Civilian Control

While the military is a necessary means to protect the peace and independence of a nation, the military meant to protect the people of a country can, to the contrary, expose them to danger if used wrongly, as the ancient Greek philosopher Plato said. Civilian control was developed as a measure to prevent military intervention in government utilizing the military under political control, and ensures the primacy of the democratic government over the military.

The system of civilian control first emerged in England, in the formulation process of constitutionalism in which a parliament limited the powers of the absolute monarch. In other words, the limitations of the monarch were clearly stated to protect civilian rights in the Magna Carta (Great Charter) established in 1215, and at an assembly in 1628, the “Petition of Right,” demanding right and liberty by legislation, was conducted. Also, established in 1689 after the Glorious Revolution, the Bill of Rights that formed the basis for British constitutional government made it illegal for a monarch to conscript and maintain a standing army in the country during peacetime without the consent of Parliament. The system remains in place to this day.

Furthermore, the Constitution of the United States of America established in 1787 and the post-French Revolution French Constitution of 1791 also provide for various systems of civilian control. Today, in democratic countries in Europe and the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, and France, not only does the Parliament make decisions on important military matters such as laws and budgets, but the president, prime minister, or other executive civilian leader exercises control over the military. In this way, policies to ensure civilian control have been established in each country.

Such systems of individual countries are by no means identical. For example, Germany is particularly careful to exercise military control by the parliament, while in France, the executive branch of government has stronger control over the military than the Parliament.

Moreover, the national defense organizations that assist the president or prime minister in implementing civilian control vary widely from country to country. In the United States, the central organization (Department of Defense) is organized around a politically-appointed civilian executives (in this case, the Secretary of Defense), but in the United Kingdom, the civilian and military executives are positioned in parallel.

Japan has also adopted various systems for strict civilian control, and leaving repentance preceding the end of the war, has put effort in achieving thoroughness in civilian control through maintaining and operating the SDF, a power organization, under democracy.
Today, the SDF has become an organization that is expected to be active in many contexts both within Japan and overseas, including international peace cooperation activities, with the aim of further ensuring Japan's safety and security. These efforts are made in response to the changing times, including the end of the Cold War, the response to global terrorism, and Japan's elevated international status.

From the perspective of how to best utilize the SDF to ensure the nation’s interests and fulfill Japan’s international responsibility, Japan is currently tasked with the further improve and strengthen the various systems of civilian control in order to reconstruct the modality of the Ministry of Defense and the SDF.
Discussions involving the Constitution

The Law concerning the Procedure to Revise the Constitution of Japan (the national referendum law) was enacted in May 2007 to be substantially enforced in 2010. This law provides the basis of a national referendum for the approval of the Japanese people concerning the revision of the Constitution. In addition, as a partial enforcement of the law, a research commission on the Constitution was installed in both houses in August last year.

Recent years have seen discussions on the Constitution at the Diet and other venues. The commissions on the Constitution of both houses submitted reports in April 2005. The reports referred to security issues, such as Article 9 of the Constitution, the right of self-defense and the Self-Defense Forces, as well as international cooperation. The reports introduce the various opinions that were discussed in these commissions.

Subsequently, the Democratic Party of Japan announced its proposals on the Constitution in October 2005, while the Liberal Democratic Party presented its draft for a new Constitution in the following month. The New Komeito Party advocates that the Constitution should be reinforced by additional concepts. Article 9 of the Constitution is one of the issues raised by parties. These parties clarified their policy to uphold pacifist principles, and the Liberal Democratic Party drafted articles of the “self-defense military forces” and its activities. In addition, the Democratic Party of Japan and the New Komeito Party have also shown their perspective and points about the existence of the Self-Defense Forces and the positioning of its international activities.