



# The Amendment of Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution

Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party has secured a strong majority, bringing constitutional reform back into focus. At the centre of the debate is Article 9, Japan's pacifist clause:

*"Article 9. Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the 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.*

*In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized."*<sup>1</sup>

On paper, Japan cannot maintain a military. In reality, it already does. The Self-Defense Forces (SDF) are modern, capable, and increasingly active. Over time, the government has reinterpreted Article 9 to expand what Japan can do—such as supporting allies and increasing defence spending—without formally changing the constitution.

This reflects a broader pattern: important institutional change can and does occur without constitutional amendment. In Japan, security policy has evolved through reinterpretation, new laws, and gradual shifts in practice. Other countries show similar patterns. The United States built its modern military system without rewriting its constitution, the United Kingdom operates without a written constitution as such and the French military has developed largely through policy and institutional change rather than constitutional revision.

This gradual approach has created a unique balance. Japan can strengthen its security while still presenting itself as a pacifist country. The ambiguity

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<sup>1</sup> The Constitution of Japan.

[https://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb\\_english.nsf/html/statics/english/constitution\\_e.htm](https://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_english.nsf/html/statics/english/constitution_e.htm)

has helped avoid major political conflict at home and reduce tensions abroad.

Supporters of revising Article 9 argue that it would make Japan's military role clearer and more legitimate. However, it would not significantly change Japan's actual capabilities.

Rewriting Article 9 could also reduce Japan's flexibility. For example, in a possible conflict over Taiwan, Japan has kept its position deliberately unclear while quietly preparing and coordinating with allies. This ambiguity allows it to respond without making rigid commitments in advance. A constitutional change could force clearer positions, making crisis management more difficult.

There are also risks at home and abroad. Revision could divide public opinion by forcing a clear choice between pacifism and a traditional military role, and it could raise concerns among neighbouring countries.

Japan's security policy has already evolved without constitutional change. The key question is *whether revising Article 9 would truly strengthen Japan—or weaken the flexibility that has helped it balance pacifism and security for decades.*<sup>2</sup>

## Questions

1. What, in general, is the role of a national constitution?
2. How does institutional change happen in countries?

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<sup>2</sup> Source: Latham, A. and Gangal, T. (2026, April 17). Japan's Constitutional Theater: Revising Article 9 Would Be a Mistake. *The Diplomat*. <https://thediplomat.com/2026/04/japans-constitutional-theater-revising-article-9-would-be-a-mistake/#:~:text=C%20constitutional%20revision%20has%20now%20returned,a%20military%20under%20another%20name>.