

Asia on alert as Japan slides towards renouncing pacifist pledge

By Zhong Sheng from People's Daily

Japan's Commission on the Constitution under the House of Councillors restarted its substantive discussion on a constitutional amendment on November 16 after a nine-month hiatus. It is the first formal multi-party discussion of its kind after the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and its allies secured a supermajority in the election of the House of Councillors this July.

Despite the disagreement of opposition parties, the ambitious LDP, whose members dominate the current government, have maintained their efforts to amend Japan's pacifist constitution.

Shinzo Abe's government has further stoked the flames by pushing new security laws that have been accused of violating the country's constitution. In a "Keen Sword" military drill staged this month by Japanese and US forces, the two countries have for the first time put on joint exercises related to the new security laws.

In addition, the Japanese government also approved a plan for its troops to conduct rescue missions in South Sudan on UN peacekeeping operations. Such actions have aroused strong opposition across the country, while the new security laws have been characterized as paving the way to war.

"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". This historic renunciation of war in the pacifist constitution is what the Abe government has long been trying to abolish since he took office.

If constitutional change is a move taken by Abe in the public sphere, then the attempts to enact the new security laws are brazen violations of Japan's pacifist pledge. Since the laws allow the country to fully exercise its right to collective defense, it's just a matter of time before Japan's Self-Defense Forces (SDF) engage in aggressive military action, which directly violates its pacifist constitution.

However, the Japanese government, infamous for saying one thing and doing another, holds greater ambitions. The true intention of the conservative Abe government is to legalize its engagement in wars.

To advance its underhanded agenda, it has carried out a series of actions both domestically and internationally. It rejected and amended the domestic and diplomatic policies adopted by successive cabinets, overturned its introspection and repentance over aggression in World War II, fomented tensions over the Diaoyu Islands and South China Sea, made "new allies" and drove a wedge between China and its neighbors.

The world has expressed severe concerns over these actions that may lead Japan off the path of peaceful development.

Since Japan passed the new security bills last September, more than 300 protests have taken place across the country, calling for the government to abolish the new laws. In addition, many Japanese citizens have filed lawsuits against the Japanese government for its violation of the constitution and the mental torment caused by

the possibility of future wars or terrorist attacks.

These voices have criticized the endorsement of the new security bills as a savage act, described the amendment of the constitution as a regression of history, and voiced their opposition to sending their children to battle.

Just recently, US magazine Foreign Policy remarked, “Abe did pass the legislation but never managed to dispel public concerns ... that sometime, somewhere at Washington’s behest, Tokyo will get dragged into a conflict that has nothing to do with the defense of Japan”.

The debate over the constitutional amendment will surely bring chaos to Japanese society, but the victims will not be limited to the Japanese people. The new security laws allow Japanese troops to operate across the world, provide military support to its allies, and strike first in a military capacity, thus further destabilizing the Asia-Pacific region.

Japan is trying to shake off the final restraint on its diplomatic, military and overseas actions through its constitutional amendment, new security laws and abolishment of its renunciation of war, so as to escape its post-war pacifist system. The international community should stay alert to such actions.

Hitoshi Ashida, former chairman of Japan's Committee on the Bill for Revision of the Imperial Constitution, said 70 years ago that the renunciation of war is the common desire of the people who suffered from the war that caused hundreds of thousands of casualties, comparing it to a broad path to world peace.

Though seven decades have passed, the significance of the pacifist constitution should not be undermined or forgotten. It serves as an assurance of peace to the Japanese people and the countries once invaded by Japan, as well as a crucial step to eliminating a potential threat to the peace of East Asia.

It is the responsibility and mission of every member of the international community to safeguard and play a constructive role in regional and world peace. Only by drawing lessons from history, adhering to a peaceful development trajectory, treading cautiously when it comes to military action and boosting mutual trust with neighbors, can Japan return to the right path.

Though Japanese citizens know this well, a handful of extreme and stubborn right-wing politicians are leading Japan astray by walking down the old path of expansionism.