-service dynamics as the pivotal explanatory variable for the 2014 to 2017 period. The rapidly changing post-Cold War security environment meant that the JGSDF, much like the MWF, was struggling to remain relevant. To avoid the capability divestment process that the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) had begun, together with the "Hokkaido JSDF Bases Liaison Council", the JGSDF exerted its influence on both the DPJ and the following Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) governments. The success of the Army's lobbying efforts, however, came with unintended consequences, as the JMSDF lost interest in amphibious capabilities. This led to the cancellation of the JMSDF's amphibious assault vessel introduction plans, plunging the MWF back to its pre-2013 condition. Thus, while the army was growing increasingly interested in the concept of amphibious operations (Ninomiya, 2016; Yoshitomi, 2016; 2017), the JMSDF, despite officially establishing its amphibious warfare unit five years before the JGSDF, was instead becoming increasingly detached from it.

The last chapter brings the tale of the MWF full circle by studying the introduction of the Mogami-Class Frigate Multipurpose/Minewarfare (FMM) to the unit and the present state of the JMSDF's amphibious strategy. The FFM's case is also interesting because it can be interpreted through the lenses of both inter- and intra-organizational politics. On the one hand, the introduction of the new frigates in the same year that the JGSDF announced the official establishment of its marines unit and while it was openly calling for

improved sealift capabilities to support them (Yoshitomi, 2020; 2021), highlights how the JMSDF remains clearly disinterested in, if not outright hostile to, the JGSDF's amphibious strategy. Convinced, with good reason, that the Japanese marines are a product of the JGSDF's political lobbying (Kitaoka, 2014; Pollmann, 2018; Schreer, 2020), the JMSDF remains of the opinion that, if they desire sealift options, they should acquire them on their own budget, as clearly stated by an anonymous JMSDF commander. Instead, the JMSDF decided to invest in a fleet of small frigates that better reflect its interest in cheaper, stealthier, and survivable ships with a high degree of automation that could be employed in Distributed Maritime Operations (DMOs) (Ōmachi 2021; Saitō, 2019; Tomohisa, 2022; Yamazaki, 2022).

However, although amphibious capabilities may have disappeared from the JMSDF's procurement lists, they remain present in the intra-organizational struggle between the MWF and the FEF. Just as in the early 2010s, the two units vied for control of amphibious capabilities, now the same debate is repeating itself over control of the 22 new FFMs. Much like in the past, the MWF used its success in the 2011 disaster relief operations to justify its affinity with amphibious operations; now it uses its status as the service's amphibious unit to justify its claims over the frigates. However, in both cases, these pretexts mask the unit's true objective: to curb the decline of its minesweeper fleet before it endangers its existence as an organization. Regardless of the outcome of this intra-service debate, the Mine Warfare Force's name will continue to stand as a reminder of how intra-organizational politics within the JMSDF and inter-organizational dynamics between the JMSDF and JGSDF led to the failure of Japan's joint amphibious strategy.

Lastly, this study aimed to stimulate further research into how intra- and inter-organizational dynamics shape the evolution of the new JSDF's capabilities. While this paper has delved into the evolution of the MWF as an amphibious warfare unit, the subject remains far from exhausted. Unanswered questions persist, such as why the Japanese Air Self Defense Force (JASDF), "preferring to be at 30,000 feet" (Newsham, 2014), has been so reluctant to join in the debate on amphibious operations. Investigating the JASDF's stance could be particularly illuminating. Unlike the JGSDF, the JASDF lacks the historical rivalries

associated with the JMSDF, potentially offering insights into inter-service dynamics that extend beyond their Showa-era legacy. This and many other examples, not limited to amphibious capabilities, could offer valuable insights into how intra- and inter-organizational politics influence the JSDF's capabilities and, in the end, its overarching strategy.

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