

When Soldiers Speak Out against Their Own Military

A Study of Non-Academic Books Published by Retired JSDF Officers*

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After leaving the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF), some high-ranking officers produce non-academic books. These books are usually published in the form of inexpensive paperbacks available in any bookshop in Japan, written in language that is easily understandable, often with an alarming title such as *Now I Can Tell You This ! JSDF Soldiers Speaking Their Mind*. Many authors begin chapters with a sentence along the lines of “I couldn’t say this until now”. They reveal information not otherwise accessible to the public; they include behind-the-scene stories and backdoor conversations between top officials during past foreign missions. They also disclose soldiers’ complaints and disagreements about particular missions that they were not permitted to express during their service. Notwithstanding their titles, the information in such disclosure books seldom contains valuable revelations that warrant military and political sensitivity; thus, in a strict sense, they must not be labelled as whistle-blowing or exposés of the type that could threaten national security.

This article uncovers why the retired JSDF high-ranking officers decide to produce disclosure books. What kind of information do they want to convey to the public? What is the background that spurs these authors to disclose internal information? What social psychology motivates their authorship? In order to answer these questions, this article first defines the scope of this research and then provides highlighted contents (translated into English by the author) of the disclosure books written by retired JSDF soldiers. It then analyzes the political backgrounds, reasons, and psychology behind their claims before finally offering three theoretical approaches to better understanding the authors’ choices to publish as they have.

Scope of the Research

There is no specific definition of disclosure in this research context. The information provided in the paperbacks should not be treated as equivalent to exposé documents such as *WikiLeaks*. Rather, the paperbacks contain information that the Japanese Ministry of Defence and the JSDF would not wish to make publicly available because doing so may attract the prying inquiries and demands for accountability from the public. The authors’ information may or may not be verifiable. Some information is simply overstated and sensationalized. For this

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writer’s purposes, however, whether the information provided by the paperbacks is factual or a hoax is not critically important. This study’s focus is the context – and contributing factors – that leads JSDF soldiers to write (and thus disclose) this type of information in the form of paperbacks.

This article examines 27 paperbacks and book chapters, listed in Table 1 below, written by retired JSDF soldiers in Japanese and published in Japan. They are authored by former high-ranking JSDF soldiers. The list is not exhaustive. While more paperbacks of this kind are available and all warrant more careful exploration, this list is strongly representative of the disclosure “genre” under review.

Table 1 : List of paperbacks and book chapters written by retired JSDF soldiers

N°.	Author / Year / Title	Rank (time of retirement)	Major contents
1	Kazuhito, Araki, Araya Taku & Sukeyasu Ito. 2016. <i>JSDF Illusions: Security Policy and Constitutional Amendment to Fight against North Korea's Abduction Cases</i> , Sankei-Shimbun Shuppansha.	Col., JGSDF, Cmdr, Special Force Group/ Lt. Col., JMSDF, Cmd Officer, Special Boarding Unit	JSDF’s unpreparedness for rescuing Japanese abductees in North Korea
2	Seiji, Ikeda. 2015. <i>People Who Manipulate and Seize Our Nation : The Real Enemies I Encountered during My Service in the JSDF</i> , Hikarurando.	Lt. Gen., JGSDF, Dir, Dept, Personnel & Training	Views on current world politics
3	Ito, Sukeyasu. 2016. <i>Are We Ready to Die for Our Nation? Thoughts and Deeds in Establishing a JSDF Special Unit</i> , Bungeishunju.	Lt. Col., JMSDF, Cmd Officer, Special Boarding Unit	JSDF’s unpreparedness for defence & security
4	Ito, Sukeyasu. 2018. <i>The JSDF That Is Failed: The Reasons Why I Left the JSDF Special Unit</i> , Shincho-sha.		JSDF’s unpreparedness for defence & security
6	Oriki, Ryoichi. 2015. <i>Responsibilities to Defend Our Nation: Monologue of a Former JSDF Chief of Staff</i> , PHP Shinsho.	Chief of Staff, JSDF	His views and analysis of Japanese security policy
7	Kamei, Kotaro. 2013. <i>Works of the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force Infantry Regiment</i> , Ushioshobo-Kojinsha.	Unknown, JGSDF	JGSDF’s daily service details
8	Kubo, Mitsutoshi & Takashi Matuo. 2017. <i>A Former JSDF Officer’s Guide to the Most Powerful Task Management Tactics: His Know-How’s for Success</i> , Mikasa Shobo.	Unknown, JGSDF	JSDF’s leadership management methods
9	Hayashi, Yoshinaga. 2019. “The Best Compromise is Legal Reforms under the Current Constitution”, in Watanabe, Takashi, H. Yamamoto & Y. Hayashi. 2019. <i>JSDF Soldiers’ Missions and Agonies in Overseas Operations</i> , Kamogawa Shuppan.	Lt. Gen., JASDF, Cdt., OCS	Former commanders’ concerns & challenges during operations abroad
10	Hirohata, Koichi. 2018. <i>The Way of Life as a JSDF Soldier</i> , East Press.	Lt. Col., JGSDF	JSDF’s daily service details
11	Nezu, Shinji. 1997. <i>I Wanna Run Away ! I Wanna Quit ! Stunning Experiences in JSDF Services</i> , Gendaishokan.	NCO, unknown	True nature of JSDF soldiers’ everyday life
12	Sato, Masahisa. 2007. <i>JSDF in Iraq : My ‘Combat’ Diary</i> , Kodansha.	Col, JGSDF, Chief, Advance Element, Iraq	Challenges experienced in Iraq operation
13	Sato, Masahisa. 2011. <i>Thank You, JSDF ! Journal of JSDF Relief Operations after the 2011 Earthquake</i> , Wani Books.		Challenges experienced in 2011 earthquake relief operation

15	Sudo, Akira. 2011. <i>Journal of the JSDF Relief Activities after the 2011 East Japan Earthquake: Reporting from the Frontline Operation Sites</i> , Fusosha.	Gen. in command of Tohoku Region, JGSDF	Challenges experienced in 2011 earthquake relief operation
16	Tamogami, Toshio. 2012. <i>Now I Can Tell You This! JSDF Soldiers Speaking Their Mind</i> , Okura-Next-Shinsho.	Gen., Chief of Staff, JASDF	Shares author's views of the inside nature of the JSDF
17	Tamogami, Toshio. 2009. <i>A JSDF Brave Hero's Testimonies</i> , Asuka-shinsha.		Q&As on JSDF
18	Tamogami, Toshio, Yusuke Matsushita, Sumihiko Kawamura & Masashiko Katsuya. 2009. <i>Discourse on National Defense</i> , Asukomu.		Views on Japan's foreign & security policy
19	Tomizawa, Hikaru. 2017. <i>The Realities of Japanese Military Affairs</i> , Shincho-shinsho.	Gen., Chief of Staff, JGSDF	Views on today's security issues
20	Hama, Takeru. 2018. <i>Guide to Real-Estate Investment & Financial Planning for JSDF Soldiers Retiring in 10 Years</i> , Cross-Media Publishing.	Unknown, JGSDF	Financial management methods practised in JSDF accounting unit
21	Hironaka, Masayuki. 2017. <i>The Real Reasons Why Ex-Soldiers Should Not Become Politicians: A Study of Civil-Military Relations</i> , Bunshun Shinsho.	Gen., JASDF, Cmdr, ATC	Problems in civilian control & political consequences in Japan
22	Matsushima, Yusuke. 2004. <i>The Japan Self-Defense Forces that JSDF Soldiers Didn't Even Know Of</i> , Goma-books.	Gen., JGSDF, in command of Chubu Region	Indicates paradoxes & agonies JSDF soldiers feel in their services
23	Matsushima, Yusuke. 1996. <i>Thus Fought JSDF in the 1995 Hanshin Earthquake Relief Operations</i> , Jiji-tushinsha.		
24	Matsumoto, Goro. 2017. <i>Mightiest Leadership: Trained by a Former JSDF Frontline Soldier</i> , Wave Shuppan.	Unknown, JGSDF	Leadership management as practised in the JSDF
25	Nakamura, Hideki. 2017. <i>Japan's Military Power: The Japan Self-Defense Force's Real Capability</i> , Besuto-shisho, 2017.	Adm., JMSDF, Staff, Fleet Escort Force	Reveals problems and challenges inside Min. of Defense and JSDF
26	"Expecting more substantial debates about the future JSDF" in Watanabe, Takashi, H. Yamamoto & H. Yoshinaga. 2019, <i>op.cit.</i> .	Gen., JGSDF, Cmdr Central Rapid Reaction Force	Commanders' concerns and challenges during operations abroad
27	Watanabe, Takashi. 2019. "It Is the Japanese Citizens Themselves who Decide the Way How the Future JSDF Should Be", in Watanabe, Takashi, H. Yamamoto & H. Yoshinaga. 2019, <i>op.cit.</i>	Gen., JGSDF, in command of Tohoku Region	

While e-books and other digital media are becoming the strong media, paperbacks remain popular in Japanese society. They are usually priced no higher than 1,000 yen (approximately 9 US dollars) and are sold in any bookshop. Various genres of paperbacks are well circulated in Japan. These go beyond novels such as criminal and romantic stories – popular genres for this type of books. Paperbacks (at least in Japan) also cover a wide variety of topics within the field of social sciences such as international affairs and military science. The paperbacks examined in this study belong to the latter kind.

This study sheds light only on such paperbacks. There are other types of media that may be similarly exhibiting the JSDF soldiers' disclosures, such as articles in periodicals, blogs and other SNS, and testimonies in TV interviews. They may contain useful and crucial information but are not covered by this study.

Non-Academic Paperbacks Authored by Retired JSDF Officials

The Legal System Preventing the Use of Weapons in Overseas Peace Missions and the Reality on the Ground

A majority of the authors of the books examined raise concerns over the gap between the reality of the legal system and the frontline security conditions in overseas peace support operations (PSOs). As pointed out by many scholars elsewhere in the literature on the JSDF, the use of weapons abroad, particularly during PSOs overseas, has been one of the legal and operational challenges for soldiers on the ground. The challenges derive from the following three fundamental legal limitations: (1) The Japanese Constitution renounces war and denies the right of the country to possess military forces or any other means of state violence ; (2) the JSDF's overseas missions have been limited to civilian assistance in which the areas of permitted tasks are specified in separate laws ; and (3) the use of weapons in PSOs is restricted to specified situations. Recent legal reforms¹ have relaxed the conditions for the JSDF's use of weapons in overseas operations; however, the presence of strict limitations for the use of weapons still causes concerns over the gap between the political visions reflected in the existing legal system and the tactical realities soldiers are facing in the field.

While acknowledging the presence of such a gap, many authors of the paperbacks under study express particular anxiety about their individual responsibilities and leadership in life-risking missions outside Japan. Since the commanders who served in the missions perceived the laws to be either too complicated for their subordinates to comprehend or too unrealistic given the situation on the ground, their field instructions to their subordinates on the ground were candid. In short, they ordered soldiers to shoot only when ordered to do so, not when the soldiers themselves deemed necessary, or to engage in combat if necessary, allowing the commanders to take legal responsibility afterwards.

Watanabe (2019), who led one of the first contingents in the 1992 UNTAC mission in Cambodia, revealed his tacit determination to resign should his interpretation of “the gap” lead to too many casualties (or be found to violate too many regulations) :

I can write this because I am retired now. The most difficult thing during my mission in Cambodia was to convince myself to fill the gap between the legal system restricting the use of weapons and the reality of combat on the ground. I was expecting to lose 3 or 4 soldiers in my unit no matter how careful I was about local security. I was determined to resign when I lost up to six soldiers under my leadership in Cambodia (Watanabe, 2019, p.46).

When the Rule of Engagement (RoE) arrived on my desk in Cambodia, I was asked whether I should conduct field training before starting the engineering duties. I replied immediately, saying “No”. The reason was clear: the RoE was too complicated for the soldiers to understand. It could create more danger than safety.

¹ For example, Kurosaki, 2016.

I just told my soldiers, “*Shoot back when your buddies are being shot at. For other cases, leave the decision to your company commander; he will tell you if and when to pull the trigger. Other than that, don't even touch it*”. This was the maximum I could tell my subordinates (Watanabe, 2019, p. 8).

Yamamoto (2019) similarly reveals the JSDF's extra-legal activities during an operation in which they protected and rescued civilian aid workers in East Timor out of emergency necessity, which was (at the time of writing) illegal :

[Although we were not allowed, by law, to use weapons and to rescue and protect civilians working in the same field,] indeed, we did rescue several [Japanese] NGO field workers in East Timor as they were in life-threatening danger. I could expect accusations of having violated the law, but on the ground, the commander had to decide in a split second to react to the security situation. The Japanese government ignores this crucial point and should not send my soldiers on deployments without solving this paradox (Yamamoto, 2019, p.88).

Ikeda (2015) bluntly describes how the then unit commander bent the law to employ a civilian escort and protection in Cambodia :

Protecting a civilian Japanese election monitoring team was not part of the JSDF's missions in Cambodia. But the civilian team had already arrived in our mission area. There was a constant danger of being targeted by Cambodian guerrilla forces. Matsukawa, an officer from the Staff Office, told the civilian team members, “*Please do not worry. Please proceed with your tasks as scheduled as the JSDF will give full protection*”. Next, he turned to the JSDF soldiers and said, “*Protect these civilian team members at all cost. I give you two tasks*”: (1) conduct surveillance for bridge and road repairs; and (2) acknowledge that the area of the surveillance is where these election monitoring team members are working.

This technically allowed the JSDF to “protect” the civilians because the JSDF could (legally) shoot back for self-protection because the soldiers were practically “escorting” the civilians. This way of manipulating the legal system regarding the use of weapons entirely relies on the voluntary self-sacrifice of the JSDF soldiers. Is this ever permissible? (Ikeda, 2015, p.109).

Another account by Ikeda (2015) is startling. Since self-protection is the only legitimate cause for the use of weapons, the unit leader designated a soldier beforehand to be the “first targeted” in case of attack, to allow the entire JSDF unit to return shots.

In order for the soldiers to fight against possible guerrilla attacks, someone needed to be shot at first so that we could use force in the name of self-protection. The discussion was, then, who should be the first one up front. Amongst some potential candidates, we made a chart and calculated points reflecting their family conditions such as marital status, presence of old parents to look after at home, and so on. Lt.Col. Ishibashi had the lowest points and was thus nominated. He agreed and volunteered. He was 35 years old, unmarried, had no girlfriend, and was the youngest brother of five siblings (Ikeda, 2015, p.111).

Several authors warn that the gap exposes Japanese units to great danger in the field. Matsushima (2004) accuses the government of naïvely releasing tactical information critical to

the security of active units. He explains that the government does this to comply with the guidelines that missions are conducted in the form of civilian assistance and thus only minimum possible use of weapons is allowed :

The Ministry of Defence astonishingly revealed the entire list of the kinds and the number of weapons the JSDF would carry to the Iraq mission prior to its entry into Iraq. This list was formally and openly discussed in the National Diet and made available online. It was quite a disturbing event for the JSDF soldiers to be sent to Iraq in such a way, as they were instantaneously exposed to terrorist attacks, which everyone was most afraid of (Matsushima, 2004, p.103)

Masahisa Sato (2009), who led the Advance Element in the 2003 Iraq operation, expresses his concern that the presence of such political pressure would penetrate into soldiers' psychology and discourage them from shooting even if required :

Given the condition that our soldiers were under heavy political pressure to hesitate to use weapons, I intentionally conducted extra live firing training in the field using specially designed decoys that really look like humans. I conducted the same training in the Golan Heights, too. This shooting training was secretly photographed by a photographer from the *Asahi Shimbun* [left-wing newspaper in Japan] which turned it into a broad scandal in Japan. The importance of live shooting training and the soldiers' safety are misunderstood and not respected (Masahisa Sato, 2009, p.216).

Araki and his colleagues (2016) warn that the government has never been clear with its political goals for peace missions abroad. As a result, the commanders were ambiguous about the long-term goals for their own missions. Araya (2016) discloses discussions amongst the commanders during the operation in Iraq :

After the political decision was made to send the JSDF to Iraq, the Staff in the Ministry of Defence spent a whole week discussing what the Japanese unit's final goal should look like. All the commanders on the ground, from the 1st to 10th, similarly (and repeatedly) had to question themselves after they had landed in Iraq. Some ordered their subordinates, "Anyway, our very presence is the prime importance; that satisfies the US's demands." Some said, "Safety is our priority. Take no risk." Others said, "Come what may, our mission is to help the Iraqi people's reconstruction. We will commit to it." As such, the vision of the foreign mission was so blurred that each commander gave different orders depending on the unit leader. This clearly confused the soldiers on the ground. The soldiers with no clear mission goals may have anticipated they would go but stay low key and safe (Araki *et al.*, 2016, p.19).

Misplaced Interpretation of Civilian Control

Some authors also argue that the concept of civilian control has been over- and misinterpreted in such a stringent way that any political statements made by the military are read as grave interference in political decisions. While acknowledging civilian control is doubtlessly an essential element for the militaries of democratic states, the authors examined in this study agree that the major political elites' interpretation of civilian control has been excessive. This has muted the JSDF when critical tactical information is needed for political decisions required by the security policy. The authors also warn that such misinterpretation has distanced JSDF soldiers even farther from the public, thus weakening their morale.

Hironaka (2017) explains that such a misunderstanding of civilian control comes from politicians' general mistrust of the military. He recalls the politicians' purblind understanding of the military's roles in the 2011 earthquake disaster relief. His testimonies return to the topic a number of times :

[The 2011 earthquake caused a nuclear meltdown at the Fukushima nuclear plant, requiring a JGSDF helicopter to pour a large amount of water on top of the heated plant for an emergency cool-down]. Defence Minister Kitazawa said to a reporter, "*I had Gen. Oriki, Chief of Staff, make the final decision for this operation*". Many JSDF soldiers were stunned and confused by the Minister's admission that, "*I had him make the final decision*". The Defense Minister, a civilian, is the operational commander, not the Chief of Staff. Not only did Minister Kitazawa misplace the concept of civilian control, but he also exposed his sheer lack of responsibility for the JSDF's military operations in emergency circumstances (Hironaka, 2017, pp.38-39).

During the relief works after the 2011 earthquake, not only political leaders but also a number of high-ranking bureaucrats sent confidential inquiries to the Joint Staff Office, asking the true reasons why the US had been conducting emergency evacuations for US soldiers and their families out of Japan. They even put on a defeated face, asking "*Are they abandoning Japan?*" This attitude represents the Japanese leadership's sheer lack of responsibility for protecting Japan and a grave lack of trust in its own military, i.e. the JSDF (Hironaka, 2017, p.44).

Many JSDF soldiers were indeed disappointed by such statements and attitudes by the Japanese political and government leaders. Evidently, what sustained the soldiers' high morale during the relief work in 2011 was not the political leadership but the citizens' deep gratitude, their direct, tearful expressions to each one of the soldiers (Hironaka, 2017, p.216).

[According to public opinion polls on the JSDF, more than 90% of the respondents have a "positive impression" of the JSDF]. While the number is good, I often feel the Japanese people in general are misled to regard the JSDF to be a mere convenient rescue organization. The JSDF needs political leaders with correct understandings of civilian control, or it will lose trust from the Japanese people. Short of that, the JSDF soldiers' morale would fall, exposing Japan to danger under the ever-changing security environment in Asia and beyond (Matsushima, 2004, postscript).

Some authors' criticisms point to the JSDF's lack of readiness in peacetime. They suggest that this weakness reflects the culture engendered by misguided civilian control that discourages JSDF soldiers from speaking out :

A security breach at the Operation Room of the JMSDF is not difficult. The entrance gate is full of security staff, but there are public buses that go into the area, and there is no security check of vehicles nor of their passengers. No IDs are requested. Any terrorists could be boarding the bus and easily stage an attack (Nakamura, 2017, p.131).

The Military Police standing at the entrance of the JSDF base hold assault rifles. But those rifles are not loaded. They do not have even blank bullets. Real bullets are kept in a nearby, but separate, storage room. The Military Police are supposed to run to the storage room for loading the bullets only in an emergency case. There is one

exception : the MPs in front of the armoury ; each of their guns is loaded with five live bullets. I am confident about this because I was an MP officer myself and did this very duty for many years (Nezu, 1997, p.83).

Matsushima (2004)'s claims are in line with these authors. His copious and candid examples describing the short of readiness are alarming to readers :

JSDF tanks could not go through the express toll gate. The reason was clear : the gate was physically too narrow for tanks to pass. During the exercise, we were allowed to use the nearby ground to bypass the narrow gate, but in wartime, we would need to destroy it, later the JSDF would be legally charged for destroying public property. Furthermore, the law requires the tank drivers to pay the toll. What kind of military requires tanks to pay cash at the toll gate during the exercises, let alone in wartime ? (Matsushima, 2004, p.72).

Ballistic technology has developed so much that a cannon's range is over 30 km and a trench mortar's about 10 km. Usually, the training field in Japan is not large enough, so the JSDF cannot fully practice those weapons. They then introduced specially developed ammunition that cruises up to 2-3 km first but automatically destroys itself after that (Matsushima, 2004, p.67)

Another example may surprise readers. Sometimes the JSDF is under-budgeted so that they are not able to purchase bullets for training. Bullets are produced by Japanese firms and only sold to the JSDF, so the price stays high. In this case, the JSDF sometimes conducts training without bullets and has the soldiers cry "bang!" to mimic the launch (Matsushima, 2004, p.75).

Furthermore, Ito (2016) reveals an alarming situation where the JMSDF's Aegis warship *Myoko* — in which he served as a Navigator — confronted a North Korean spy ship in 1999 (which might have had Japanese abductees onboard) intruding upon Japan's contiguous zone. According to his description, the Japan Coast Guard (JCG) patrol vessel was pursuing the North Korean boat but could not continue, requesting that the *Myoko* take over. After firing their 127 mm cannon, the *Myoko* sailors were arming themselves for the upcoming onboard inspection of the North Korean boat. But the boat escaped out of the zone, leading *Myoko* to abort the pursuit. Ito warned of the JGSDF's unreadiness for such combat :

[Combating the North Koreans and rescuing Japanese abductees if located inside the zone] was a very possible scenario. The Prime Minister's Office just cleared the order to execute an onboard inspection, which was about to happen. But no. Impossible. We never conducted training for this kind of situation. I was an instructor myself, but I too had never taught this kind of action to my subordinates. [...] Bulletproof jackets were not even available on board our ship.

My sailors were ready to go. They glued a lot of thick *Anime* magazines around their bodies with duct tape as a substitute for a bulletproof jacket. I felt comical for a second, but soon I was enthralled by their strong determination. They shouted, "Mr. Navigator, we're ready to go now ! Thank you and farewell !!" (Ito, 2016, p.126).

Undervalued Respect for Sacrifice

Death, particularly during PSOs abroad, is a sensitive topic amongst JSDF soldiers (Yasutomi, 2018*b*). The current laws and government principles regarding PSO allow the JSDF

to be sent overseas only after safety has been guaranteed and to theatres where no combat is present.² Any death on PSOs would be interpreted as a failure of the safety guarantee, requiring the JSDF to immediately withdraw. However, soldiers serving in these missions know that the political and legal doctrine is out of step with the reality on the ground, which has turned in-mission deaths into a taboo subject among JSDF soldiers (Yasutomi, 2018a).

Some officers describe deaths that led to uneasy compensatory solutions, which may contribute to undermining troop morale :

A JASDF pilot died during a plane crash in an emergency operation. He flew a cargo plane for a medical evacuation in bad weather that led to the crash, killing this pilot and other crew on board. Despite the fact they died during their service, they were not granted a status of compensation for accidents in the line of duty ; rather, they were accused of not having been able to conduct the operation safely. Similarly, in another instance, a tank commander was killed during an exercise when his tank rolled over in a ditch. He was also accused of unsafe management of a vehicle and not granted compensation. In the latter case, I personally helped his family to prepare a lawsuit against the JSDF claiming compensation, which the family won. As such, not only the insufficient payment of compensation but the JSDF's attitude of not trying to understand these kinds of situations has weakened troop morale (Matsushima, 2004, p.183).

Hayashi (2019) also witnessed a diminished pride and commitment among troops caused by the lack of respect for soldiers' sacrifice, noting that it has been stagnantly undervalued during the decades of peacetime in Japan :

Since Japan has never participated in wars since 1945, the word "sacrifice" has lost its real meaning amongst the Japanese people who easily forget the importance of protecting their country.

It is so critical for today's JSDF soldiers to be granted the same military status as those in other countries. They may have the order to destroy and kill enemies if required. The present legal status causes paradoxes and confusion on the ground. As a result, soldiers fighting at the frontline in overseas missions always get the deadliest burden. This has dispirited their pride and commitment (Hayashi, 2019, p.81).

Three Theoretical Approaches

Based upon the examination of various non-academic paperbacks written by a number of high-ranking JSDF officers as exhibited above, this section explores three theoretical explanations as to why some officers are apt to publish such books.

² The Five Principles of Peacekeeping stipulated in Article 6 (7) of the Peacekeeping Operations Act specify the conditions under which Japan can participate in UN peacekeeping operations. They include : (1) agreement on a ceasefire reached amongst the parties to the armed conflict ; (2) consent from the UN and from the host country allowing Japan to participate in UNPKOs ; (3) impartiality of the Japanese operations ; (4) withdrawal if the above conditions are not met ; and (5) the use of weapons within limits judged reasonably necessary.

Whistle-Blowing Theory

Whistle-blowing behaviour helps frame and explain retired officers' incentives to publish disclosure books about the JSDF. Whistle-blowing is defined as disclosure by former and current organization members of illegal, immoral, or illegitimate practices under the control of their employers, to persons or organizations that may be able to effect actions (Near & Miceli 1985, p.4). Many of the contents of the disclosures in the above-mentioned examples do not necessarily contain illegal, immoral, or illegitimate practices in the JSDF. If this definition is strictly applied, only a very few instances may fit into whistle-blowing activity. Nevertheless, whistle-blowing theories can still provide robust explanations to help us understand particularly how and why exposés are made and are made public, and what type of organizational member is inclined to do so.

The Three Phases of Whistle-Blowing

Miceli and her colleagues (2008) explain that there are three phases through which problematic wrongdoing can become a whistle-blowing case. In Phase 1, organization members assess whether the problematic activity is wrongful (e.g., producing false financial reports or sexual harassment). In Phase 2, an organization experiences two separate phenomena : (a) signalling and (b) demoralizing. In the former, organization members (e.g., employees) realize that the organization would not correct any wrongdoings if they are reported. The members perceive that wrongdoings are noticed but generally tolerated, and in such an environment, whistle-blowing is too risky. After wrongdoings are noticed by the employees, a high sense of demoralization develops (e.g. psychological distress, anxiety, depression), which leads to lower productivity and a withdrawal from work. In Phase 3, observers of wrongdoing decide whether it is their own responsibility to act upon the specific wrongdoing and whether and what means for action are available. Observers in this stage may have to calculate the expected cost (including the organization's retaliation against the "betrayal" act) and benefits (e.g., successful consequences) in relation to the options available to them.

Organizational Defence Mechanisms against Whistle-Blowing

Why, then, do many members of organizations remain silent about the wrongdoings they observe? There are several factors that diminish the incentives for making violations public (and thus ripe for correction). The first reason is coercion. The (personal) cost of whistle-blowing is often much higher than not blowing the whistle. Whistle-blowers may well have to face retaliation by their organization (e.g. salary reduction, demotion, harassment, etc.) or pressure not to reveal such information from employees who want to avoid disadvantages as a consequence. Normalization theory provides another explanation, describing the process by which wrongdoings gradually become "legitimized" through

everyday practices so that their observers no longer feel compelled to come forward (Ashforth & Anand, 2003). Once such routine practices have been institutionalized, organization members begin to self-censor their observations and judgments (Phases 1 and 2). Moreover, any newcomers to the organization are likely to be compromised, coerced or convinced to collude so that misconduct will not be reported (Ashforth & Anand, 2003).

The Theoretical Implications for JSDF Soldiers' Disclosure Books

These whistle-blowing theories help us understand why disclosure paperbacks are published by retired high-ranking JSDF officers. They reveal that whistle-blowing is generally a prosocial behaviour. All of the authors of the books examined in this study wrote about the positive intentions behind their decisions to publish, prioritizing service to the public good over retaliation or personal reward. None, at least in their writings, claimed to disrespect the JSDF and its soldiers nor wished to put Japanese citizens in danger by revealing inconvenient internal information. Nakamura writes in his foreword :

I do not intend to leak any confidential information, nor do I mean to disrespect the JSDF soldiers who serve our country. I decided to write this book to inform the readers of the realities the JSDF is facing now where its defence capability is not fully practised due to many legal limitations, leading Japan into a more dangerous situation (Nakamura, 2019, p.11).

Nezu similarly writes in the postscript to his volume :

None of the present Japanese media reports the true face of the JSDF today. I decided to write this book to let the readers know how JSDF soldiers are thinking and feeling every day in their unit. I wrote honestly although I may cause some people (and myself) to be in a very difficult situation (Nezu, 1997, p.229).

During their service, the authors may have shown some interest in (either overt or covert) whistle-blowing [Phases 1 and 2], but they did not feel responsible for, or they were not equipped with effective means to reveal, wrongdoings that they observed [Phase 3]. However, once they retired, the spectre of organizational retaliation lost its bite, as punishment like salary reduction and demotion no longer applied (although there are always risks of being retrospectively accused and punished). It is not difficult to think that leaving the organization (the JSDF in this case) has allowed potential whistle-blowers to decide to make their concerns known [Phase 3].

“Dirty Work” Theory

The contents of the disclosure books examined in the earlier section suggest that the authors' motivations for publishing are not purely rooted in their pursuit of justice. Many aspects of their narratives suggest ardent quests to expose their unique and uneasy perspectives on military culture and logic that may not be immediately comprehensible to the outside public, nor wholly compatible with its mores. In other words, while pursuing

justice, these authors also tend to pursue greater understanding and acceptance by the public. In this context, dirty work theory helps us to better understand the authors' choices to publish disclosure books.

Defining Dirty Work

Dirty work theory developed amongst scholars who paid particular attention to specific types of occupations that people usually perceive to be "dirty work". According to Ashforth and Kreiner (1999), "dirty work" refers to the labour of individuals whose occupations are stigmatized in association with either physical, social, or moral challenges and issues, such as an undertaker, garbage collector, correctional officer, strip club dancer, etc. Defining "dirty work" is difficult, and Ashforth and Kreiner discuss how the perception of what is "dirty" is inevitably socially constructed by subjective public opinion (Ashforth & Kreiner 2014b, p.424).

Characteristics of "Dirty Workers"

Dirty work generally inspires, in a significant portion of the public, a range of negative emotions and categorizations (e.g. dangerous, disgusting, demeaning, etc.). At the same time, work that is to some degree "tainted" does not always lead to lower occupational prestige. Certain occupations receive relatively higher prestige due to their higher educational and technical requirements, higher income, and stouter mental and ideological requirements, such as emergency room nurses and firefighters (Tracy & Scott, 2006). These socially constructed perceptions create psychological distance between "dirty workers" and the rest of the public. In turn, this social alienation gives rise to unique behaviour amongst stigmatized workers.

Dirty work theories can help explain such workers' behaviours. They often strengthen bonds amongst themselves to defend their self- and social esteem as well as to protect themselves from derogatory criticisms from the outside public (Ashforth *et al.*, 2007). They do so by fostering a strong sense of in-group occupational cement (Kreiner *et al.*, 2006), which brings them closer to one another but can alienate them from the public. At the same time, stigmatized workers also build a defensive mechanism against losing social validation: social psychology finds that people wish to be recognized for their roles, functions, and contributions to society (e.g., Milton, 2009). In order to retain social validation, those working in stigmatized fields tend to hide what they do from their family and neighbours, as they wish to avoid voyeuristic investigations (e.g., "how do you do such work?", as in the case for undertakers, etc.) and other feelings of insecurity (Ashforth & Kreiner, 2014a). For these reasons, the more isolated stigmatized workers become, the stronger their bond gets, and this spiral continues.

The Implications for JSDF Soldiers' Disclosure Books

Applying dirty work theory to the JSDF is valid and effective for a number of reasons. First, scholars in this field include soldiers as one of the groups of stigmatized workers (e.g. Ashforth & Kreiner, 2014b). As a number of military anthropologists and military sociologists have pointed out in earlier studies, in the case of post-war Japan, where the military and war are renounced by the Constitution, JSDF soldiers (at least until the 1990s) were regarded as “second-class citizens” and not were not respected for their work (e.g. Frühstück & Ben-Ari, 2002). Many authors of the books examined for this study also described their vivid and vexing memory of having been derogated on the street by ordinary citizens yelling, “*Hey you in uniform ! You are all thieves of our tax money !*”. One author writes :

When I heard this, I immediately noticed they were talking about me. My face turned red out of anger. I quickly glanced at them, but I ran and ran away from them so I couldn't hear them shouting anymore. I was so nervous and sweaty. After that event, I swore to myself I would never go out of the base in uniform! (Nezu, 1997, p.93).

This description clearly reflects *both* the public's repugnant (in this context most likely social and particularly moral) attitude towards stigmatized workers and the soldiers' awareness that they seem destined to be tainted in their society.

Secondly, dirty work theory supports the in-group option of developing micro-cultures that defend self-esteem from the public's criticisms and derogation. This allows JSDF personnel – facing public criticism over the alleged unconstitutionality of the JSDF and their use of weapons in overseas operations – to isolate themselves and develop their own organizational culture that is hardly accessible to the general public. A portion of the public is also keen to ask voyeuristic questions about what the soldiers' lives and thoughts look like. Retired JSDF soldiers have more opportunities to respond to such questions by describing the unique philosophies, methods, traditions, and other activities that have been “normalized” for and by soldiers in their secluded environment. Revealing such information presents an opportunity to regain social validation and defend the JSDF's identity and contribution to society. Indeed, many authors write that they felt it necessary to inform the public about their unfamiliar, unique ways of thinking and approaching life – ones the public may deem incomprehensible.

The Literature of *Seken*

These two theories on whistle-blowing and dirty work help us understand why JSDF soldiers commonly disclose internal information: pursuit of justice and a quest for social validation. What, then, are the social structures that may prevent the soldiers from exposing their sensitive information, and what liberates them from these constraints ? Studies exploring the uniqueness of the Japanese mindset and culture help us uncover these

questions. They blossomed in the 1990s owing to research by a number of Japanese and Western anthropologists and sociologists. One such area of study focuses on *seken*, a conceptual community space where the Japanese sustain their sense of belonging. The concept of *seken* also helps us understand why high-ranking JSDF soldiers often publish disclosure books after retirement. *Seken* is a difficult concept as it has been embedded amongst the Japanese for centuries and is a commonly used point of reference for the “right” decisions to make in many parts of their everyday life. Inoue (2014) points out that little research has been done on this topic because it is either too difficult to indicate what it is or because knowledge of what *seken* means and its resulting influence are taken-for-granted. *Seken* is an informal psychological territory within which members are bound by sharing common standards and norms for their lives.

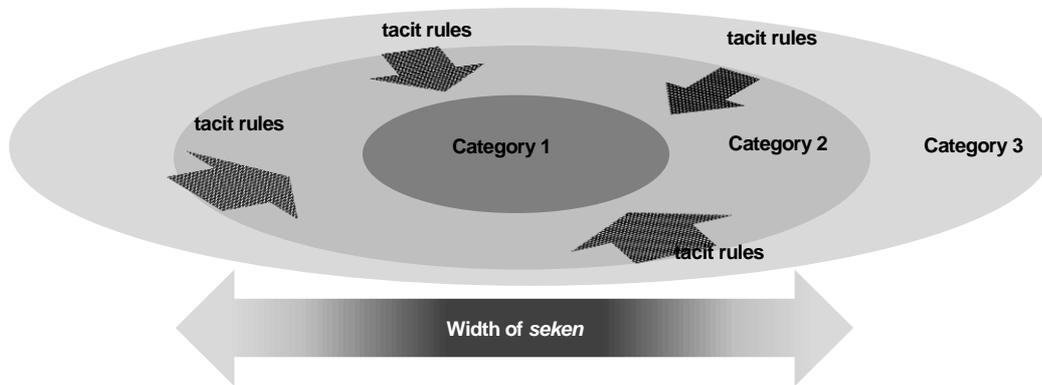
Characteristics of Seken

Respect for collectivism over individualism: Watsuji (1934) explains in his classical work *Ethics as Human Learning* that *seken* does not value the individual “self” and members are expected to maintain a high level of collective harmony amongst themselves. This contrasts with the quintessential Western understanding of harmony where individuals are by nature different and thus necessary for and capable of creating harmony in their search for compromise. *Seken* presumes every member is by nature equal and thus expected to refrain from unique actions and attitudes that may disturb group harmony. In her well-circulated book *Japanese Society: A Practical Guide to Understanding the Japanese Mindset and Culture*, Nakane (1970) argues that *seken* is typically fostered on three levels of society : (1) members who share a natural closeness, such as family and its related members, co-workers and superiors in their workplace, and the neighbourhood of their living area [category 1] ; (2) invisible communities in which members do not usually meet in person but feel somewhat supported by themselves [category 2]; and outsiders [category 3]. Nakane explains that each member in a category expects (and is expected) to know and respect group rules and feels a bond (strongest in category 1) with fellow members. There is a strong presumption that no member should act in a way that destabilizes the *seken* harmony.

Sets of regulations: Abe (2013), in his book in Japanese *What is “seken”?*, argues that there are at least four rules in *seken*. The first is reciprocity. If a member is given assistance (material, financial, or any other form), he/she ought to provide the same volume of help in return. The second is seniority: members are expected to be able to find their position within the members’ hierarchy of seniority and act accordingly. The third is egalitarianism. It may sound contrary to the second rule but, as mentioned above, all members are expected to be regarded as equal, and they shall not take any actions or hold attitudes that reveal differences with other members, as doing so may well disturb group harmony. The fourth is respect for ceremonies. Members ought to maintain ceremonial

events and activities that have traditionally been kept. They include not only big events like participating in village festivals but also everyday customs like bowing when greeting (Fig.1). Naoki Sato (2011) argues that anyone who fails to comply with these rules is subject to dislodging from the group.

Fig. 1: Structure of *Seken*



Source : Author, based on Nakane (1970) and Abe (2013).

Shame : Inoue (2014) argues that what prevents *seken* members from violating group rules and regulations is their strong sense of shame. He refers to Ruth Benedict’s famous study arguing that the Japanese culture is strongly rooted in the feeling of shame or “*haji*” (Benedict, 1951). This means that a member’s disturbance of *seken*’s harmony by violating (or being ignorant of) rules demonstrates his/her inability to be sensitive enough to others’ criticisms and humiliation. Benedict notes that while shame is not particularly unique to Japanese culture, its significance is a key factor in how the Japanese conceive of (and enforce) responsibility (*ibid.*). Thus, shame plays a role of collective social sanction providing psychological punishment for members who have failed to observe group rules. It combines reprobation for the abjection of self-pride with a kind of (reprehensible) notoriety for holding oneself above the group. For this reason, the Japanese try their utmost to avoid invoking shame in or casting it upon *seken* members (their family members included) in the eyes of others.

The Implications for JSDF Soldiers’ Disclosure Books

The literature on *seken* makes it possible to compare JSDF soldiers’ behaviours with those of soldiers in other militaries. The Japanologists who study the culture of *seken* seem to emphasize its uniqueness to Japan, or at least its stark contrasts with Western culture. However, interestingly, there seem to be a number of common elements between the *seken* culture and those highlighted by students of military culture in the West (e.g., English, 2004 ; Finlan, 2013). For instance, Dandeker and Gow (1999) argue that military culture is unique and distinct from other organizational culture in that its core values rest upon the subordination of the self to the group and the idea of sacrifice for the common good, values

that are voluntarily upheld by individual soldiers. This resembles the *seken* culture wherein individualism is less respected than collectivism for the purpose of maintaining harmony amongst members. Moreover, Dandeker and Gow also discuss the presence of informal culture within the military; that is, elements of shared values and beliefs that are not clearly expressed nor sanctioned by the formal culture (Dandeker & Gow, 1999). These elements of informal culture resemble the sets of informal rules and tacit consent present in *seken*.

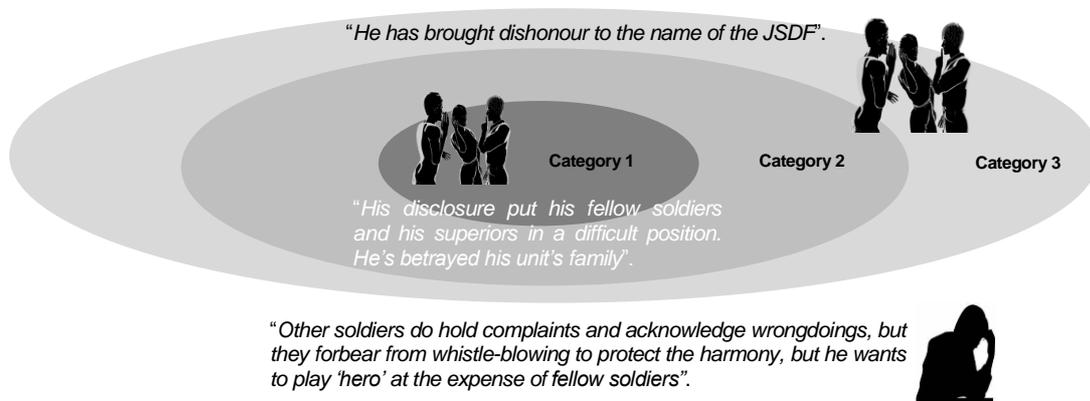
Furthermore, Nakane's categorization of the three "groups" in the *seken* structure (cf. Fig. 1, p.15) helps specify the extent of JSDF soldiers' psychological bonds : Category 1 represents a soldier's unit and the everyday contact he/she has with peers, immediate superiors, and subordinates. Category 2 represents other soldiers within the JSDF with whom he/she may not be directly involved. Category 3 represents those outside of the JSDF. Inside categories 1 and 2, there are sets of formal as well as *informal* rules that soldiers are expected to respect (a failure to comply with formal rules may lead to discharge, while violating informal rules is apt to result in isolation within the unit). Notwithstanding this, such attempted comparisons here are premature and require more extensive investigation.³ Nevertheless, there are strong signs that the *seken* structure is applicable to and reflective of the military, a fact that holds significant weight in the case of the JSDF.

Crucially, the formal and informal rules preventing JSDF soldiers from releasing information they might consider important is reinforced by the presence of *seken* culture in the Force. It has to do with the difference between "guilt" and "shame" (Piers & Singer, 1953 [2015]). The Self-Defence Force Laws and other legal systems in Japan oblige JSDF soldiers to maintain secrecy and withhold confidential information. Any failure to comply with these legal obligations brings about a criminal charge, begetting "guilt" in the violator. At the same time, "shame" also works to prevent a JSDF soldier from breaking rules (including whistle-blowing and other information leakage) in three ways : (a) public group shaming [Categories 1, 2 & 3] (*You dishonoured the name of the JSDF in the eyes of the public*); (b) shaming peers and superiors who will be held to account for their actions [Category 1] ; and (c) self-shaming in relation to others [Categories 1 & 2] (*Other soldiers do hold complaints and acknowledge wrongdoings, but they forbear from whistle-blowing to protect group harmony, while you want to play hero at the cost of fellow soldiers*).

Figure 2 (next page) offers a summary :

³ It is not this author's intention in the present study to go beyond these passing remarks on the theoretical exploration of comparisons between Western military organizational cultures and those found in the armed forces of Eastern democratic countries, such as Japan and South Korea. In-depth treatment of this under-explored research area is reserved for future studies of his.

Fig. 2 : Three Kinds of Shame Preventing JSDF Soldiers from Whistle-Blowing and Other Disclosure of Sensitive Information



Source: Author

As such, whistle-blowing and other acts of disclosing sensitive information are filtered and discouraged by guilt (violations of a legal obligation) and shame (protection from criticisms and humiliation). Once a JSDF soldier is retired, he/she is liberated from some of these filters. Needless to say, the existing legal systems and JSDF internal regulations still prohibit retired personnel from disclosing confidential or sensitive information. Likewise, close networks among JSDF retirees continue to exist, forming a default *seken* for retired soldiers. Nevertheless, the density of such networks may be less than it used to be on active duty, allowing them a greater degree of liberty to disclose what they perceive as important for the public to know.

Conclusion

This article started by introducing the phenomenon of high-ranking retired officers who publish non-academic paperbacks revealing internal stories from and personal views of their military service and operations. Most of the information provided by such books does not pertain to military secrets, nor does it describe government conspiracies that could threaten national security as such. These books do not, strictly speaking, amount to whistle-blowing or scandalous exposés. Nonetheless, they do contain material and opinions that the JSDF and the Ministry of Defence would not want to make public, as certain revelations could require a degree of accountability that might otherwise be avoided. What do they tell the readers, why do they do that now, and how do they come to their decision to publish such books ?

The short answers are easy: once liberated by retirement from formal and informal pressure and censure, these officers write to reveal information that the State would rather not disclose to or debate in the public. Motivation can be simply economic: publishers are willing to pay for sensational and scandalous insider stories that readers may enjoy. A deeper

exploration drawing on theories of social psychology reveals intriguing findings. Firstly, research on whistle-blowing explains the incentives for information disclosure. Yet, careful readings of the authors' writings suggest the reasons for their behaviours are complex. Their intention for writing these books does not simply proceed from a quest for fame and heroism, nor is it solely generated by the pursuit of justice. As the literature on dirty work theory suggests, the soldiers' occupational sphere has been stigmatized by the rest of society, leading to voyeuristic attention to the conditions of their service (particularly on missions abroad), the disparagement of soldiers, and a distancing of the military from the public. It is through these volumes that high-ranking career soldiers can foster social validation by informing the public about JSDF activities and its soldiers' feelings and experiences. Writing disclosure books like these is a result of their own internal struggle between two conflicting senses of duty – a personal call for pursuing justice and a responsibility for preserving the JSDF's honour and harmony. Moreover, retired soldiers reveal that a number of serious issues continue to affect the armed forces as a result of both society's distancing from its military personnel and the JSDF's pallid efforts to connect with it. They are unanimously alarmed that society's misconceptions, misunderstandings, biases, and scant knowledge about the JSDF often cause unrealistic demands to be placed on it, frequently leading soldiers into life-threatening situations. The authors of disclosure books are voicing the concerns and complaints of soldiers on the ground so that their voices can be heard. Thus, former soldiers write about their experiences because they wish detailed descriptions of the JSDF culture to help readers better understand and more fully support JSDF soldiers as well as their activities inside and outside of Japan. Such books also reflect a fear that their writings might bring shame to colleagues, to the JSDF as a whole, and to themselves, as publishing content that has been strongly discouraged – however trivial the information may be – is seen as an act of betrayal.

More extensive study is undoubtedly necessary. The present contribution has only examined available non-academic paperbacks but excluded other forms of publications, like writings in both academic and non-academic journals, blogs and other social networking service articles. It has also refrained from engaging in quantitative analysis of the production under study, a line of inquiry likely to yield enlightening results. Moreover, it remains to be ascertained whether this phenomenon is characteristic of Japan only or whether it can be found in other democratic states. There is also a need to investigate whether such writings can effectively change the JSDF's military organizational culture. Finally, further research might usefully further explore how the soldiers' disclosures reflect internalized agony (a set of complex responses to external accusations of self-righteousness and pride as well as the threat of shame) engendered by decades of mutual distancing between the Japanese armed forces and the public.

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