

# Japan - New-rightwing Osaka mayor: Established parties keep a wary eye on new Japan Restoration Party

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Ruling and opposition parties are becoming wary of the Japan Restoration Party, which was officially launched on Sept. 28 with the aim of forming a third bloc in the Diet, wondering how far the new party can go in garnering support from voters critical of established parties.

"We'll fundamentally change the country's governing structure. We'd like to try solving diplomatic problems that our previous generations weren't able to solve," said Osaka Mayor Toru Hashimoto, who heads the party.

Seven Diet members have joined the party, meaning it meets the legal requirement that a political party must have at least five legislators. At the same time, incumbent lawmakers' entrance into the party has obscured its differences from established political parties, inviting criticism that it is no more than platform for mutual assistance in elections.

In an effort to lay out the party's unique vision, Hashimoto has proactively made statements on diplomacy as well as his interpretation of history in recent weeks. In an open debate with legislators on Sept. 23, he insisted that Japan and South Korea jointly control the disputed Takeshima islets in the Sea of Japan.

On Sept. 27, Hashimoto said he will visit Tokyo's Yasukuni Shrine, where the war dead are enshrined along with Class A war criminals, while emphasizing that he has no intention of denying Japan's wartime atrocities against its Asian neighbors.

"The way we send messages to the international community is important. No one can deny that Japan caused trouble to its neighboring countries in the past," he said.

His remarks, which appear to draw a line between him and conservatives within the largest opposition Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), have sparked speculations he is trying to accentuate the differences between his opinions and the conservative views of newly appointed LDP President Shinzo Abe.

"The advent of LDP leader Abe has made it difficult for us to fight in the upcoming general election. The Japan Restoration Party can stand out only if there are policy differences with the LDP," said a high-ranking member of the new party.

The Restoration Party shares Abe's views on constitutional amendments and educational reform.

Projecting uniqueness in its basic policy line as it seeks to form a third bloc separate from the ruling Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) and the LDP is a major challenge.

For now, the Restoration Party needs to work out its election strategy. The party is set to field a total of 350 candidates in the 300 single-seat constituencies and 11 proportional representation districts of the House of Representatives.

On Sept. 28 the party concluded its initial public solicitation of candidates for the next general election, and it is now poised to select candidates who will run in the election. However, the support base of these candidates is weaker than that of candidates from established political parties.

Local assembly members, including those belonging to the Osaka prefectural and municipal assemblies, are hoped to play an important role in the Restoration Party's election campaign. Specifically, local assembly members belonging to the party will be dispatched to 11 proportional representation districts across the country to help the party's candidates in their campaign for the lower house race. However, they are worried about whether they can wage an effective election battle.

"If local assembly members enter regions where candidates have no support base, they can't do anything for them," one Osaka Municipal Assembly member lamented.

The Restoration Party is based in Osaka and is unique in that its Diet members and local assembly members coexist on an equal footing. However, a tug-of-war between the local assembly members and legislators has surfaced over decision-making processes.

Moreover, the leader of the party has broad power over the selection of candidates in Diet elections and other important decision-making, which could trigger internal strife over the management of the party.

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<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120929p2a00m0na009000c.html>

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### **Hashimoto's group formally approved as party with election looming**

TOKYO (Kyodo) — The political grouping created by Osaka Mayor Toru Hashimoto, a former TV personality seeking to drastically transform national politics from his regional base, was formally approved Friday as a political party by the internal affairs ministry.

Hashimoto heads the party, named Nippon Ishin no Kai or the Japan Restoration Party, which aims to win a majority of House of Representatives seats in the next general election to be held within a year. The party set up its headquarters in Osaka.

It is very unusual for a local government leader to head a nationwide political party and for a party with national aspirations to be based anywhere but in the Japanese capital of Tokyo, drawing much attention to whether such a venture in Japan's political arena will bear fruit.

While Hashimoto, a lawyer-turned-politician, has ruled out running in the next general election, the party is trying to field around 350 candidates across Japan.

If no political force secures a majority in the next lower house election, the new party of the 43-year-old mayor could become a key player in the struggle to create a ruling coalition.

Osaka Gov. Ichiro Matsui assumed the post of secretary general of the new party. Seven Diet lawmakers, including former Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Yorihiisa Matsuno who left the ruling Democratic Party of Japan, have joined it and more Diet members are expected to before the next election.

The party's pledges include halving the size of the 480-seat lower house and introducing a direct vote to elect the prime minister, reforms criticized by some pundits and parliamentarians as only pandering to the public.

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<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20120929p2g00m0dm003000c.html>

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## **New-rightwing Osaka mayor: Hashimoto in favor of Japan exercising collective self-defense**

OSAKA - Japan should lift its ban on exercising the right to collective self-defense, Osaka Mayor Toru Hashimoto, the outspoken leader of a new political party, said Thursday, making his stance clear on the delicate constitutional issue for the first time before a general election is held.

"The right has been recognized also by the U.N. Charter. Why can't we exercise this right that we have," Hashimoto told a news conference, a day after he launched the party with the aim of winning a majority of seats in the Lower House whenever the next general election is held. "That does not make sense logically and linguistically."

For many years, the government has interpreted the Constitution as prohibiting the country from engaging in collective defense, or coming to the defense of an ally under attack.

Hashimoto's proposed revision to the interpretation is a sensitive issue with China and other neighboring parts of Asia, given Japan's wartime past.

But Hashimoto, the leader of Nippon Ishin no Kai (Japan Restoration Party), also said the right should not be exercised with no strings attached.

He proposed that the government specify conditions under which it will be able to exercise the right while taking into account Article 9 of the Constitution, which stipulates the Japanese people forever renounce the threat or use of force as a means of settling international disputes.

Hashimoto, known for his hawkish views, acknowledged that lifting the self-imposed ban could lead to worsened ties with the nation's rivals.

But he said Japan should consider "rules (over how to exercise the right) that would be appropriate for our country - the most mature, democratic nation in Asia - with the aim of holding an honorable position in the international community."

**Kyodo Press**, Friday, Sep. 14, 2012

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120914a5.html>

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