

New-right-wing Osaka Mayor denies that the Imperial Japanese Army forced Korean women and girls into sexual servitude at wartime military brothels

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No evidence sex slaves were taken by military: Hashimoto

OSAKA - Osaka Mayor Toru Hashimoto said there was no evidence that the Imperial Japanese Army forced Korean women and girls into sexual servitude at wartime military brothels.

In response to a question Tuesday about South Korean President Lee Myung Bak's visit to the disputed Takeshima islets, which are called Dokdo in South Korea, which controls them, Hashimoto touched on Lee's recent demands for Japan to apologize to the forced sex workers - now often described as "sex slaves" by the media - who were euphemistically called "comfort women" by the Japanese.

"There is no evidence that people called comfort women were taken away by violence or threat by the (Japanese) military," Hashimoto said. "If there is such evidence, South Korea should provide it."

Hashimoto also said he is "not denying all of what South Korea is saying," adding the military brothel system "may have been ethically problematic if viewed now."

In August 1993, after more than 11/2 years of government research into the issue, then-Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono issued a statement saying the Japanese military was, directly or indirectly, involved in the establishment and management of "comfort stations" and the transfer of comfort women.

"The government study has revealed that in many cases they were recruited against their own will, through coaxing, coercion, etc., and that, at times, administrative/military personnel directly took part in the recruitments," the statement said.

"It is deeply regrettable that the politician (Hashimoto) made remarks that run counter to the official position of the Japanese government," said a South Korean government spokesman in an email to The Japan Times. "Former Chief Cabinet Secretary Kono issued a statement acknowledging the forcible recruitment of the so-called comfort women, sexual slavery victims drafted for the Japanese Imperial Army. As such, we believe the Japanese government has already acknowledged the forced nature of the recruitment of comfort women."

New-right-wing Osaka mayor: On sex slaves, Hashimoto on same page as Abe

OSAKA - By touching on the wartime sex slavery involving Korean females, Osaka Mayor and Osaka Ishin no Kai (One Osaka) leader Toru Hashimoto is apparently sounding out ex-Prime Minister Shinzo Abe about joining hands for the next Lower House poll.

Hashimoto's comments earlier this week that there was no proof that Korean women were forced into prostitution by the wartime Japanese military are being seen as a political appeal to Abe, as they were virtually the same as what he said in March 2007 as prime minister.

In response to a U.S. congressional resolution calling on Japan to apologize to the "comfort women," Abe said there was no evidence the "recruitment" was forcible, at least in the narrow definition of the word.

On Friday, Hashimoto said on Twitter, "In 2007, a Cabinet statement said there was no supporting evidence" to show the comfort women were forcibly taken away by the Japanese army or government authorities to military brothels.

"Despite this, South Korea refers to the Kono statement as proof," he added, referring to a 1993 apology statement by then-Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono.

While Abe has not commented on Hashimoto's overtures and indicated Thursday evening he will run in next month's LDP presidential election, the two continue to grow closer, raising the prospect of an alliance between an Abe-led LDP and Osaka Ishin no Kai members following a Lower House election. Some pundits predict candidates backed by both parties would capture well more than the 241 seats needed to form a ruling coalition.

The attempt to woo Abe comes as Hashimoto and Osaka Gov. Ichiro Matsui, the secretary general of Osaka Ishin no Kai, grow concerned that while potential candidates now studying at a Hashimoto-run school might win a lot of seats, few have experience in national politics.

Unless experienced, heavyweight politicians can be convinced to support Osaka Ishin no Kai, party members could be ineffectual lawmakers and quickly lose public trust.

Hashimoto and Matsui have stated publicly their views are in line with Abe's on many issues. Also, many Osaka Ishin no Kai ranks in the Osaka Prefectural and Municipal assemblies are former LDP members whose philosophies are similar to Abe's and ex-Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's.

"Within the LDP, Abe's views on reviving the party are well-founded," Hashimoto said recently.

How many in the LDP would support Abe in the presidential poll, especially if he seeks an alliance with Hashimoto, is unclear. LDP President Sadakazu Tanigaki has long been a critic of Hashimoto and cool to the idea of a tieup. Hashimoto's push to get out of nuclear power is also of concern to many LDP members who have long backed nuclear energy.

Other Diet members from the ruling and opposition parties continue to explore the possibility of political cooperation with Hashimoto. DPJ Lower House member Yoriyisa Matsuno, LDP Lower House member Kenta Matsunami and representatives from Your Party met Tuesday and Wednesday to discuss Hashimoto's policy platform.

However, Osaka Ishin no Kai and Your Party have grown apart in recent days over increasing personality differences between Hashimoto, Matsui and Your Party leader Yoshimi Watanabe. Earlier this week, Matsui denied reports that Your Party and Osaka Ishin no Kai might combine to form a new political party.

ERIC JOHNSTON, *Japan Times* Staff writer, Aug. 25, 2012

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120825a4.html>
