

German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ)

## DIJ Social Science Study Group



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### Civil-Military Relations in Japan - From Ignorance to Embrace?

Since the beginning of Japanese rearmament in 1952 and the subsequent creation of the Self-Defense Force (SDF) and its administrative body, the Defense Agency, in 1954, civil-military relations were characterized by a strict hierarchical system of control. The experiences before and during World War II convinced postwar leaders to establish a 'subjective' control of the military, in which the armed forces are heavily suppressed by several control mechanisms which kept the military distant from the sphere of politics and decision-making. Civil supremacy was regarded as the core of anything related to military issues which extended to the point that even security and defense issues were solely decided by civil officials. Uniformed Officers did not have a voice.

This presentation argues that in recent years basic tenets of the civilian control of the military have fundamentally changed. With the current and ongoing development of Japanese security and defense policy since the end of the Cold War however, the unique system of civilian control came under constant pressure, as new security challenges made the SDF more important in terms of national security. The most visible change occurred in January 2007 when the Defense Agency was upgraded to full ministerial status. These recent changes in civil-military relations point to a new 'objective' control of uniformed officers and the SDF in general where military officials have new clout in security policy related decision-making.

As existing literature on Japan's security and defense policy have failed to show in-depth changing civil-military relations, this project will be critical for understanding facets in changing decision-making and its implications for future security policy. Methodology of this project is the analysis of security policy related documents and qualitative interviews with uniformed officers and experts.

***Simon Schwenke*** studied Japanese Studies and History at Freie Universität Berlin and has been a research fellow at the Institute for East Asian Studies at the same university. He is currently at the DIJ for his PhD fieldwork. His PhD project deals with institutional change of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces.

The DIJ Social Science Study Group is a forum for young scholars and Ph.D. candidates in the field of Social Sciences organized by Maren Godzik, Phoebe Holdgrün and Barbara Holthus. All are welcome to attend, but registration ([holthus@dijtokyo.org](mailto:holthus@dijtokyo.org)) is appreciated.

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