
Japan Parliament Approves Controversial Bill to Expand Role of Military

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Despite strong protests from the opposition and public, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party of Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, and its coalition partners, the Buddhist New Komeito, could bring forward four amendments in Thursday's vote.

It will then pass on to the ruling bloc dominated Upper House, where it is likely to be finalized in about 60 days.

The bill, which is set to bring about the biggest change in Japan's defense strategy since World War II, attracted much discontent, with the main opposition Democratic Party and four other formations, including the Communist Party, leaving the chamber during the vote.

The reforms would invalidate the pacifist clause of the Constitution, adopted after World War II and has generated enormous debate in Japanese society.

The Japanese government is being criticized for bringing in legislative package without the required debate.

Opposition leader Katsuya Okada, Thursday described the adoption of the legislative reform as "a stain on Japanese democracy" and recalled "80 percent of the citizens consider it insufficient the explanations that have been given to them, while half of the country considers the reform unconstitutional."

Prime Minister Abe said the security situation around Japan is becoming increasingly difficult

and "this act is necessary to defend Japanese citizens and prevent a war in advance."

Coinciding with the debate and vote, hundreds of people came out near the Parliament, protesting against the approval of what they consider a 'military law.'

Polls show more than half of Japanese citizens oppose the reform and protests against it has been growing in recent months, including periodic ones in front of Abe's residence.

The adoption of this legislative reform package has been a major ambition of the Abe administration (re-elected by majority last December) and responds to the controversial re-interpretation of the Magna Carta, which the cabinet approved last year.

Until then, Article 9 of the Constitution prevented the country from using force to resolve international conflicts; neither allowing Japanese troops to assist foreign contingents nor attend or participate in foreign operations.
