

2015

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Recommended Citation

Shimodaira, Takuya (2015) "The JMSDF's Resilient Power for Civil Society: Lessons from the Great East Japan Earthquake," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 68 : No. 3 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol68/iss3/5>

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THE JMSDF'S RESILIENT POWER FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Lessons from the Great East Japan Earthquake

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The Asia-Pacific is a disaster-prone region. In humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) operations, it is crucial to save lives at the outset. Success in the initial phase will produce trustful relationships among civil and military actors and will influence subsequent relief operations.

Soon after Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda) struck the central Philippines on 8 November 2013, the United States dispatched an aircraft carrier and conducted Operation DAMAYAN.¹ Dr. Patrick Cronin, senior director of the Asia-Pacific Security Program at the Center for a New American Security, wrote, “The response to Haiyan could be a turning point for the United States in Asia, an opportunity to re-up the pivot.”²

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Japan too sent a relief force to the devastated area, marking Japan's largest international disaster-relief mission to date. It readily brings to mind Operation TOMODACHI, after the Great East Japan Earthquake (GEJE) of 11 March 2011. The response to the GEJE showed the utility of integrating diverse coalitions. The deep alliance between the United States and Japan was the main pillar of this coalition. *Tomodachi* means “close friends, trusting each other”; Japan and the United States can shape a more peaceful future and maintain peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region as the strongest possible allies and *tomodachi*. President Barack Obama declared in the 2014 State of the

Union address his intention to continue to focus on the Asia-Pacific, support American allies, and work toward a future of greater security and prosperity.³ What kind of power should the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) exercise to shoulder an assertive role in shaping such a future alongside the United States?

One of the most important lessons learned from the GEJE is the importance of smooth coordination with local people to judge needs onsite.⁴ To deal with an unprecedented disaster, governmental and nongovernmental actors must make good use of their own and each other's strengths. For the JMSDF, it is necessary to establish a trustful relationship with the local people if it is to meet onsite needs in an appropriate and timely manner.

In the Asia-Pacific region, multilateral cooperation in dealing with frequent major natural disasters is indispensable. One of the most important kinds of security operations that the JMSDF can perform now is HA/DR, in which saving lives from the sea in the initial phase is critical. The JMSDF can contribute to the establishment of trust among the nations of the Asia-Pacific region through the manner in which it makes available its knowledge and capabilities.⁵

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and the roles that they are expected to play have attracted new attention. A large number of the volunteers who worked vigorously to rescue and support disaster victims immediately in the wake of the GEJE were from NGOs. In fact, the total number of volunteers registered at volunteer centers exceeded 767,000 in the six months following the disaster.⁶ In addition to sending volunteers, NGOs provided a wide range of services, from delivering relief supplies to providing health care.

Although humanitarian assistance has traditionally been carried out by civilian organizations, in recent years military organizations have placed more weight on HA/DR. As a result, the activities of military and civilian organizations now often overlap or compete with each other during HA/DR, causing confusion about who is responsible for coordination. Professor Peter D. Feaver of Duke University argues that there is a latent gap between civil and military organizations, one that is difficult to fill even by building a good civil-military relationship.⁷ Nevertheless, a large-scale HA/DR operation necessarily requires unified effort and a whole-of-government approach; this gap must somehow be overcome.

First, this article analyzes onsite coordination during Operation TOMODACHI among the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps and the JMSDF and describes the strengths provided by the JMSDF. Next, it reviews the activities of NGOs in the response to the GEJE. Last, it explores the resilience and robustness of the JMSDF's power for connecting civil and military organizations in the Asia-Pacific region.

The author joined Operation TOMODACHI on board the state-of-the-art helicopter destroyer JS *Hyuga* (DDH 181) as chief of staff of JMSDF Escort Flotilla 1 and was responsible for coordinating Japanese-U.S. joint operations in the afflicted areas. These observations and recommendations are based on successes and difficulties experienced during the operation onsite.

OVERVIEW OF OPERATION TOMODACHI

An enormous earthquake and tsunami devastated the Tohoku region of northeastern Japan on 11 March 2011, a combined disaster since referred to as the “Great East Japan Earthquake.” In response to the GEJE, Japan’s Self-Defense Force (SDF) quickly went into action, deploying forty naval vessels and approximately three hundred aircraft. Early the following morning, JMSDF units reached a position off Miyagi Prefecture and started search-and-rescue operations. On 14 March Joint Task Force–Tohoku (JTF-TH) was formed; the SDF provided more than a hundred thousand personnel until the task force’s dissolution on 1 July. JTF-TH controlled at the maximum five divisions and four brigades (about forty-five thousand ground personnel); fifty vessels and 172 naval aircraft (about fourteen thousand maritime personnel); and 240 other aircraft (about twenty-one thousand air personnel). The results of its activities over three months were that 19,286 lives were saved, 9,500 remains were found, 23,370 were provided medical assistance, 4,709,019 meals were served, 32,985 tons of water were supplied, bathing assistance was rendered to 966,436 people, and other support, including debris removal from public facilities, bridge reconstruction, and temporary housing, was provided.⁸

Meanwhile, the U.S. Navy promptly responded to a request of assistance, deploying eight naval vessels, including the aircraft carrier USS *Ronald Reagan* (CVN 76). They arrived off Miyagi Prefecture before dawn on 13 March, and started Operation TOMODACHI. At its peak the United States deployed approximately twenty naval vessels, about 160 aircraft, and over twenty thousand personnel.⁹ Helicopters of both the JMSDF and U.S. Navy transported water, food, and blankets from JS *Hyuga* and the supply vessel JS *Tokiwa* (AOE 423) to playgrounds and other places in Miyagi and Iwate Prefectures. By 20 March, ten days since the earthquake, the needs of the afflicted areas were shifting to livelihood support. The USS *Essex* (LHD 2) Amphibious Ready Group, with the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit, arrived off Aomori Prefecture and began to provide relief supplies in support of Operation TOMODACHI in cooperation with the SDF, the Japan Coast Guard, the National Police Agency, and fire authorities. U.S. forces assigned to Operation TOMODACHI shipped approximately 280 tons of food, 7.7 million liters of water, forty-five thousand liters of fuel, and approximately 3,100 tons of other items.¹⁰ On 1 May, after making this enormous contribution, the

United States terminated the operation, although maintaining a quick-reaction capability. The significance of this deployment and its unprecedented scale are particularly worthy of discussion.

JMSDF and U.S. forces expeditiously deployed to the disaster site in full strength almost immediately after the disaster and displayed to the world a high level of interoperability. Then–Defense Minister Yoshimi Kitazawa evaluated their interaction as a symbol of the “deepening of the Japan-U.S. alliance.”¹¹ In addition to the support received from the United States, Japan received help in the form of supplies and relief funds from various other nations. In return for the help that was given to Japan in a time of critical need, the JMSDF must do whatever it can in future disasters elsewhere.

THE JMSDF’S STRONG HA/DR CAPABILITIES

What is required immediately after any disaster is devotion of all efforts to search and rescue. Next, it becomes necessary to understand in detail the situation in the afflicted area to plan the transportation of relief supplies. In view of the characteristics of naval power, access from the sea can be expected to achieve great results.

Sea Base

The main characteristic of the GEJE was that the devastation was spread along an extensive coastline, the degree of damage suffered and type of support required varying according to the area. A large volume of floating debris made it difficult to approach the coast and caused great confusion. Particularly at first, helicopters and landing craft offer highly effective ways to reach isolated coastal areas, such as the tips of peninsulas and isolated islands.

The response to such a situation must be comprehensive. The JMSDF can provide an effective sea base for onsite, well-coordinated operations involving the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force and the Japan Air Self-Defense Force and effective utilization of the capabilities of U.S. forces. This coordination can take into account the relationship with the Japan Coast Guard, the police, and prefectural headquarters for disaster countermeasures.

JS *Hyuga*, with its extensive command-and-control (C2) and air-base capabilities, was fully utilized on the scene. Naval forces have good capabilities for searching isolated afflicted areas in detail, collecting information, searching for and rescuing castaways at sea, transporting relief supplies to a wide area, and analyzing and evaluating the extent of damage. In selecting the types of support required in specific locations, it is necessary to grasp accurately the people’s needs in the afflicted areas, always keeping in mind the need to maintain the effectiveness of forces and discern the content of support required. As the necessity of the civil-military cooperation in peacetime tends to increase, the JMSDF, which

operates at the frontline in noncombat operations, must focus deliberately on coordination with local governments, international organizations, and NGOs.

Command and Control

Because the initial actions after any disaster are most important, the JMSDF and U.S. Navy exploited their characteristics for swiftness and mobility when the GEJE occurred. They made preparations rapidly for collecting information and responded at full power. In the HA/DR operations that followed it was necessary to maximize C2.

The needs in afflicted areas change. Search and rescue for the missing is prioritized for about three days after a disaster, at which point transportation of relief supplies is prioritized until about one week after the occurrence; then the priority shifts particularly to the restoration of lifelines and life support for isolated victims. Moreover, reconstruction assistance begins about one week after the disaster and becomes full-blown when about two weeks have passed. It is of utmost importance to discern the timing of changes in needs.

It is also essential for the JMSDF to utilize the capabilities of JS *Hyuga*—and also JS *Ise*, of the same class—in cooperation with the U.S. Navy, to the maximum extent. It is necessary to consider not only efficient operations of forces but also smooth coordination for supply and repair. In addition, it is necessary to design a cycle in which forces may be added and changed continuously, with timing that meets the needs in the afflicted areas. It is indispensable for the JMSDF and U.S. Navy to devise a concept, based on common background and high C2 capability, that maintains a common operational picture.

It is also important to hold video teleconferences and exchange liaison officers to enhance the effectiveness of the operational cycle. Such a coordination process has been established through exercises in the past few years, and communications on-scene have been sufficient. However, there has been no opportunity to practice interactions among the whole of government.

In the end, the principal arena of HA/DR is on the land. The characteristics of ground, maritime, and air forces and of their operating environments are different. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct exercises in advance.

Onsite-centricity: Information Superiority

Humanitarian assistance / disaster relief has basically the same operational cycle as combat operations. “Victims’ needs on the scene” is equivalent to “movement of the enemy” and is a core factor of the operational cycle.

For the U.S. Navy, information is always the center of the operation cycle. U.S. personnel first transported water and emergency food to the afflicted areas, and every time they did so they directly asked victims for input or conducted questionnaire surveys. Then they addressed these needs in their next assistance

actions. This process is equivalent to the analysis of information on the enemy. The JMSDF also conducted search and rescue of the missing immediately after the disaster, as well as the provision of water, food, and blankets, and it coordinated with the U.S. Navy activities such as assistance in bathing.

In such activity it is important to distribute appropriate information to alleviate the anxiety not only of victims but of the entire nation and to minimize confusion, taking into account the almost total lack of information in the afflicted areas immediately after the occurrence of a disaster. It is also necessary to consider the points for distributing and replenishing accumulated relief supplies and replacing perishable items that become outdated. It is important to share and coordinate such information and activities to respond to the people's needs in the afflicted areas swiftly and accurately.

The cooperation between the JMSDF and the U.S. Navy is becoming more and more important, in ways depending on the characteristics of areas where they operate. Each individual SDF and U.S. unit needs to coordinate in a way that contributes to the overall objective by taking advantage of their characteristics and maximizing their capabilities. Using the lessons learned from the past, the JMSDF has been aware that disaster response has three steps: initial search-and-rescue stage, life assistance, and reconstruction assistance stage. Although it is difficult to define standards for transitioning to each next step, decision to take specific actions can always be made onsite in the afflicted areas.

NGO ACTIVITIES DURING THE GEJE AND THE JMSDF

Japan Platform (JPF), an international humanitarian-assistance organization founded jointly by a number of NGOs, the government of Japan, and the Japanese business community, played a significant role in making up for the loss of local government functions during the GEJE.¹² It created a mechanism that allowed for the prompt and effective delivery of assistance to disaster victims by connecting local governments, administrative agencies, private corporations, NGOs, and other entities with the needs of the people in the disaster-affected areas. NGOs played a big role in this mechanism, acting as the coordinating authority.

The day after the disaster occurred, JPF immediately activated a partnership with other NGOs. Civic Force, a professional and leading disaster-relief organization, sent helicopters to the disaster-affected areas for situational awareness. Thereafter NGOs, led by JPF, jointly undertook a great many relief tasks, such as distributing supplies, preparing meals, and managing volunteer centers.¹³

What follows is a review of the major activities that were carried out by NGOs in response to the GEJE in the categories of relief supplies, volunteers, and health care. The article will then propose a possible relationship between the JMSDF

and NGOs, a concept based on the interview with the chairman and founder of Civic Force, Kensuke Onishi.

Delivering Relief Supplies

ADRA Japan, a “specified nonprofit corporation” (as defined in Japanese law) based on the Christian faith, carries out its activities cooperatively on an international basis with the aim of restoring and maintaining human dignity around the world.¹⁴

ADRA Japan implemented six projects totaling about ¥954 million in the response to the GEJE, which was its largest undertaking since its founding. In its initial response ADRA supported the provision of meals for about a hundred persons in Yamamoto-cho, Miyagi Prefecture, including the personnel of the disaster-response office. It thereafter supplied daily necessities to 4,320 affected households in Matsuyama City, Miyagi Prefecture, and 26,683 households in nine municipalities that included Tamura City, Fukushima Prefecture. It also supplied necessities to elementary, junior high, and senior high schools in Fukushima Prefecture, including bicycles and school uniforms. For 1,030 households accommodated in temporary dwellings in Yamamoto-cho the organization ascertained and monitored needs to help build a framework and community for mutual assistance.

Transportation is essential for accomplishing the delivery of these supplies. A private company, Takahashi Helicopter Service K.K., joined hands with Civic Force to build a transportation system through a public-private partnership that would directly respond to calls for help from disaster sites. Some local governments suffered damage and temporarily lost their ability to function; NGOs provided support for them, as well as supplying what was needed in the affected areas. The use of private helicopter-service companies like Takahashi K.K. was a significant example of flexibility by the local government and businesses.

Parties that are supposed to provide disaster relief—the central government, local governments, large corporations, small and medium-sized enterprises, and NGOs—have different tasks that they perform depending on circumstances. It is therefore important to build relationships among all these parties in advance to share their knowledge and experiences for future disaster response.

Kensuke Onishi argues that Civic Force can be used as a main resource to gather emergency supplies instead of the JMSDF, because Civic Force has the knowledge, experience, and platforms to gather information, manpower, funds, and resources in an organized manner. Civic Force has contracted with the business community—almost a thousand corporations in Japan that can provide various kinds of goods, clothes, and shelters—and puts its skills into practice almost every year.¹⁵ As one of the most recognized and professional NGOs, Civic Force

has a profound and unique knowledge base and extensive experience and capability. The JMSDF should recognize the professionalism of NGOs, especially their knowledge about the *gemba* (“at the site”), and produce more plans to coordinate with private entities to maximize the capabilities of both.

Sending Volunteers

Since the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake of January 1995, the Peace Boat Disaster Relief Volunteer Center (PBV), a “general incorporated association” (again, a category defined by Japan’s legal framework), has been engaged in carrying out emergency relief activities in areas affected by natural disasters. PBV has provided assistance all around the world: after earthquakes in Turkey, Taiwan, Pakistan, Niigata, and China (the province of Sichuan); the large tsunami that hit Sri Lanka in 2004; and Hurricane Katrina, which struck the United States.¹⁶

On the basis of the experience that it has accumulated sending disaster-relief volunteers and engaging in international relief operations, PBV was able to organize a large volunteer group immediately after the occurrence of the GEJE. PBV sent volunteers to Ishinomaki City, in Miyagi Prefecture, and other affected areas to perform such relief activities as preparing meals, removing dirt, distributing supplies, and supporting evacuation centers. As PBV accepted volunteers from foreign countries and businesses in addition to Japanese citizens, it was able to assign about two hundred volunteers per day to carry out a variety of assistance tasks according to ever-changing local needs. As an organization that participates in cross-border disaster-relief operations, PBV has accepted and organized more than four hundred volunteers from about fifty countries around the world.

Civic Force too, Kensuke Onishi has pointed out, can send emergency-response teams, led by professionals trained for and accustomed to disaster environments, assess relief needs, and, drawing on its wealth of knowledge and experience, conduct effective and prompt disaster relief.¹⁷

The JMSDF should cooperate with NGOs in ways that make the most of each organization’s capability in order to focus on the people’s needs. To do this, the JMSDF should use professional NGOs to acquire immediate situational awareness by sending emergency-response teams who know the environment.

Providing Health Care

SHARE—Services for the Health in Asian & African Regions—was founded as a specified nonprofit corporation in 1983 by physicians, nurses, and students who started with grassroots activities.¹⁸ With the goal of creating a society where everybody can live a healthy life in both mind and body, SHARE has been offering health care in Thailand, Cambodia, East Timor, South Africa, and Japan.

After the GEJE, SHARE provided emergency assistance in Natori City, Miyagi Prefecture, and then carried out health-care support activities in Kesenuma

City, mainly by visiting disaster-affected residences, evacuation centers, and temporary dwellings, and providing health consultations to victims.

In late March, the Kesennuma Traveling Care Support Team was formed, with the cooperation of local doctors and nursing staff, as well as medical support staff from outside Miyagi Prefecture. SHARE participated in its health-consultation section and engaged in various activities such as visiting disaster victims still in their homes, especially elderly people and mothers with little children, to confirm their safety and condition and to provide health consultations, notify them that they could receive medical checkups for infants, and support home-based care. In June, the team started visiting disaster victims in temporary dwellings and small evacuation centers. The team recorded the information obtained through such visits and shared data regarding safety and health problems with local government officials and health-care providers in Kesennuma City.

Charity Platform, a specified nonprofit corporation, is headed by Ms. Hiroe Murakami, who has been engaged in clinical psychology as her lifework and who has provided mental-care support in relation to child rearing since becoming a representative of a nonprofit organization, the Mental Support Network, in March 2008.¹⁹ When the GEJE occurred, Charity Platform supported mental care for mothers raising children in Fukushima Prefecture, provided a communication network connecting more than six thousand NGOs nationwide, and served as a bridge between more than 250 corporations and the NGOs that receive donations from them.

Kensuke Onishi is convinced that cooperation between the JMSDF and NGOs can produce good results. By leaving the private sector to lead the relief response to the people, the JMSDF will escape from unnecessary burdens, connect with other parts of the private sector, and receive international official-development-assistance funding through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In the future, Civic Force will pursue the idea of using temporary hospital ships, as a cooperative effort involving merchant ships and the JMSDF.²⁰

THE JMSDF'S RESILIENT POWER IN CONJUNCTION WITH NGOS

The damage caused by the GEJE was unprecedented for Japan, but looking outside that country we can see that emergencies of the same magnitude happen in many places around the world. At the same time, since experiencing the GEJE, international Japanese NGOs that once focused on developing countries have been directing their attention to domestic needs. Thus, NGO activities have become more multidirectional. The foundation of Japan Platform has produced a framework for united emergency assistance whereby NGOs, the business community, and the government of Japan work in close cooperation, making the most of the respective sectors' characteristics and resources.

The JMSDF should give serious consideration to building a partnership with NGOs that play important roles in emergency assistance and have strong capabilities for HA/DR so as to gain a public understanding with and among them. The most critical issue is how to coordinate all these entities. Further, a question is being raised that affects the very *raison d'être* of the JMSDF: How will the JMSDF be able to exercise and use its capabilities in an emergency in which central or local governments are unable to function? It will do so by means of its resilient power with respect to civil society.

Its first task is to enhance trust. It is important to make the most of the JMSDF's strong capabilities at scenes of devastation. Its capabilities and achievements have for almost seventy years produced trust among the Japanese people. It is expected to fill the gap between the civil and military sectors. Both civil and military organizations answer to the same code—that is, saving people comes first. Civil-military cooperation is an essential factor for coordinating each kind of power to save more lives. There are both possibilities and limitations with respect to civil-military cooperation. It is easy for civil and military organizations to cooperate for a limited time and in a specific place, especially in the initial phase, but such cooperation is usually more complex if it must be ongoing and widespread.

An example of good civil-military coordination was seen after the Sumatra earthquake in 2004.²¹ As the disaster area where HA/DR operations needed to be performed was difficult to reach, civil organizations had to rely on military transportation. At such a time a cooperative relationship can be established easily between civil and military organizations. Furthermore, if the operational framework is simple, it is relatively easy to build a structure that is beneficial to both civil and military organizations. Training and exercises that include civil and military organizations will enhance trust.

Second, the JMSDF must revitalize “multi-actors.” The JMSDF has an excellent command-and-control capability for smooth HA/DR operations. It is necessary, however, for the JMSDF, the U.S. Navy, and NGOs to aim at improving their efficiency when available resources are limited. One important lesson learned from the GEJE is that Japan should be prepared for unexpected or unintended events. For its part, the JMSDF must posture itself to take on tasks and issues that are outside initial planning or beyond the scope of available capabilities. Therefore, it is important for the JMSDF to join in as soon as it can, dispatch wherever it can, and do whatever it can on a voluntary basis, especially in the initial phase. Once the initial quick response has been provided, a coordinating system should be established immediately. Specifically, by putting “multi-actors” together to build a powerful C2 center capable of coordinating HA/DR operations, it is possible to

make more organizations available than needed and thereby to pursue extensive and multilevel response measures.

UNPRECEDENTED DISASTERS, UNPRECEDENTED RESPONSES

When an unprecedentedly large-scale disaster occurs, a response should be made with the united efforts of the whole country. Should a disaster more devastating than the Great East Japan Earthquake ever happen, even more assistance would be needed than was available then. The basic principle of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief is to “provide the necessary assistance to those who need it”;²² obviously, this cannot be achieved solely by the JMSDF, and it is not a task that is imposed solely on the JMSDF. In the future, NGOs and private corporations, which have unlimited potential, are expected to introduce new possibilities in the field of HA/DR; NGOs, thanks to their diversity, will play significant roles in interconnecting organizations involved in HA/DR.

A relationship among the JMSDF, the U.S. Navy, and NGOs in HA/DR is beneficial in the sense that NGOs overcome a gap between the private sector and the military sector and work together in the disaster area. It is essential for civil and military organizations to share their roles flexibly, depending on the time, place, and capabilities, so as to ascertain the changing needs onsite accurately and bring to bear efficiently the maximum effect of the united efforts of the whole of the government.

The primary task expected of the JMSDF is to exercise the full power that it has cultivated over a long period. In essence, it is an offshore platform. For the future, it is necessary to pursue a collaboration with the Asia Pacific Alliance for Disaster Management, an organization aimed at building frameworks wherein, when large-scale disasters take place within the Asia-Pacific region, private corporations, NGOs, and government agencies of the countries and territories concerned collaborate beyond organizational boundaries to share and use resources—personnel, goods, money, and information—to provide assistance quickly and effectively.²³ The keys to increasing the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance and disaster reliefs are training and exercising in a real environment.

NOTES

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4. Available at [*Govt. of Japan*] *Ministry of Defense*, www.mod.go.jp/.
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- an opinion poll on Japan in the seven ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam) in March 2014. When asked which country they currently considered an important partner for ASEAN from among eleven countries of Asia, Europe, and the United States, the respondents ranked Japan first (65 percent), followed by China (48 percent), and the United States (47 percent). Available at *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan*, www.mofa.go.jp/.
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 12. *Japan Platform*, www.japanplatform.org/.
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 14. *ADRA Japan*, www.adrajpn.org/. See also “Outline of the Law to Promote Specified Nonprofit Activities,” available at *Global Development Research Center*, www.gdrc.org/.
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 22. Kensuke Onishi, *NGO, Jōzai Senjō* [NGO, Always Prepare Yourself as If You Are on a Battlefield] (Tokyo: Tokuma Shoten, 2006), p. 243.
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