The Fourth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution protects individuals from "unreasonable searches and seizures" and is a critical framework for evaluating law enforcement's use of force. It states: *"The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized."* When applied to use of force, the amendment focuses on the "seizure" of a person, which includes arrests or other physical restraints, and whether the force used was "reasonable" under the circumstances.

**Key Principles for Law Enforcement Use of Force**

1. **Reasonableness Standard**: The Supreme Court case *Graham v. Connor* (1989) established that the Fourth Amendment governs claims of excessive force by law enforcement, and the core question is whether the officer's actions were "objectively reasonable." This is assessed based on:
	* The severity of the crime at issue.
	* Whether the suspect poses an immediate threat to the safety of officers or others.
	* Whether the suspect is actively resisting arrest or attempting to flee.
	* The evaluation is made from the perspective of a reasonable officer on the scene, not with hindsight.
2. **Seizure Defined**: A seizure occurs when an officer intentionally restricts a person’s freedom of movement, either through physical force or a show of authority (e.g., *Tennessee v. Garner*, 1985). For example, stopping someone with a drawn weapon or tackling a fleeing suspect constitutes a seizure under the Fourth Amendment.
3. **Use of Deadly Force**: In *Tennessee v. Garner*, the Court ruled that deadly force is only constitutional when an officer has probable cause to believe the suspect poses a significant threat of death or serious physical injury to the officer or others. Shooting a fleeing felon who poses no immediate danger, for instance, would violate the Fourth Amendment.
4. **Balancing Test**: Courts weigh the government’s interest (e.g., public safety, law enforcement) against the individual’s right to be free from intrusion. Excessive force—beyond what’s necessary to achieve a legitimate purpose—can render a seizure unreasonable.

**Practical Implications**

* **Non-Deadly Force**: Officers may use reasonable non-deadly force (e.g., handcuffs, tasers, or physical holds) to detain or arrest someone if supported by probable cause or reasonable suspicion (per *Terry v. Ohio*, 1968, for brief stops).
* **Excessive Force Claims**: If force is deemed unreasonable (e.g., beating a compliant suspect), it violates the Fourth Amendment, potentially leading to civil lawsuits or criminal charges against the officer.
* **Context Matters**: The amendment doesn’t prohibit all force—it permits what’s proportional and necessary given the situation.