Changing Security Concepts?
Japanese Attitudes toward Collective Self Defense

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Introduction

The former Japanese Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, was unique in a sense that he adopted the amendment of the Japanese constitution as an official policy goal for his administration. Specifically, Abe tried to challenge the established governmental interpretation of Article 9, which is understood to prohibit Japan from exercising the right of collective self defense. Comparing Japan prohibited from using its inherent right to a legal incompetent, Abe criticized that Japan cannot live up to the expectation and responsibility in the international society. Beyond the reinterpretation of the current constitution, Abe also wanted to amend the constitution itself to legalize the exercise of collective self defense completely. According to Abe, only with the complete constitutionality of collective self defense can Japan establish a strong sense of mutual trust in the US-Japanese security system.

The defeat of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and Komeito in the Upper House election of July 2007 led to Abe's resignation one
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month later.³ Facing the Upper House controlled by the Democratic Party and other opposition parties, the newly organized Fukuda administration is having difficulty in finding a policy framework that can expect the agreement of the opposition parties. The discussion on Article 9, which is to divide even the ruling LDP and Komeito, cannot be a realistic political agenda in the current situation. After all, with the resignation of Abe, the political momentum for the amendment of the constitution to legalize the exercise of collective self defense seems to have gone at least for a while.

Abe tried to make the issue of constitutional amendment, specifically that of Article 9 and collective self defense, one of the major political agenda to be decided in the last Upper House election. Despite his determination to take a step toward constitutional amendment, however, the issue of the shaking Japanese national pension system overshadowed all the other political agenda. After all, the constitutional issue did not come out as a major factor by which the Japanese people chose their supporting political party in the July election.⁴

The result of the 2007 Upper House election did not necessarily reflect the Japanese people's attitude toward the amendment of Article 9 and the issue of collective self defense as Abe wanted it to do. However, it would be still important to evaluate to what extent the Japanese attitudes toward Article 9 and collective self defense have been changed in order to understand the future development of the Japanese security policy and the US-Japanese security cooperation

This short paper tries to describe the evolution of the Japanese
attitudes toward Article 9 and collective self defense in the post cold war period. First, the Japanese government's official interpretation of Article 9 and that on the exercise of collective self defense will be summarized to set up the starting point of the post cold war discussions. Then, the evolution of the Japanese attitudes toward the issue of Article 9 will be described by looking at the contents of the editorials of the three major Japanese newspapers; Asahi, Yomiuri, and Mainichi. May 3 is the constitutional day in Japan to commemorate the fact that the current Japanese constitution came into effect on May 3, 1947. Therefore, major Japanese newspapers customarily deal with constitution related issues in the editorial on that day. The year 2007 is the 60th anniversary of the Japanese constitution so that all the three newspapers spent much space for discussions and analyses on the constitutional issues. For a comparative purpose, this paper looks at the three newspapers' editorials of every five years; i.e. those in 1992, 1997, 2002, and 2007.

**Article 9 and the Development of its Interpretations to Deny Collective Security**

Article 9 of the Japanese constitution states:

Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes.

In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized.
If someone without any knowledge about the post war Japanese history reads the text above, he or she will surely be surprised to find the Self Defense Forces (hereafter, SDFs) in today's Japan. The person would wonder how it could be legally possible under this clear constitutional statement of war renunciation to keep as large scale forces as today's SDFs in Japan. But the post war Japanese governments developed constitutional interpretations to avoid the contradiction between the idea of the constitution and the reality of the international politics. According to their interpretations, the Japanese SDFs are not constitutionally banned forces because they are not to be used as means of settling international disputes. As its name indicates, the use of the SDFs is to be strictly limited for self defense of Japan.

Since the right of self defense is an inherent right of any state, the Japanese constitution should not be interpreted as the denial of self defense per se. However, reflecting pacifist principles expressed in the preface and Article 9 of the constitution, it is understood that the exercise of self defense should be allowed only under strictly limited conditions. Consequently, the Japanese government came out with the interpretation that Japan can use the SDFs only if direct armed attacks occur against Japan. This condition led to the interpretation that Japan has the right of collective self defense, but that Japan is constitutionally prohibited from using it because an action of collective security defense is by definition taken without armed attacks against Japan.

On October 14 of 1972, the Tanaka administration announced its opinion on the constitutional limit on self defense of Japan. Since then,
this interpretation has been referred as the official interpretation of the Japanese government on Article 9. Regarding the right of self defense per se, the opinion says that Article 9 "renounces war and banns the maintenance of armed forces. However, it should not be interpreted that the constitution prohibits Japan from taking any self defense means necessary to maintain its peace, security and existence." As other sovereign states do, Japan has both individual and collective self defense as recognized in Article 51 of the UN Charter and other international laws.

The 1972 governmental opinion, however, states that collective security is a right to use forces to stop armed attacks not against Japan itself but against other countries with close relations with Japan. Under the pacifist spirits and principles of the constitution, Japan is allowed to use forces only if Japan faces imminent and unjust infringe on its sovereignty. Therefore, it is unconstitutional for Japan to resort to collective self defense because it by definition allows Japan to use its forces without direct attacks against Japan.

The 1972 governmental interpretation of Article 9 was challenged in the 1980s when the rise of international tensions in the new Cold War raised the possibility of Japan's more active security role and functions in the defense of sea lanes around Japan. The Japanese government tried to defend its more active security role by magnifying the applicable range of individual self defense while still maintaining the unconstitutionality of exercising collective self defense. Through a series of the Japanese cabinet answers to the Diet on security-related issues in the 1980s, the 1972 governmental interpretation of Article 9 was repeatedly referred as the established rule. In 1986, the Chief of the
Cabinet Legal System Bureau reconfirmed the 1972 interpretation by summarizing three conditions for Japan to exercise the right of self defense as follows:

(1) the occurrence of imminent and unjust armed attacks against Japan,
(2) non-existence of alternative means but the use of forces,
(3) minimum use of forces just necessary to stop attacks against Japan.

Again, according to the three conditions above, Japan is not allowed to exercise collective self defense because such an action fails to satisfy the very first condition of the three.

Discussions on Collective Security Defense in Japan after the Cold War


The end of the Cold War in 1989 and the outbreak of the Gulf Crisis and War in 1990 to 1991 changed international security environments that had allowed Japan not to think of any realistic possibility of sending its troops abroad. Up to the end of the Cold War, the Japanese leaders and citizens alike did not have to think of oversees dispatch of the Japanese SDFs as a realistic policy choice. The memory of Japanese war aggressions in its Asian neighbors as well as the Cold War rivalry of the nuclear superpowers expected no more than individual self defense efforts of Japan. When the UN authorized multinational forces were organized in 1991, therefore, the Japanese diplomacy was in a sense paralyzed to make any decisions regarding what Japan should do to help the international society. After all, in the international efforts to oust Saddam Hussein from Kuwait, Japan
humiliatedly received little international recognition for its financial contribution of more than 13 billion dollars to the multinational forces.

The UN authorized military sanctions against Iraq showed that Japan could no longer avoid responsibility of maintaining international peace and security in the post Cold War period. It was rather quickly agreed in the Japanese society that Japan should assume an appropriate burden to contribute to the maintenance of security and peace. However, it became a sensitive political issue if the Japanese contribution should be limited to the non-military field, or be explored as well in the military field. Specifically when unprecedented scale of UN peace keeping operations was organized in Cambodia in 1992, Japan had to decide if it would send the SDFs abroad for the first time in its history. The SDFs were supposed to join non-military functions, such as construction activities in war-torn Cambodia. However, dispatching the SDFs to a foreign country was still sensitive enough to divide the Japanese publics then. The unconstitutionality of collective security had long been regarded as a synonym with the prohibition of overseas dispatch of the Japanese SDFs. The so-called Ozawa Constitution Study Group was organized by then LDP Chief Secretary Ichiro Ozawa to explore the possibility of legalizing the SDF's participation in UN authorized peace keeping operations. Only by assuming an appropriate burden in the international society, Ozawa argued, can Japan become a normal state (futsu no kuni). However, in the early 1990s, the traditional sentiments against the SDF's overseas dispatch was still very strong in Japan.

The 1992 Constitutional Day editorials of Asahi, Yomiuri, and Mainichi newspapers respectively raised the issue of Japan's new role
as a contributor to the international society. The Mainichi editorial, titled as "We expect the strengthening of the Pacifist Constitution," criticizes the development of Article 9 interpretations as the history of weakening normative authority of the constitution. Mainichi insists that Japan pursue a unique way of contributing to the international society in order to live up to the ideals of the constitution. The Asahi editorial, titled as "Pacifism as a Historical Trend," also criticizes attempts to have Japan join activities in the military area. The Asahi article also says that the Soviet Union fell down because it heavily depended on the military power. In contrast, Japan came out as a winner of the Cold War because it attained economic development and prosperity under the pacifist constitution. Asahi claims that the post war history shows a lesson that Japan should find a way of being a non-military contributor. If Japan tries to send its personnel to the UN peace keeping operations, Asahi proposes, Japan should make a different organization than the SDFs.

The Yomiuri editorial, "A Thought on International Responsibility and the Constitution," argues that Japan should consider its international responsibility instead of being too much concerned about the past constitutional interpretations. The Japanese constitution, at its 45th anniversary then, faces many social and international changes which were never expected at its introduction. Therefore, Yomiuri says, under the new environments, we should stop seeing the constitutional amendment as a political taboo. If Japan is expected to take a new responsibility in the new international environments, Yomiuri contends, the Japanese should dare to explore new interpretations of the constitution, or to amend the constitution itself.
As of 1992, the dividing line in the discussions on Article 9 lied between those who dogmatically opposed the dispatch of the SDFs to any foreign soil, and those who supported the dispatch of the SDFs for UN-authorized non-military activities. Although the Yomiuri article briefly touched on the necessity of amending Article 9 in the future, none of the three editorials raised the issue of collective security. Having been accustomed to the Cold War international system in which Japan was largely expected to focus on its own security alone, the Japanese leaders and public alike were not ready to define Japan's new security role under Article 9.


Japan celebrated the 50th anniversary of its constitution in 1997. Despite such a historical significance, the Constitutional Day editorials of the three major newspapers show rather sober public attitudes to the constitution. Despite strong resistance from opposition parties, the ruling LDP introduced the UN Peace Keeping Operation Cooperation Act in 1992. In the following five years since then, four SDF missions were respectively sent to UN peace keeping operations in Cambodia (September 1992-September 1993), Mozambique (May 1993-January 1995), Rwanda (September 1994-December 1994) and the Golan Height (February 1996-present). The successful missions in these areas quickly changed the Japanese image toward the SDF's participation in non-military activities of UN-authorized peace keeping operations. Different from the 1992 editorials which questioned the constitutionality of sending the SDFs to a foreign country, no 1997 editorials on the Constitutional Day raised the same issue.
The Mainichi editorial, "In Pursuit of New Internationalism: Toward the Construction of Networks of Trust," proudly listed Japanese post war peace initiatives, such as Three Non-Nuclear Principles, national bans on arms trade, and the 1% GNP cap on its defense budget, as efforts to promote peaceful spirits and principles of the constitution. The article regrets that these Japanese efforts had not received enough international recognition they deserved. In conclusion, the article argues that, rather than trying to amend the constitution, Japan needs a new peace strategy to cultivate human resources who will lead Japan to go beyond its post war "peace isolationism." The Asahi editorial, "Toward the New Idea of International Peace Initiatives," also claims that Japan should establish a new security paradigm by developing, but still maintaining, pacifist ideas of the Japanese constitution. The article argues that, rather than building up its military capabilities in surrounding areas of Japan, the construction of mutual trust with its Asian neighbors and the promotion of worldwide nuclear disarmament movements will be a more meaningful role for Japan.

The Yomiuri editorial on the 1997 Constitutional Day, on the other hand, says that discussions on constitutional amendment are necessary toward the 21st century with new global environments. Essentially repeating the main points of its 1992 editorial, Yomiuri emphasizes that the current constitution is facing many unexpected conditions at its enactment of 50 years ago, such as the emergence of global environmental problems, the development of information technologies, and the collapse of the Cold War international order. Referring to the result of one public opinion poll, the Yomiuri article claims that 75% of the Japanese people think it necessary to explore
the possibility of constitutional amendment. The Yomiuri editorial concludes that, among various issues and problems in the current constitution, its Article 9 shows the largest gap between the ideas its text expresses and the reality it faces.

Given the fact that the 1996 US-Japan Common Security Declaration and the 1997 New Guideline for the US-Japanese Security System opened a way for Japan to exercise more active security roles and functions in the US-Japan security alliance system, it is rather surprising to find that no editorials on the 50th anniversary of the constitution refers to the concept of self defense, not to speak of collective self defense.

(3) Discussions in 2002: The Beginning of National Discussions on the Constitution

The September 11 terrorist attacks triggered the US global war with terrorism. The US-Japanese security system was expected to contribute to the US anti-terrorist efforts. Since the war with terrorism by definition resulted in the war effort with no territorial boundary, the US-Japanese security system became also expected to function in a geographically wider area than before. The Anti-terrorist Special Measure Act (Tero Taisaku Tokuso Ho) was hastily introduced in October 2001 by the Koizumi administration to support the US military sanctions against the Taliban government of Afghanistan. Japan began to send the SDFs to the Indian Ocean where they provide oil to US military vessels.

The SDF activities in the Indian Ocean are not fully rationalized by the right of individual self defense. In order to guarantee the
constitutionality of such activity, the Koizumi government argued that the SDF's activity is not integrated with the US armed attacks in Afghanistan. According to this "integration" theory, the US military vessels that received oil from the Japanese SDFs in the Indian Ocean were not supposed to directly go to battle fields to engage in armed attacks. However, when the extension of the Anti-Terrorist Special Measure Act was discussed in the Japanese Diet, there turned out some cases in which the "integration" theory might not have been strictly observed.

With the Anti-Terrorist Special Measure Act, the Koizumi government in 2002 also introduced three emergency laws; the Armed Attack Situation Act, the Surrounding Area Act, and the National Protection Act. The issue of emergency laws had been long discussed in Japan specifically since the early 1980s when the expanded Japanese defense efforts were required in the new Cold War situation. The memory of the prewar military government among the Japanese people made it extremely difficult to introduce laws which would limit human rights in emergency although the necessity of such legislation was at least theoretically recognized. The reported activity of North Korean paramilitary vessels in territorial seas of Japan, as well as the reported threat of terrorist activities in any country in the world, changed the Japanese sentiments toward the emergency situation enough to introduce the emergency laws. Since some clauses of the Armed Attack Situation Act and the Surrounding Situation Act define the situation in which Japan can possibly take actions under imminent threats, i.e. without the real occurrence of military attacks against Japan, it is being pointed out that the emergency laws will contradict the established governmental interpretation of Article 9.
In 2002, another change in the Japanese international security role was introduced in the process of reviewing the 1992 UN Peace Keeping Operation Cooperation Act. At its introduction in 1992, the SDF's participation in what the Japanese called PKF operations, such as ceasefire surveillance and disarmament, was not allowed. The 2002 review of the law decided to allow the SDFs to participate in ceasefire surveillance. Up to 2002, the SDFs had participated in four UN Peace Keeping Operations and five refugee rescue missions abroad. As far as UN authorized non-military activities are concerned, the Japanese allergy against oversees dispatch of the SDFs, which had been widespread in 1992, was largely overcome ten years later.

The editorials on the 2002 Constitutional Day together indicated the changing Japanese sentiments toward the issue of constitutional amendment. The Mainichi editorial's title, "We Welcome the Atmosphere of Discussion without a Taboo: It is Citizen's Responsibility to Examine the Constitution Continuously," shares an idea with the 1992 Yomiuri editorial as both argue that the Japanese should engage in discussions on constitutional amendment in an atmosphere without political or ideological pressures. However, the 2002 Mainichi editorial put more emphasis on those issues such as the introduction of national referendum systems, and the provisions of new human rights, than on those related with Article 9. Specifically, Mainichi argues that further change of the interpreted meaning of Article 9 is to be avoided in order to maintain the rule of law principle. The Asahi editorial, titled as "Get Constitutional Discussions Back into the Hands of Citizens: the Fifty-five Year History of Democracy," also expects to have more national discussions regarding the constitution.
Expressing dissatisfaction against the passage of the three emergency laws, the Asahi editorial claims that Japan should develop its political order and institutions along with the spirits and principles of the constitution. It also suggests the introduction of a national referendum system as a possible means to stimulate the public discussions on the constitution.

The Yomiuri editorial on May 3, 2002 was titled as "It is a Requirement of Our Era to Establish a National Consensus on Security." It says that the Japanese public attitude toward national security has been changed dramatically since ten years ago when the SDFs participation in the UN peace keeping operations divided both ruling and opposition parties in Japan. The Japanese attitude toward security issues has reached almost that of international standard. The SDF members participating in UN operations have yet to be given a clear legal authorization for using weapons in the practice of their missions. These inadequate frameworks for Japanese security contribution to the international society are due to the unconstitutionality of collective security. The editorial concludes that each major political party should present its draft of the new constitution.

The 2002 editorials indicate that increasing Japanese people began to recognize the necessity of constitutional amendments. At the same time, it should be pointed out that the seemingly increasing demand for constitutional amendment does not necessarily indicate the increasing demand for the amendment of Article 9 and a new security policy of Japan. Quite contrarily, as the introduction of the three emergency laws faced strong criticisms, the Japanese people were still
cautious of expanding Japan's security role in the international society. While the SDF's participation in UN peace keeping operations had become recognized as a legitimate mission of the SDFs, active national discussions on Article 9 and collective self defense had barely started among the Japanese public then. After all, on the Constitutional Day of 2002, the Yomiuri editorial alone raised the issue of collective self defense.

(4) Discussions in 2007: The Rise and Fall of Collective Security

Since Prime Minister Kishi, Abe's grandfather, had resigned after the renewal of the US-Japanese Security Treaty in 1960, Shinzo Abe became the first prime minister who explicitly adopted the constitution amendment as the policy goal of his administration. In his policy platform book, titled "A Beautiful State: Japan," Abe emphasized the necessity of breaking the post war regime. Abe wanted Japan to adopt an independent and active diplomacy. In order to realize this goal, Abe tried to change the established governmental interpretation on collective self defense. According to Abe, Japan cannot be an equal security partner to the US unless it exercises the right of collective self defense. In May 2007 Abe organized the Discussion Group for the Reconstruction of Legal Basis for National Security, the mandate of which was to study four sensitive cases in which the Japanese exercise of collective self defense seems to be required.

Under the Abe administration, the Defense Agency was upgraded as the Defense Ministry in January 2007. Although the upgrading from an agency to a ministry has a more symbolic meaning than a substantial difference, the institutional reform of the defense organization indicated Abe's determination to initiate fundamental
changes in the post war Japanese diplomacy. As the new Defense Ministry Act was introduced to establish the Defense Ministry, the SDF's participation in UN authorized peace keeping operations was finally recognized as one of its main missions along with national defense.

In May 2007 the Abe administration also established the National Referendum Act for Constitutional Amendment. While Article 96 of the constitution requires referendum to ratify a constitutional amendment proposed by the Diet, concrete rules and procedures of the national referendum were not introduced with the constitution. In the Cold War era, the introduction of a national referendum act for constitutional amendment was regarded as an attempt to open a way toward the amendment of Article 9. With no imminent necessity for constitutional amendment, the ruling LDP leaders did not dare to introduce the national referendum act in the Cold War period although the party platform of the LDP states the adoption of an independent constitution as one of the party's main political goal. The adoption of the National Referendum Act for Constitutional Amendment was, therefore, regarded as another example of Abe's determination to initiate the amendment of Article 9 during his term.

Abe's rather radical move toward the constitutional amendment embarrassed, rather than divided, the Japanese public. While recognizing the necessity of examining the constitution to reflect social and international changes, the Mainichi editorial on the 2007 Constitutional Day criticizes Abe's political slogan as too much emotional and potentially dangerous. Mainichi argues that the Japanese efforts to contribute to the post Cold War international
society indicate that Japan can do various activities under the current constitution. Instead of amending the constitution hastily to exercise collective self defense, the article concludes, Japan should maintain and strengthen the UN-centered principle of the constitution. On May 3, 2007 Asahi Shimbun carried 21 editorials on constitutional issues. Six of the twenty one articles were devoted to the issue of Article 9. While strongly opposing an attempt to amend Article 9 at this point, Asahi claims that Japan can legally send its SDFs to various UN operations under the current legislation. The Asahi editorials also emphasizes that Article 9 is functioning as a brake for the US unilaterality.

The Yomiuri editorial, titled as "This Year will Become a Historical Turning Point," expressed expectations toward the newly introduced National Referendum Act for Constitutional Amendment. The article also expects the Constitution Review Committee, which is to be organized with the enactment of the National Referendum Act, to promote moves toward the constitutional amendment. Though various issues being raised on constitutional amendment today such as those of new human rights, Yomiuri says, the amendment of Article 9 is still the issue of most significance. The Yomiuri article concludes that the Japanese government should change its traditional interpretation of collective self defense in order to strengthen the US-Japanese alliance.

**Conclusion**

Although having abruptly left his office in September 2007 after a relatively short one year term, the former prime minister of Japan, Shinzo Abe was unique in a sense that he adopted the constitutional amendment as an official policy goal during his term. After
experiencing a series of severe political divisions on the issue of constitutional amendment in the 1950s, which culminated toward the revisions of the US-Japanese Security Treaty in 1960, it became an established custom for the successive Japanese prime ministers to avoid the constitutional amendment despite the fact that the party platform of the Liberal Democratic Party, which produced most Japanese prime ministers since its foundation of 1955, adopts the amendment of the US-imposed current constitution as one of its main political goals.

The so-called Post Office election of August 2005 gave more than two-thirds of the Japanese Lower House, a constitutionally required precondition to conduct the national referendum to amend the constitution, to the ruling LDP-Komeito coalition government. Receiving this predominant political power from his predecessor Koizumi, Abe tried to change the long established interpretation of Article 9, which has been understood to prohibit Japan from exercising the right of collective self defense. Toward this goal, Abe made a series of efforts, such as the establishment of the Defense Ministry, the introduction of the National Referendum Act for Constitutional Amendment, and the organization of the Discussion Group to study the four sensitive cases in which the exercise of collective self defense is expected.

The land-sliding defeat of LDP in the 2007 Upper House election denied Abe's ambitions. With seats far less than a majority in the Upper House, Abe faced difficulty even in the management of daily political issues, not to speak of the pursuit of his ambitious goal of constitutional amendment. Abe tried to stay in office even after the
historical loss of the July election. One month later, however, when his proposal to extend the Anti-terrorism Special Measures Act faced unconciliated opposition by the Democratic Party, Abe decided to resign. Although Abe's defeat in the election was primarily due to the public criticism against the shaking national pension system of Japan and a series of Cabinet members' scandals, the examination of the newspaper editorials above indicates that there was also a significant gap between Abe's initiatives on Article 9 and the attitudes of the Japanese people.

The newspaper editorials examined in this paper show that the Japanese people have formed three groups of thought on Article 9 and collective self defense in the post Cold War period. The first group, represented by Abe, wants to change the interpretation of Article 9, and, if possible, to amend Article 9 itself to enable Japan to exercise the right of collective self defense. This group wants to see Japan as an equal partner in the US-Japanese security alliance system. Another important characteristic of this group is that it regards the Japanese constitution as a US imposed one during the post war occupation period. Potentially, therefore, this school can be divided into the two sub groups; one preferring the more effective function of the US-Japanese alliance, and the other hoping a more equal and independent role of Japan in the world.

The second group of thought tries to maintain the current text of Article 9, but add a new clause to it to explicitly legalize more active Japanese participation in and contribution to the UN peace keeping operations. This group generally agrees to the idea that some clauses of the Japanese constitution need to be amended. For example, in
order to provide a constitutional basis for newly conceptualized human rights in the post war period such as the right of privacy and that of environments, the second group recognizes the necessity of amending some clauses of the constitution. However, this group is cautious of amending Article 9 to allow Japan to exercise the right of collective security defense.

The third group would be called the dogmatic protectionist of the constitution. While even the Asahi Shimbun, which is known for its "protectionist" views on the constitution, no longer rejects discussions on the issues of the constitution, there still are a group of people, represented by the Socialist Democratic Party and the Japan Communist Party, who oppose any moves that show the slightest sign of leading to the constitutional amendment.

It is not readily known to what extent the Japanese people support the respective schools of thought on the issue of constitution. Results of recent public opinion polls on the issue of constitutional amendments and that of Article 9 are very difficult to read because they show very different, sometimes even contradictory, data. It seems that current public opinions on the constitutional issues are influenced by the way of presenting questionnaires. According to the public opinion poll conducted by Mainichi Shimbun in late April of 2007, 34% people hoped to enable Japan to exercise the right of collective self defense, 30 % people supported the addition of a new clause to Article 9, and 19% people expressed the opposition to any amendment of Article 9. The results logically indicate that more than 60% of the people prefer to see some change in the current constitution. In the same public opinion poll, however, to the very first
general question which asked if they think it necessary to amend the
constitution, only 51% people said "yes." It means at least 10% people
said "no" to the amendment of the constitution, while saying "yes" to
the necessity of changing Article 9.

Public opinion polls conducted by major Japanese media
companies over the period of March and April of 2007 show a general
tendency that slightly more than a majority of the Japanese people say
"yes" to the necessity of amending the current Japanese constitution. If
they are asked about the necessity of amending Article 9, one third or
slightly less people tend to say "yes." But, if they are asked the question
of Article 9 alone, much more people tend to say "yes" to the necessity
of amending Article 9. On the other hand, if the questionnaire
emphasizes the issue of collective self defense while asking the
necessity of amending Article 9, fewer number of people tend to say
"yes" to the amendment of Article 9. Moreover, though a small portion
like 5%, there are some people in every public opinion poll saying that
they want to change the first clause of Article 9 while maintaining the
latter half of it. Since the first clause defines the object of Article 9, i.e.
the renounce of war, and the second half describes the means of
attaining the object, the amendment of the first half alone cannot exit
as a logical choice.

These contradicting results of public opinion polls suggest that
Japanese people today have yet to understand different policy choices
clearly enough to decide on the issue of Article 9 and that of collective
self defense. In other words, although Japan has been trying to define
its security role in the post Cold War international system, the
Japanese people today do not feel it acutely necessary to decide on the
issue of Article 9 and that of collective self defense. The former Prime Minister Abe's determination to amend the constitution somehow increased public concerns on the constitutional issue in general, and on that of Article 9 in particular. In late April of 2007, 69% people said that they would regard the constitution as an important issue to decide their voting in the coming Upper House election in July. However, once the national pension issue was raised as a contending issue toward the election, public interests in the constitutional issues were quickly evaporated. According to the public opinion poll conducted two days prior to the election, only 22% people regarded the constitution as an important issue. Despite Abe's expectation and ambition, the Japanese people have yet to be ready to take a step beyond the post war regime.

References:


1 This paper was originally prepared for the seminar co-sponsored by Jeju Peace Association and the Institute of Peace Studies, Jeju National University, November 23 in Jeju, South Korea.
2 Abe’s words at the Discussion Meeting on the Basic Legal Framework for National Security, April 17, 2007.
3 Out of 121 contested seats in the 2007 Upper House Election, which elects one-half of the total 242 seats every three years, the ruling LDP and Komeito together got 47 whereas the Democratic Party won 60 seats.
4 According to the public opinion poll conducted two days prior to the July 2007 election by Yomiuri Shinbun, only 22% people answered that they regarded the constitution as an important issue in the coming election.
7 The Public opinion poll conducted by the Yomiuri Shimbun on March 17 and 18 indicated that 35.7% affirmative and 55.8% negative to the amendment of Article 9. The NHK opinion poll conducted on April 6 to 8 showed 25% affirmative and 44% negative. The Asahi Shimbun research on April 14 and 15 turned out 33% affirmative and 29% negative.
9 Ibid.