

## 《Abe skirts constitution to wake up dormant war machine》

TOKYO -- The Japanese government on Tuesday is going to finish touches to a proposal likely to be accepted by the Cabinet, allowing Japan to exercise the right to collective self-defense, in a historic move that has circumnavigated the nation's Constitution as Prime Minister Shinzo Abe seeks to leave his signature on the future annals of Japan's military history.

The move marks the most significant shift in Japan's post-war security policy and sees the realization of Abe's future legacy, as he has truculently, since returning to power, moved all the necessary pieces in his favor, including the final hurdle of getting his once reluctant New Komeito coalition ally on board with his militaristic ideology.

Rather than seeking to change Japan's war-renouncing Article 9 section of its Constitution, which has remained unchanged since its adoption in 1947 and forbids the use of force as a means of settling international disputes and also prohibits Japan from maintaining an army, navy or air force, Abe has bypassed this step by seeking to merely reinterpret the Constitution.

As opposition to Japan exercising the right to collective self-defense is growing, as evidenced by recent polls that showed more than 55 percent of the public oppose Japan engaging in collective self-defense, and almost 60 percent oppose Abe's bid to achieve that by changing the government's interpretation of the Constitution, political commentators and the public are now wondering if the move is really in Japan's best interests and constitutionally lawful, if the Constitution hasn't been officially amended?

Many are arguing that Abe has used his party's majority power in both chambers of parliament to craft, steamroll and enact this plan, in a manner that has not allowed for adequate debate in the Diet and has skirted the government's responsibility to seek public approval for such a monumental shift in security policy.

The public's voice has been marginalized to street protests around the prime minister's official resident and Diet building and, in one isolated case, the self-immolation of an opponent to collective self-defense, who felt the only way he could get Abe's attention was to bear his views over a megaphone to a growing crowd of people and then continue to douse himself in gasoline and set fire to himself to punctuate his sentiments, outside a crowded train station in central Tokyo.

"Abe has used guile and cunning to achieve his signature policy goal and he's done it at lightening speed, exploiting such phrases as, 'changing geopolitics' and 'shifting security environment' in the region to largely placate a population," Laurent Sinclair, a Japan-based pacific affairs research analyst, told Xinhua.

"Abe knew from the get-go that if he were to try to seek to lawfully amend the Constitution he would first have to win a majority approval in a public referendum, which the latest polls show us is very unlikely, and then go on and secure a two-thirds majority vote in each chamber of the Diet, where he may have stood more of a chance, but, as I said, would unlikely win the public's support in the first instance."

"He has gagged the very people he is purportedly representing and exploiting his position in power, as his ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) has no real opponents to keep it in check. Reinterpreting the Constitution at will,

without due public diligence, is a monumental departure from the Constitution's democratic fundamentals and a very large step towards autocracy," Sinclair said.

Sinclair went on to say that the LDP's junior New Komeito coalition ally had done its best to ensure that certain provisos and particular wording were in place, pertaining to Cabinet decision, which will almost certainly see Japan's forces allowed the right to collective self-defense, and had stalled on a number of key debates for as long as possible. But barring New Komeito bolting from the LDP, the tiny party was always going to toe-the-line eventually, or risk losing their voice in the national government, he added.

With Japan on the precipice of widening its military scope both domestically and overseas, the LDP is also pushing for Japan's forces to be able to be involved in United Nations-led peacekeeping operations, and, other "gray zone" missions that don't fully equate to war, in a wholesale turnaround to Japan's pacifist stance, held since Japan was defeated in World War II in 1945.

