

NPS Welcomes Japan's Former Navy Chief as Inaugural International Fellow

Adm. Ryo Sakai was the Chief of Staff of the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force, he is now on the faculty of the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School (NPS).

MONTEREY, CA, UNITED STATES, March 13, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Former Chief of Staff of the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF), retired Adm. Ryo Sakai, joined the faculty of the [Naval Postgraduate School](#) (NPS) as the institution's first-ever International Fellow, earlier this year.

Equivalent to the U.S. Navy Chief of Naval Operations for JMSDF, Sakai's experience as JMSDF Chief of Staff will provide a wealth of knowledge and experience for NPS students, faculty, and the Naval University System and broader naval forces to leverage.

Sakai is a subject matter expert in operations and plans for the Indo-Pacific region and has been outspoken about the region's strategic importance.

"This is the most dynamic area to operate in as China has continued to encroach upon our exclusive economic zones," Sakai said. "China's military gray zone campaigns have increased since 2008 and of course tensions have



Former Chief of Staff of the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF), retired Adm. Sakai Ryo joined the faculty at the Naval Postgraduate School in Jan. 2025.



Adm. Stephen Koehler, commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet, right, meets with Adm. Ryo Sakai, chief of staff of the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force, in Tokyo, April 15, 2024.

mounted as well.”

Located on the West Coast, NPS contributes directly to [U.S. Pacific Fleet](#) requirements through tailored courses at its Naval Base Hawaii campus, applied research, and wargaming with allies, including Japan.

“Admiral Sakai’s profound wisdom, vast perspective, and stellar credentials are a huge win for the NPS team,” said Adm. Steve Koehler, commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet. “His experiences and insights leading the naval force of one of America’s closest allies will enrich NPS students and prepare them for their own contributions to Indo-Pacific security with our allies and partners.”



Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) tank landing ship JS Kunisaki (LST-4003) breaks away from the formation after a group sail with the U.S. Navy, July 22, off the coast of Hawaii during Exercise Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) 2024.

NPS [Naval Warfare Studies Institute](#) (NWSI) director and Vice Provost, Warfare Studies retired U.S. Marine Corps Col. Randy Pugh is acutely aware of the concern in the Indo-Pacific region regarding adversarial increased illegal, coercive, aggressive, and deceptive operations.

“Japan, and specifically JMSDF, has long experience and a great amount of expertise confronting and defeating adversaries attempting these operations,” Pugh added. “In addition, JMSDF is highly technical and very capable of fighting and winning at the high end of warfare. Understanding JMSDF capabilities and doctrine will enable us to fight together as a highly integrated and highly lethal team.”

As a new member of the team, Sakai says he is interested in reaching out to NPS’ various academic departments so he can engage the NPS student body in meaningful discussions on operations in the Indo-Pacific region, allied naval forces and interoperability, and what it all means for the future.

“I have a broad view of security and combined operations with our allied countries,” Sakai said. “We often conduct training exercises with our partners in the region. Coordinating with regional partners like Australia and the U.S. is important for interoperability.”

“I have been a surface warfare officer my entire career and I have seen advances and how to utilize them to the highest degree in operations and tactics with our naval forces,” he added. “I’ve been operational for a long time and bring experiences to NPS students as a mentor.”

These invaluable benefits, especially for NPS students and faculty experts, are exactly what the institution's leaders wanted to bring to the campus when the International Fellows program was in its initial development.

"NPS' International Fellows are intended to serve three purposes," said Pugh. "First, is to provide insights to NPS' faculty and students about the national security issues that our partners face and how they are being solved. Second, is to ensure we have a good appreciation of their military concepts, or how they fight, and capabilities, or the things with which they fight. And third, is to serve as advisors and mentors during wargames and exercises, providing their naval warfighting experience, expertise, and insights."

Retired U.S. Navy Vice Adm. Phillip G. Sawyer, former NPS Professor of Practice in the Undersea Warfare Academic Group, strongly recommended Sakai as the institution's first International Fellow. The two worked together while Sawyer was serving as commander, U.S. 7th Fleet, in Yokosuka, Japan, from 2019 through 2021.

"We are always searching for ways in which we can better support our naval warfighting efforts," said Sawyer. "Bringing Admiral Sakai onboard as NPS' first International Fellow brings unmatched experience and operational knowledge in the theater of interest to our faculty and students. We couldn't be happier he accepted our offer."

Sakai graduated from the Harvard Kennedy School with a master's degree in public policy and completed the Command Course at the U.S. Naval War College. With more than 30 years of experience, his naval service culminated in his appointment to lead JMSDF in March of 2022.

NPS, located in Monterey, California, provides defense-focused graduate education, including classified studies and interdisciplinary research, to advance the operational effectiveness, technological leadership, and warfighting advantage of the Naval service. Established in 1909, NPS offers master's and doctorate programs to Department of Defense military and civilians, along with international partners, to deliver transformative solutions and innovative leaders through advanced education and research. www.nps.edu

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