

# Japan: mobilisations against militarism, constitutional change, nuclear weapons and nuclear power plants

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## Tokyo protesters say no to amending Constitution

TOKYO (AP) — Hundreds of Japanese, young and old, gathered in downtown Tokyo in a peaceful protest Friday against calls by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to amend the country's pacifist constitution and give the government more power to abridge civil liberties.

Opposition parties, labor groups, religious organizations and individuals turned out to march from a park near the Imperial Palace through the Ginza shopping district, beating drums and chanting their opposition to such moves by Abe and the ruling Liberal Democratic Party.

Japan was marking the 66<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its constitution on Friday, a national holiday.

Supporters of amending the constitution want to change the requirement that constitutional amendments win two-thirds approval in both houses of parliament before they are put to a national referendum. They want that changed to simple majority approvals in parliament before a referendum.

Opponents say such changes could allow the government to undermine civil liberties. Reinforcing such concerns is a proposal by the Liberal Democrats that calls for making civil liberties such as freedom of speech and expression subordinate to the public interest.

"The constitution is meant to protect the people and their rights from the government. What they want to do is to reverse that," said Hiroshi Honna, a member of a group of World War II air raid victims' families and of a group against amending Article 9 of the constitution, in which Japan renounces the use of war.

His was among dozens of groups handing out flyers and marching in the "Ginza Parade."

Surveys show mixed opinions among Japanese to revising the constitution, with some media organizations showing a majority in favor while others show the number of those who are undecided at nearly half, with the rest divided about evenly.

While many Japanese favor Abe's calls for a greater sense of patriotism and national pride, many believe their nation's rejection of war and its protection of civil liberties are essential for its prosperity.

The nuclear disaster following the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami in northeastern Japan has likewise left many Japanese wary of allowing the authorities wider powers.

The constitution was written by U.S. officials whose main concern was keeping Japan from rearming soon after World War II. Until recently, discussions of constitutional amendments mainly focused on longtime calls to change Article 9, which keeps a tight rein on Japan's military, known as the "Self-Defense Forces."

Abe took office late last year, vowing to end two decades of economic stagnation and restore Japan's greatness. He has long campaigned for boosting the role of the military, and with his popularity ratings at more than 70 percent appears confident of winning a strong mandate for the Liberal Democrats in a July election for the upper house of parliament.

Among other things, Abe wants Japan to be able to engage in "collective defense," with its troops able to fight alongside Tokyo's allies — especially the U.S. troops who are obliged to defend Japan — if either comes under direct attack. The United States has about 50,000 troops in Japan, including its largest air base in Asia.

Right now, if Japan's current standoff with China over a group of disputed islands flared into actual conflict, and U.S. Navy ships coming to Japan's assistance took enemy fire, Japan wouldn't be able to help them.

The prospect of a stronger role for Japan's military causes great unease in neighboring South Korea and China, which endured invasion and occupation by Japanese Imperial forces before and during World War II.

Liberal Democrats and other supporters of constitutional reform contend Tokyo needs greater leeway to cope with China's rising military power.

"China is getting stronger and stronger, and meanwhile our military is confined to a purely defensive posture," Liberal Democratic lawmaker Gen Nakatani said in a Friday television discussion on NHK TV.

Addressing the rally Friday, Mizuho Fukushima, head of the opposition Green Party, urged listeners to lobby against amending the constitution.

"If they can amend the constitution through a simple majority the government will be able to make whatever changes it wants whenever it suits them," she said.

Kazuo Shii of the Japan Communist Party said high requirements for amending the constitution were considered "common sense" in most countries.

"The constitution exists to protect your own rights," he said. "There is a good reason it is not easy to amend it."

**AP**, May 4, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130504p2g00m0dm001000c.html>

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## **Three-month peace march sets out for Hiroshima**

Around 1,000 people set out Monday on a three-month peace march from Tokyo to Hiroshima, calling for the abolishment of nuclear weapons and nuclear power generation, according to organizers.

Holding up a banner reading, "Let's abolish nuclear weapons," and with stickers that read "YES PEACE" on their arms, the marchers shouted slogans such as, "We don't need nuclear weapons" and "We don't need nuclear power," as they departed.

Before the start, Malaya Fabros, a 34-year-old antinuclear advocate from the Philippines, called on the marchers to join forces so that a peaceful world without nuclear weapons can be realized.

Some of the participants are planning to walk all the way from Tokyo to Hiroshima, while others will walk part of the relays toward the city that was devastated by a U.S. atomic bombing in 1945 in World War II, according to organizers.

The marchers are scheduled to reach Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park on Aug. 4, two days before the anniversary of the bombing.

Yasuo Shiose, 74, who was orphaned at age 7 when he lost his parents and two older brothers in the bombing of Hiroshima, said, "I will walk with the aim achieving a peaceful world free of nuclear weapons and wars."

Kyodo News, May 7, 2013

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/05/07/national/three-month-peace-march-sets-out-for-hiroshima/#.UZGAIUpOj1U>

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## **Parties split over relaxing requirement for constitutional revision**

TOKYO (Kyodo) — Japanese political parties were split Thursday on the issue of whether to relax a parliamentary requirement for holding a national referendum on revising the Constitution.

The governing Liberal Democratic Party and two of the country's opposition parties — the Japan Restoration Party and Your Party — voiced support for revising the Constitution's Article 96 which requires a vote of two-thirds or more of the members in each house of parliament before a referendum can be held.

The main opposition Democratic Party of Japan, the New Komeito party which is the LDP's coalition partner, and the People's Life Party expressed a cautious stance on relaxing the requirements.

The Japanese Communist Party opposed revision of the article.

Members of the ruling and opposition parties discussed the matter at a session of the Commission on the Constitution of the House of Representatives, the lower house.

The Social Democratic Party, which is opposed to revision of the article, could not send any of its members to the lower house panel as it has only two seats in the 480-seat house.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe who heads the LDP has called for relaxing the requirement of a two-thirds majority to a simple overall majority.

In its draft constitutional revision plan compiled last year, the LDP called for relaxing the requirement to a simple majority.

Abe, who is keen to rewrite the current war-renouncing Article 9 and create stronger defense forces, is seeking to stir a nationwide debate on the revision of Article 96.

The LDP's draft constitutional revision plan, unveiled in April 2012, says the emperor is the country's head of state and the Self-Defense Forces are to be renamed as the country's national defense forces, becoming a fully acknowledged military.

The Constitution says the emperor is "the symbol of the state."

**Kyodo News**, May 9, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130509p2g00m0dm068000c.html>

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## **LDP locks sights on reactors, Constitution**

A draft of the Liberal Democratic Party's platform for the upcoming election states that any reactors which clear the newly compiled safety criteria will be restarted - a move likely to upset antinuclear voters awakened by the Fukushima meltdowns in 2011.

The ruling LDP will vow to stimulate the economy, revise the pacifist Constitution and mend Japan's strained ties with China and South Korea in line with the intentions of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, the party's president.

On nuclear policy, the government "will restart (reactors) under its own responsibility once it obtains the understanding" of local authorities and after the Nuclear Regulatory Authority judges them safe, the draft platform says.

Most of the nation's 50 commercial reactors, which were idled after the Fukushima nuclear disaster triggered by the March 2011 quake and tsunami, remain shut down. The LDP aims to determine within three years whether they can be restarted.

The loss of nuclear power has forced electrical utilities to concentrate more on thermal power generation and crank up imports of fossil fuels, weakening the nation's trade balance, as the aggressive monetary easing touted under "Abenomics" drives down the yen, making those purchases even more expensive.

The draft platform, which will be finalized later this month, contains about 300 policies.

Abe took office by announcing that his top priority would be to revive the deflation-battered economy but has put off releasing any actual reform plans until June. The platform, however, lists corporate tax breaks and other support as part of a five-year reform plan to increase Japan's corporate competitiveness.

To deal with the massive public debt, the government's goal of achieving a primary balance surplus by the end of fiscal 2020, to avoid issuing new bonds to finance expenditures other than debt-servicing costs, will remain unaltered.

The schedule for doubling the consumption tax will also be left untouched, although the draft says the advisability of following through will be judged six months before implementation to adjust for prevailing economic conditions.

The 5 percent tax rate is set to climb to 8 percent in April 2014 and to 10 percent in October 2015.

Traditionally supported by farmers, the LDP will aim to double their incomes over the next decade while protecting domestic agriculture from being flooded by cheap food imports if Japan joins the U.S.-led Trans-Pacific Partnership.

Since Japan will soon join the 11-nation talks on setting up the TPP, which in principle aims to scrap all tariffs, the draft makes it clear that Japan will strive to win tariff exemptions for sensitive products like rice, wheat and sugar.

The draft repeats the LDP's resolve to revise the war-renouncing Constitution - Abe's pet project. His quest to revise the supreme code indicates he is trying to shift Japan to the right.

The LDP covets legislation that would allow Japan to exercise the right to collective self-defense, which is banned under the government's current interpretation of the Constitution through Article 9.

**Kyodo News**, May 12, 2013

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/05/12/national/ldp-locks-sights-on-reactors-constitution/#.UZIDgUpOj1U>

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## **New Komeito to back postwar Constitution: policy draft**

New Komeito, the junior member of the ruling coalition, will pledge to protect the pacifist Constitution for the Upper House election, opening a rift with nationalist Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his Liberal Democratic Party, a policy draft showed Sunday.

The draft, obtained by Kyodo News, also said New Komeito will try to re-establish regular meetings between Japanese and Chinese leaders to mend diplomatic relations frayed by Japan's nationalization of a tiny set of uninhabited islands in the East China Sea last September and by historical disputes.

Despite its more than decade-long alliance with Abe's conservative LDP, New Komeito is clearly seeking to distance itself from the revisionist leader's party before the House of Councilors election slated for July.

New Komeito, backed by the major lay Buddhist organization Soka Gakkai, believes that the pacifist nature of the Constitution must be upheld, including Japan's three non-nuclear principles of not producing, possessing or allowing nuclear weapons on Japanese territory.

It will also propose that Japan host an international summit on eliminating nuclear weapons in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 2015.

The LDP, which made a strong return to power in December's Lower House election, is on a quest to rewrite the Occupation-influenced Constitution so it can turn the Self-Defense Forces into a standing military and engage in collective self-defense, banned by war-renouncing Article 9.

To alter Article 9, the LDP thinks it must officially start by watering down Article 96, which spells out the voting majorities needed to pass amendments and to hold public referendums on them.

New Komeito plans to finalize its election pledges by the end of the month after further discussions on Article 96, which states that any initiative to amend the Constitution must be supported by a two-thirds majority in each house in the Diet.

Unlike Abe's LDP, New Komeito is also cautious about restarting more of the nation's nuclear reactors without proper public support, the draft says.

**Kyodo News**, May 13, 2013

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/05/13/national/new-komeito-to-back-postwar-constitution-policy-draft/#.UZIFb0pOj1U>

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