The Soldier and the State in South Korea:
Crafting Democratic Civilian Control of the Military

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This study assess the extent of democratic civilian control of the military in South Korea by examining civilianization of the Ministry of National Defense (MND) and parliamentary oversight over the military focusing on the role of the National Defense Committee (NDC). The MND and the NDC are key actors in civil-military relations; nevertheless, little attention is paid to the role of these institutions in improving democratic consolidation. This research found that although civilian governments in South Korea had successfully implemented parliamentary control of the military in terms of preventing the military from politics in the process of democratic transitions and consolidation, they had less success in establishing democratic civilian control of the MND. This is due largely to the ongoing high security threat in the Korean peninsula. Facing North Korean threat, the military is not ready to accept true civilians as its top leaders on the premise that civilians may not be able to perform the significant roles of minister and vice minister effectively because they do not have full experience and professional knowledge about the military. As a result, the MND retains a significant institutional autonomy in the top leadership. The research argues that civilianizing the top leadership of the MND will be one of the most important steps for South Korea to go toward deepening democratic civil-military relations in the new era of integration.

Keywords: South Korea, Civil-Military Relations, Democratic Civilian Control, Ministry of National Defense, National Defense Committee

1. INTRODUCTION

After the establishment of the First Republic in 1948, South Korean politics were dominated by authoritarian and military regimes for nearly four decades. During that period, the military not only played a major role in domestic politics, but also overwhelmed civilian counterparts in terms of political power. The military regimes allowed the armed forces to enjoy economic and political prerogatives in order to maintain domestic political stability and the loyalty of the army. Since democratic transition in the late 1980s, however, the role of the military in South Korean politics has been reduced severely. The military returned to barracks and was excluded from politics. Its role was limited to national defense against an external threat. Indeed, the military in South Korea no longer appears to be a key player in domestic politics.

The divided nationhood has been considered as a major obstacle to the further democratic consolidation in South Korea. The threat from North Korea has been a constant factor in South Korean politics and foreign relations. The South Korean military intervened in domestic politics in the name of national security. Under the national security concern, the South Korean military enjoyed autonomy and legitimized its involvement in politics, while the democratic leaders could not reject the enhanced role of the army. In particular, the national security problem in the Korean peninsula inhibited the democratic force from enhancing the institutionalization of democratic civilian control of the defense and security

sector in the wake of democratic transition. Consequently, the problem has retarded democratic consolidation in South Korea.

It is true that South Korea has accomplished remarkable achievements including increasing individual political rights and civil liberties, the freedom of speech, and the consolidation of electoral democracy. In spite of this democratic progress, it is too early to conclude that South Korea has achieved a consolidated democracy. What elements should improve for further progress toward democratic consolidation in South Korea? One of the most important foundations for democratic consolidation is establishing a solid democratic civilian control of the military. South Korea has made an effort to reform civilian control of the armed force following the democratic transition that only focused on preventing the military's involvement in domestic politics. Although the threat of praetorian military intervention in domestic politics has plummeted, civil-military relations in South Korea are now facing a new challenge that should be resolved to enhance the quality of democracy. This challenge is to craft democratic civilian control of the military (Saxer, 2004: 403; Cottey et al., 2002: 31-56).[1]

The main goal of this article is to assess the degree of democratic civilian control of the military in South Korea. To do so, this article reviews literatures on civilian control of the military and discusses the main thesis of this study. This paper then assesses the extent of democratic civilian control of the armed forces by examining civilian supremacy in the Ministry of National Defense (MND) and parliamentary oversight of the military. This article concludes with a discussion of the major findings and evaluation.

2. WHO GUARDS THE GUARDIANS AND HOW?

The military is a group for managing violence (Lasswell, 1941: 455-468) to defend a nation against external and internal threats and is considered one of the indispensable elements for the establishment of a state. When the military interests are more internal rather than external, the military becomes a politicized group and a major political force. Once armed forces become involved in domestic politics, it is hard for them to disengage from politics due to an absence of military professionalism and a strong willingness to continue their privileges. For this reason, the politicized military is assumed as a big threat to a democratic norm and system. Thus, most literature on civil-military relations stresses that the political role and power of military should be minimized as much as it possibly can. In spite of the significant role of military in a country, the armed forces appear to be 'a necessary evil' in democracies. If the armed forces have more political power than civilian counterparts, democratic principles would be undermined and thus result in the emergence of different political governing systems such as authoritarian, totalitarian, and sultanistic regimes.[2] As a result, ensuring democratic civilian control of the military becomes the primary principle of civil-military relations in advanced democracies. In line with this principle, much of the academic literature on civil-military relations has sought a general theory to explain what

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[1] In the same context, a study argues that building effective civilian control of the defense and security sector is one of the most important projects to enhance democratization in central and Eastern Europe.

[2] Linz and Stepan used the term, sultanistic, as a regime type for analyzing democratic transition and consolidation. In their book, sultanism refers to "a generic style of domination and regime rulership that is an extreme form of patrimonialism." (Linz and Stephan, 1996: 51-54)

factors and circumstances determine the nature of civil-military relations by highlighting issues of military intervention in or disengagement from domestic politics and democratic civilian control of the military.

Huntington, in his seminal work *The Soldier and the State*, attempts to resolve the contradictory relationship between civilian control of the military and military effectiveness by suggesting two main themes. These themes about which he writes are military professionalism and subjective versus objective civilian control. Military professionalism has three key characteristics such as expertise, responsibility, and corporateness that distinguish it from civilian professions. Subjective civilian control is the maximization of civilian power as opposed to objective civilian control, which distributes political power between military and civilian groups. The core element of objective civilian control is the recognition of autonomous military professionalism that creates voluntary subordination of the military to civilian leaders, whereas minimizing autonomous military professionalism is the essence of subjective civilian control. For Huntington, maximizing military professionalism and objective civilian control is the best way to keep a stable relationship between civilians and militaries. Acknowledging independent military professionalism by separating the military from the political arena is to consolidate civilian control of the military without hurting military effectiveness (Huntington, 1957). This Huntingtonian approach has been recognized as the standard principle in civil-military relations for several decades.

In the Huntingtonian tradition, scholars have made special efforts to find some conditions that affect the level and nature of the armed forces' direct role in politics. In fact, it is difficult to precisely define military intervention in and disengagement from politics. For this reason, Welch (1987) points out four problems in deciding the nature, scope, analysis, and causality of military disengagement from politics by stressing the aspect of military interest in determining military intervention and disengagement. Some scholars have suggested examining levels of military participation in politics. Finer (1967: 86-139) notes that military intervention in politics consists of "the armed forces' constrained substitution of their own policies and/or their persons, for those of the recognized civilian authorities" and then lays out four levels of military intervention in politics (influence, pressures or blackmail, displacement, and supplantment) in accordance with four levels of political culture (mature, developed, low, and minimal political cultures). The level of influence contends that the military can influence politics in terms of the constitutional and legitimate bases. This level can be founded in the mature political culture in which the legitimacy for political power is paramount and unobtainable by military. Therefore, the military's intervention in politics is considered as a "wholly unwarrantable intrusion." In the level of pressure or blackmail, military power is exercised through implied verbal or real threat. These levels can be found in the developed political culture where the legitimacy of political power is important but it is in dispute. The third level, displacement, includes actions such as substitution of a cabinet or ruler by direct action of the armed forces; national leaders are in effect puppets or projection of military leaders. The last level, supplantment, is the most comprehensive level of military intervention in politics. In this case, the military not only builds government in its favor but also constitutes the government, either on its own or more likely with allies. The author argues that these two types of military intervention normally occur in the low or minimal political culture.

Through the three factors such as motive, mood, and opportunity disposing the military to intervene in politics, Finer also argues that the soldiers' belief in being the "saviours of their countries," serving the "national interest," and their particular "sectional interests" (such as

class, regional, corporate, or individual interests) motivate soldiers to intervene in politics. When the armed forces are popular, they are more likely to become involved in politics, particularly in the case of domestic crisis. By contrast, he identifies that professionalism, the armed forces' acceptance of the principle of civilian supremacy, and the military's fears of a civil war or of punishment may inhibit the military's desire to intervene in domestic politics (Finer, 1967: 23-60).

Nordlinger (1977) makes an effort to build a typology of praetorianism. According to him, praetorians can be classified into three types, such as moderators, guardians, and rulers. His distinction is contingent on two dimensions: (1) To what extent praetorian group has governmental power; (2) The praetorian officers' political and economic objectives (i.e. seeking status quo or correction/change). The intensity of military intervention in politics is minimal in the moderator type and maximal in the ruler type.

These analyses mainly rest on intramilitary and domestic factors. Welch (1992: 323-342) points out the importance of integrated analysis regarding military involvement in politics and lists both obstacles and incentives to long-term military disengagement from politics. He asserts that there is no Kuhnian paradigm or Lakatosian research program for the study of military disengagement from politics; this is due to the general lack of consensus on causes and consequences of military intervention and disengagement.

Scholars in the field have recently begun to reconsider Huntington's classical thesis and have attempted to produce new theoretical frameworks to explore civil-military relations. Feaver (1996: 167-170) criticizes both the underdevelopment of general civil-military relations theories and the Huntingtonian-oriented analysis by contending that it is time for the field to transcend the concept of professionalization to explain civilian control. He develops "a principal-agent theory" in which a game of strategic interaction between civilian leaders and military agents takes place based on their own preferences for outcomes. This theory views that contractual incentives using various oversight mechanisms and punishments are the centerpiece of civilian control of the military (Feaver, 2003).

Schiff's study introduces "a theory of concordance" that challenges the Huntingtonian general consensus about the separation of the military from politics maximizing military professionalism by proposing "the military, the political leadership, and the citizenry as partners." She further predicts that "when they agree about the role of the armed forces by achieving a mutual accommodation, domestic military intervention is less likely to occur in a particular state." Her main contribution to the study of civil-military relations is the attempt to overcome the American standard of analysis using military professionalism and the role of institution through considering the significant effect of political culture. However, her study has been criticized for its lack of clarity concerned with measuring independent and dependent variables (Schiff, 1995: 7-18; Wells, 1996: 269-275; Schiff, 1996: 277-283).

Bland also presents "a theory of shared responsibility." The interrelationship between civilians and the military and its impact on civilian control of the military are the focus of his theory. This theory contends that "civil control of the military is managed and maintained through the sharing of responsibility for control between civilian leaders and military leaders and the relationship and arrangement of responsibilities are conditioned by a nationally evolved regime of principles, norms, rules and decision making procedures around which actor expectations converge." In particular, civilian leaders are responsible for macro policies that determine overall national objectives, defense resources, and the use of force, while military leaders have "vested authority" over micro policies such as military doctrine, training, operations, organization that are confined to military subjects only (Bland, 1999: 7-

26; 2001: 525-540). This theory is noticeable in terms of its universal explanation which accounts for all types of regime type and interactions between core players.

Desch suggests a structural model for relationship between intensity of internal and external threat and civil-military relation. His basic assumption lies in the notion: "the structural threat environment should affect the character of the civilian leadership, the nature of the military institution, the cohesiveness of state institutions, the method of civilian control, and the convergence or divergence of civilian and military ideas and cultures." He argues that a high external threat and low internal threat may best insure civilian supremacy over the military, while a low external threat and a high internal threat may result in poor civilian control of the military. He claims, "externally oriented military doctrines are necessary conditions for civilian control of the military" (Desch, 1998: 389-405; 1999: 13).

Overall, the field of civil-military relations has been suffering from the lack of widely accepted general theory and the key research topic has still revolved around the question of civilian control focusing on the universal applicability of military professionalism, set forth by Huntington 57 years ago. To Huntingtonian-oriented researchers, institutional civilian control via preservation for independent military and autonomous military professionalism is the key in civil-military relations. This Huntington's objective control model has provided a solid theoretical basis to the issue of civilian control in terms of two aspects. First, Huntington rightly points out that politicization of the military is harmful to military effectiveness and professionalism. Second, objective control of the military allows the military to have a considerable autonomy and expertise. However, Huntington fails to recognize that a clear separation between political and military affairs is neither possible nor desirable. This is because best choices of defense and national security policy require close interaction between civilian and military leaders. Strategically effective choice is possible when civilian elites and military leaders play a complementary role that creates a synergy effect (Nielsen and Snider, 2009: 290-293).

Under the increased convergence of military and civilian institutions and the greater integration of the military and the civilian sectors of society, the integration rather than separation of civil and military sectors is a key task for democratic civilian control of the military (Janowitz, 1960, 7-16; Feaver, 1996: 158-167; Burk, 1993: 167-185). This does not necessarily mean that civilian leaders and military leaders have an equal authority. It means both civilian leaders and military leaders are equal partners in dealing with defense and security issues, but authority should be bestowed upon civilian leaders. A norm of "equal dialogue, unequal authority" (Nielsen and Snider, 2009: 293) will be good for both the democratic civilian control of the military and the military's effectiveness. So, civilian supremacy and an active civilian supervision of military affairs should be institutionalized to enhance democratic civilian control of the military. Democratic civilian control of the armed forces must begin with two fundamental principles, such as civilian supremacy and parliamentary control.[3] Consequently, democratic civilian control of the military is best achieved when the two principles are firmly institutionalized.

Civilian supremacy is achieved through civilian control of the military. Civilian control of the military is possible by civilianization of the armed forces. However, the mere

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[3] Born distinguishes the conceptual difference between the narrow scope and the broad scope of democratic control. According to the author, "the narrow scope of the democratic control focuses on civilian supremacy and parliamentary control. The broad scope focuses on integrating the military into society." This research follows the narrow scope of democratic control (Born, 2003: 151-165).

civilianization of the armed forces does not necessarily lead to democratic civilian control of the military. Only through installing solid civilian leadership within the military's key decision-making posts, the meaningful democratic civilian control of the armed forces could be established. In this sense, it is necessary to look at the background of the MND's high-ranking officials and decision-making structure in order to assess the degree of civilian control of the military.

Few would deny that civilianization of the MND leadership is a pre-requisite for democratic civilian control of the military. However, it does not necessarily lead to the full democratic civilian control of the military. Parliamentary control of the military must be established to complete the fundamental necessary requirements for overall democratic civil-military relations. When a parliament has a legal authority and a substantial legitimacy to exercise its oversight over the military, it is able to fulfill a key role in democratic civil-military relations. The issue of the lack of oversight of the military by the National Assembly has been pointed out as one remaining task for consolidating democratic civil-military relations in South Korea (Saxer, 2004: 403). Why this is so? Is it really like that or is it just a statement full of exaggeration? The next section will evaluate the actual state of parliamentary control of the armed forces.

3. CRAFTING DEMOCRATIC CIVILIAN CONTROL OF THE MILITARY

3.1 Leadership Composition in the MND

The Ministry of National Defense (MND) is a key institution and the highest authority in the military's decision-making. The role of this institution in improving democratic control of the military is important; however, little attention is paid to this institution. Establishing democratic civilian control of the MND, therefore, would foster democratic consolidation. In this part, this study analyzes the degree of democratic civilian control of the MND in South Korea by examining the civilianization of the MND leadership and key staffs.

South Korea established the defense headquarters in 1945 under the U.S. military leadership after the independence from Japan's colonial rule and it became the Ministry of National Defense in 1948. Since then, the MND, as a core bureaucratic institution, has played a significant role in South Korean national defense. The MND is still very influential to Korean society and government. According to a study, the MND is ranked 3rd most powerful bureaucracy out of forty-five central agencies in the South Korean government (Oh, 2006). Who leads this powerful institution? The MND organization structure is very hierarchical and has a top-down process of decision-making. Minister of national defense and vice minister of national defense are two key officials who have the authority to determine major issues related to defense and security sectors and they are staffed with five offices, eighteen bureaus, and seventy departments.

The two top officials, minister and vice minister of national defense, have full responsibilities not only to lead the armed forces but also to bridge the gap between politicians and government and military leaders as representatives of the military. Democratically consolidated countries in most Western European countries and the United States have traditionally appointed civilians to those positions assuming that "it clearly is positive for the democracy, since it potentially removes an obstacle to democratic legitimacy" (Bruneau and Goetze, 2006: 79). In theory, South Korea has civilian minister

Table 1. Defense Minister and Vice Minister in South Korea (1948-2014)

Classification	Minister			Vice Minister			Total
	1948-1988	1989-2014	Sub Total	1948-1988	1989-2014	Sub Total	
Retired Army Gen.	15	17	32(72.8%)	11	11	22(55%)	54(64.3%)
Retired Navy Adm.	2	1	3(6.8%)	0	0	0(0%)	3(3.6%)
Retired Air Force Gen.	2	1	3(6.8%)	2	0	2(5%)	5(6%)
Civilian	6	0	6 (13.6%)	10	6	16(40%)	22(26.1%)
Total	25	19	44(100%)	23	17	40	84(100%)

Source: The Ministry of National Defense of the Republic of Korea at http://www.mnd.go.kr.

and vice minister of national defense; in practice, it is hard to say that they are real civilians because most of them are appointed to the positions after their recent relief from active duty. For example, one of the former defense ministers took his office within one month after his retirement as the Chairman of the ROK Joint Chiefs of Staff. Simply put, many defense ministers and vice defense ministers just changed their uniforms from military to civilian suits. They are a kind of 'quasi-civilians' who migrate from being a soldier to becoming a civilian. In the case of the United States, their law does not allow retired military persons to be appointed to Secretary of Defense within ten years and to Secretary of the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force within five years after retirement from active duty.[4] This is not the case for South Korea. Table 1 shows the professional backgrounds of former defense ministers and vice ministers in South Korea.

This data apparently demonstrates the low degree of civilian supremacy in the top leadership of the MND. Retired military high-ranking officers took 86.4 percent of defense ministers and 60 percent of vice defense ministers and noticeably majority of them (64.3 percent) were army generals. In particular, no a true civilian has been appointed to the minister of national defense since 1989, when democratic transition and consolidation occurred in South Korea.[5] Only six civilians took in charge of vice minister of national defense after the Kim Young-Sam government, including the current vice minister of national defense in the Park Geun-Hye government. In fact, the Roh Moo-Hyun government was asked by civilian societies to make a special effort to nominate a civilian defense minister; however, it turned out to be a very difficult political task. President Roh decided to postpone the civilianization of a defense minister (Ryu, 2004; Hankyoreh, 2006). As a result, former vice Chief of Naval Operations and Chief of Staff of Army became the 39th and 40th defense ministers of South Korea in succession after their retirements from the military. This evidence seems running counter to the trend in democratically consolidating countries. For instance, several Latin American countries such as Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Uruguay have filled civilian women to the posts of defense ministers.

The overall civilianization of the MND staff is also far behind the average level of advanced democracies. In 2004, the percentage of civilianization of the total MND staff was

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[4] The United States Code Title 10. Armed Forces, available at http://uscode.house.gov.

[5] The last civilian defense minister in the history of the South Korean military was Hyun Suk-Ho (the 11th defense minister: 1961. 1~1961. 5).

52 percent and only seven out of sixteen directors of bureau were civilians. Taken this fact seriously, the Roh Moo-Hyun government forced the military to set out a plan called "defense reform 2020" to expand a civilian-led system in the MND and in defense management. According to this plan, the MND was scheduled to increase civilian staff up to 71 percent (518 civilians out of total 725 MND staff) by 2009. This plan was a good precursor for improving civilianization and democratic civilian control of the military and the MND. As of 2010, 65 percent of the total MND staff was civilians. The MND makes a good progress in civilianization of the MND; however, it seems that the MND has some hesitation to civilianize its key staff. As Table 2 shows, the percentage of civilians in the decision-making positions of the MND(above director level) was only forty-nine percent(46 persons out of 93 persons). This percentage of civilians in the key MND staff is very low compared to other democratic countries like the United States. For example, the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) has maintained 85 percent of civilians in the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) level.[6]

Why is this asymmetric proportion of the MND leadership and staffs between civilians and military officers happening in South Korea? What would be the best explanation for this situation? I believe that this is due largely to the ongoing high security threat in the Korean peninsula. The external threat environment may keep the military busy in their basic mission; however, it may not always be associated with strong democratic civilian control of the military. Faced with the North Korean threat, the military is not ready to accept true civilians as its top leaders on the premise that civilians may not be able to perform the significant roles of minister and vice minister effectively because they do not have the full experience and professional knowledge about the military. Arguably, the effectiveness is the single most important element for the South Korean armed forces in order to compete against the North Korean military. The top leaders of the MND must not master political skills but professional knowledge on force structure, use of force, allocation of resource, and so on. Therefore, it is difficult to deny that the North Korean threat and the lack of civilian experts in defense sectors may give a solid justification for the military to keep its autonomy in determining the MND leadership.

Table 2. Civilianization of the MND of the ROK

MND Staff	Civilian	Active Duty	Retired Officer	Total
Head of Office	2 (40%)	0 (0 %)	3 (60%)	5 (100 %)
Director of Bureau	6 (33%)	7 (39%)	5 (28%)	18 (100 %)
Director of Department	38 (54%)	31 (44%)	1 (2%)	70 (100%)
Total	46 (49%)	38 (41%)	9 (10%)	93 (100%)

Source: Jun (2010): 13.

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[6] OSD refers to Office of the Secretary of Defense in U.S. DoD that is "the principal staff element of the Secretary, responsible for overall policy development, planning, resource management, and program evaluation" (The U.S. DoD, 2010: 13).

3.2 Parliamentary Control of the MND

The National Assembly of the Republic of Korea plays a critical role in enhancing democratic civilian control of the military. Due to the problems of participation and expertise like in other democratic countries, the National Assembly established a special committee, called the National Defense Committee (NDC), in 1948. The NDC is a core institution designed to take charge of defense and security issues within the National Assembly. The NDC has three major legislative powers: (1) power to deliberate and settle defense budget bills; (2) power to enact and amend law related defense and security policies; (3) power to inspect and investigate the armed forces. Besides, the NDC influence exercising powers to control approval of high-ranking military officers (the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff only) and the use of forces that those have been considered as main powers of parliament over the military in consolidated democratic countries. Despite its significant role of the NDC with respect to democratic civilian control of the military, no special attention has been paid to this committee (Giraldo, 2006: 34-70).

The impact of the NDC's involvement in the defense and security sectors is significant; democratic and effective operation of the NDC would be able to boost democratic civil-military relations. One of the major powers of the NDC is to deliberate and approve the defense budget that is of vital interest to the military. Needless to say, the military leaders want to obtain and keep large defense budgets, while civilian leaders try to cut it down as much as they can. Both the military and civilian leaders are struggling to influence the decision-making process of the defense budget. The NDC stands at the very point of conflict between the two groups. The NDC is involved in the budgetary process by reviewing and approving the budget bill. Although the final decision of the defense budget is entirely up to the Special Committee on Budget and Accounts in the National Assembly, there is not much difference between the approved budget bill of the NDC and that of the Special Committee. There has been a noticeable reduction of South Korean defense expenditures in the process of democratic transition and consolidation. For example, the average percentage of defense expenditure as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) was reduced from 3.78 percent under the Roh Tae-Woo government (1988-1992) to 2.59 percent under the Lee Myung-Bak government (2008-2012).[7] This continuous reduction in defense expenditure implies the dilution of the military's prerogatives and political power. This situation has augmented the influence of the NDC on the military, because the politically weakened armed forces should make an effort to persuade and lobby the NDC in order to increase or not to decrease defense budget.

The NDC also has power to inspect the military on an annual basis. All major military organizations, including the MND, Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), and four military headquarters (Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps) and all fields of the military, such as budget, manpower, operation, logistics, and intelligence are subjected to inspection. The main purpose of this annual inspection is to check whether the military has effective management, combat readiness, transparency, and accountability. The evaluation outcome of the inspection critically affects the future status of organizations as well as that of

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[7] Stokholm International Peace Research Institute, SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, available at http://milexdata.sipri.org/result.php4. The average percentage of defense budget as a percentage of GDP between 2013 and 2014 is 2.57 percent in the current Park Geun-Hye government.

individuals; it is a big issue for military leaders to get good results in the inspection. In addition, the NDC has power to discharge the defense minister from office. When the NDC finds a defense minister's wrongdoing like corruption and inability to keep his role, the committee can call an official meeting and request the minister to attend the meeting and answer questions. If the NDC determines the minister's misbehavior is seriously harmful for securing defense and security, then the committee passes a recommendation for the removal of the defense minister from office. All of these activities of the NDC are firmly institutionalized in the South Korean constitution and statutory.

Based on these observations, it is easy to realize the strong power of the NDC and its impact on the military. We can postulate that if the decision-making process of the NDC is influenced by the military rather than the other way around, it will be closely associated with the low level of democratic civilian control of the military. One way of pinpointing the relationship between the NDC and the military is to look at the component of the committee. If the NDC is comprised of members who have individual undue favors to the military, outcomes of the committee would be resulted in something good for the armed forces. No doubt, former military high ranking officers may try to secure interests of the armed forces through dominating decision-making process of the NDC. This argument raises a hypothesis that as the degree of democratic civilian control of the military increases, the number of retired military officers in the NDC will be decreased and vice versa. This is because established democracies do not allow the military to play major role in domestic politics and in the NDC as well, whereas the armed forces may effectively influence those areas under authoritarian military government and young democracies. The hypothesis is supported by evidences in South Korea.

The average percentage of retired military high ranking officers in the NDC has been declined from 35 percent during the Roh Tae-Woo government to 13 percent during the Roh Moo-Hyun government.[8] During the Roh Tae-Woo government, the political influence of the military was still powerful to the government and to the NDC which meant it did not need to take care of the NDC because the institution was under the influence of the military. This was not the case for civilian government. As democratic consolidation deepens in South Korea, retired military officers could not play a major role in the NDC any longer. As a result, the percentage of retired military high ranking officers in the National Assembly and in the NDC together has dwindled. This evidence clearly shows the strengthened democratic civilian control of the military and the promoted parliamentary oversight over the military in South Korea.

4. CONCLUSION

Democratization in South Korea changed the role of the military in politics and society. In effect, the political influence and the leading role of the military in society have been significantly diminished. The military no longer appeared to involve in domestic politics. As it turned out, the efforts of the prevention of military's re-intervention in politics were successful (Croissant and Kuehn, 2009: 187-218); the attempts of reforming some areas of

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[8] The Republic of Korea National Defense Committee, available at http://defense.na.go.kr; Republic of Korea National Assembly, available at http://www.assembly.go.kr; DongA people search, available at http://www.donga.com/inmul/inmul_search.html.

the army remain somewhat intact. Civilian leadership has firmly institutionalized parliamentary control of the military by increasing parliamentary power over the military. By contrast, the democratic force had less success in establishing civilian supremacy in the top leadership of the military. This was due mainly to the tangible threat from the North. Under the volatile and continuous North Korean threat and intertwined inter-Korean relations, South Korean armed forces have been required to maintain its effectiveness and thus have maintained its autonomy in the areas of defense and security.

The military's autonomy from civilian control and maintenance of the military's efficacy are major interests for military leaders. Specifically, the military elite strongly want to keep their autonomy in the field of defense and security in which their fundamental interest exists. Even though the military pass many privileges over to the democratic force, the decision-making positions of defense and security sector is the last area that they would like to yield. Accordingly, the improvement of civil control of the top leadership of defense and security field is generally slower than that of other areas. In this sense, it is clearly expected to see that the South Korean military will strive to keep its institutional autonomy in those fields as much as it could.[9] The ongoing high national security threat will help the armed forces to justify and retain its institutional autonomy in the process of democratic consolidation. In the eye of the democratic elite, on the other hand, the national security problem could be a difficult issue for them to handle for democratic progress. This does not necessarily mean that the national security problem cannot be compatible with democratization. It does mean that the nature of national security issues are too complex to unravel and thus should be carefully managed by the democratic group (Linz and Stephan, 1996: 19). Otherwise, the national security problem makes the road to democratic consolidation more difficult.

Due to the constant skirmishes between the two Koreas, it appears that further democratic civilian control of the military may not be plausible in near future. In spite of this difficulty, it is the foremost task of civilian leaders to civilianize the top leadership and key staffs of the MND for democratic consolidation. The skewed balance of manpower distribution between the active duty and the civilian within the MND poses a problem in an era of integration and convergence. Additionally, the top leadership of the military is required to demonstrate political skills which would empower them to bring a greater defense budget and support for defense policy (Kim, 2010: 126). The retired high-ranking army officers-led MND leadership needs be changed to a true civilian-led leadership. For facilitating this task, the political leadership needs to legalize the appointment time for retired military generals to the posts of the MND leadership because they should spend some time to acclimate themselves to a new civil society and to think like civilians. Civilianizing the key staffs of the MND is also one of the most important areas for further development in democratic civil-military relations in South Korea. However, having civilian defense ministers, vice ministers, or key staffs will not automatically ensure the improvement of democratic civilian control of the military. A civilian defense minister, a vice defense minister, and a key staff who have the capabilities to run the MND efficiently without undermining military's effectiveness and readiness can only be accepted by the military and it ultimately improve democratic civil-military relations in South Korea.

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[9] Although the terms military and institutional autonomy have not clear meanings, one study provides clarity in these concepts by defining military autonomy as "an institution's decision-making authority," and institutional autonomy as "the military's professional independence and exclusivity" (Pion-Berlin, 1992: 84).

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