

Japan & WWII: Hashimoto's stance on 'comfort women' necessary for soldiers raises fury

Friday 24 May 2013, by [Associated Press](#), [JOHNSTON Eric](#), [Kyodo News](#), [Mainichi Shimbun](#), [MIE Ayako](#), [NISHIDA Shinichiro](#), [OSAKI Tomohiro](#) (Date first published: 19 May 2013).

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Hashimoto says 'comfort women' necessary for soldiers

OSAKA (Kyodo) — Osaka Mayor Toru Hashimoto, who co-heads the opposition Japan Restoration Party, said Monday he believes the system to recruit women into sexual servitude was “necessary to maintain discipline” in the Japanese military during World War II.

Hashimoto told reporters at Osaka City Hall that the women who were forced into sexual slavery for the Japanese military during the war, euphemistically referred to as “comfort women” in Japan, were “needed to provide rest to a group of brave soldiers who were exalted in the line of fire.”

The mayor asked, “Why is the Japanese 'comfort women' system only blamed? Other countries had

similar schemes at the time.”

He denied the Japanese military had systematically abducted women, mostly from other Asian countries, to coerce them into sex slavery by assaulting and threatening them.

The mayor said Japan has been labeled “a nation of rapists” in Europe and the United States due to “campaigns by South Korea and other nations.”

He said the system of “comfort women” was born “as a tragic consequence of war” and it is necessary to understand the feelings of such women and pay due consideration to them.

Hashimoto also said when he visited Okinawa to inspect the U.S. Marine Corps’ Futenma Air Station in late April, he asked a senior U.S. military officer based in the prefecture to let Marines use local sex-related services.

“Otherwise, they cannot control the sexual energy of wild Marines,” Hashimoto said. The U.S. military officer told the mayor that the Marines are prohibited from using such services, he added.

A South Korean government official slammed Hashimoto’s remarks on “comfort women,” saying they showed a “serious lack of recognition of history and the need to respect women’s human rights,” according to Yonhap News Agency.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told a press conference in Tokyo that Hashimoto had expressed his personal view and the Japanese government will not review its official position on the issue of wartime sex slavery.

In 1993, then Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono acknowledged in a statement the Japanese military’s responsibility for forced recruitment of women into sexual servitude and apologized to the victims.

Regarding Hashimoto’s remarks, Osaka Gov. Ichiro Matsui, secretary general of the Japan Restoration Party, told Kyodo News that people “cannot have an ordinary sense during war.”

Hashimoto’s comments drew fire from other opposition parties.

Japanese Communist Party Secretary General Tadayoshi Ichida said the remarks were “degrading to human beings and unforgivable.” Hashimoto is “not qualified to serve as the head of a party and a mayor, or to speak about national politics,” Ichida said.

Democratic Party of Japan leader Banri Kaieda said he believes the “comfort women” system was not necessary for the Japanese military during the war.

Kyodo News, May 14, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130514p2g00m0dm041000c.html>

Ministers criticize Hashimoto for remarks on ‘comfort women’

TOKYO (Kyodo) — Japanese ministers denounced Osaka Mayor Toru Hashimoto on Tuesday, a day

after he said sexual servitude by women in Asia was “necessary” for Japan’s soldiers during World War II to maintain discipline in the military.

Hashimoto, who co-heads the Japan Restoration Party with House of Representatives member Shintaro Ishihara, shrugged off criticism, saying on Twitter, “It’s an undeniable fact” that soldiers need to satisfy their sexual desires through some measures.

Ishihara, a former Tokyo governor, defended the outspoken mayor, telling reporters, “Any military is commonly associated with prostitution and that is like a principle of history,” adding, “It’s by no means preferable. But Mr. Hashimoto isn’t saying anything wrong basically.”

Abe declined to evaluate Hashimoto’s remarks.

“I have a deep compassion for comfort women who had painful memories beyond description,” he said during a Diet committee session, adding, “Recognition of history should not develop into political and diplomatic problems.”

The comments can be viewed as part of his efforts to try to ease tensions with Asian neighbors that have raised concerns about an apparent shift to the right in Japanese politics under his leadership.

Hashimoto, a lawyer-turned-politician and formerly a popular TV personality, is known for his nationalistic political views along with Ishihara, which have drawn criticism from countries that experienced Japanese wartime atrocities.

When recently meeting with a senior U.S. Marines officer in Okinawa Prefecture, Hashimoto proposed that servicemen stationed on the island use Japan’s legal adult entertainment industry, in order to prevent them from committing sex offenses against locals.

On Tuesday, Hashimoto said it is necessary to seek “ways to meet human sexual desires.”

A high-ranking official of the U.S. military based in Japan told Kyodo News on condition of anonymity that Hashimoto’s remarks “do not align with the values we seek to instill in our personnel and run counter to Defense Department policies and our laws.”

Kyodo News, May 14, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130514p2g00m0dm087000c.html>

Citizens groups furious over Hashimoto’s remarks on comfort women, and other responses

Osaka Mayor Toru Hashimoto has come under fire for his remarks on May 13 that the wartime system to recruit women into sexual servitude for the Japanese military was necessary, with citizens groups lambasting his statement as a “profanity to women” and “unheard of” as a politician.

“We’ve heard (politicians’) remarks to the effect that the system ‘couldn’t have been helped,’ but we’d never heard a politician say it was ‘necessary’ in affirmative of the system,” said Kiriko Asai, 56, of a group calling for the resolution of the sexual slavery issue under the former Japanese military.

“His statement disregards women’s human rights. Eradication of sex violence against women has been debated at international conferences. His sense of human rights is called into question,” fumed Bang Chung-ja, co-leader of a group on the Japanese military’s comfort women issue. The group, based in the Kansai region, has organized meetings inviting former comfort women as speakers and called upon Mayor Hashimoto, who is co-leader of the opposition Japan Restoration Party, to meet the women.

Kim Jong-suk, secretary-general of “House of Sharing” (Nanum no ie), a home for former comfort women to live together in Gyeonggi, South Korea, said, “His statement further torments former comfort women, who have already been deeply hurt. He should come here and listen to former comfort women directly before making such a statement.”

Yumiko Suto, co-leader of a group seeking the establishment of a law banning sexual violence, said, “His remarks sound as if it is natural for women to be sexually exploited in order to pursue violence such as war, and constitute profanity to all women. His statement can also be linked to the U.S. base issue in Okinawa, in that he has no imagination for women suffering from (sexual violence) near the bases.”

Researchers also criticized and called Hashimoto’s remarks into question. Professor Yasuhiro Ishikawa at Kobe College, who compiled testimonies by former comfort women into a book, said, “The comfort women issue is not a thing of the past but has been a serious diplomatic issue. Hashimoto lacks awareness that the issue concerns how Japan gets along with countries in East Asia.”

Professor Kan Kimura at Kobe University’s Graduate School of International Cooperation Studies, said, “It’s an indiscreet statement that is unthinkable as one made by the leader of a political party in national politics. Comfort stations were set up against the backdrop of frequent assaults in mainland China, and affirming the need for comfort stations is tantamount to admitting that ‘the then Japanese military was an organization that committed assaults in battlefields.’ It is thoughtless for a person who might become prime minister and commander in chief of the Self-Defense Forces to make a statement that could be interpreted as that the comfort women system was inevitable in war.”

Ikuhiko Hata, a modern historian, said, “The South Korean army’s annals of warfare states that the South Korean military also administered comfort stations during the Korean War. In the Vietnam War, the U.S. forces also used comfort stations, and Hashimoto’s remarks are largely true to these facts. Comfort stations were meant to prevent soldiers from committing sex crimes.” Hata, however, added, “Such remarks can be misleading unless he listens to experts about points at issue and gives clear explanations.”

Kyodo News, May 14, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130514p2a00m0na008000c.html>

China denounces Hashimoto for ‘comfort women’ remarks

BEIJING (Kyodo) — China on Tuesday denounced Osaka Mayor Toru Hashimoto for his remarks that so-called “comfort women” were necessary for Japanese soldiers during World War II.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei said at a press conference that the conscription of “comfort women” was a grave crime committed by the Japanese military and a major human rights issue that concerns the victims’ personal dignity, according to Xinhua News Agency.

“We are shocked and indignant at the Japanese politician’s remarks, as they flagrantly challenge historical justice and the conscience of mankind,” Hong said when asked to comment on the remarks, according to the Xinhua report.

“How Japan treats its past will decide its future,” Hong said, adding that its neighbors, as well as the international community, will have to wait to see what choice Japan makes.

Kyodo News, May 15, 201

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130515p2g00m0dm007000c.html>

Hashimoto’s remarks on ‘comfort women’ spark criticism abroad

Osaka Mayor Toru Hashimoto’s recent remarks that sexual servitude by women in Asia was “necessary” for Japan’s soldiers during World War II to maintain discipline in the military drew bitter criticism not only from the Chinese and South Korean governments but also from the United States.

Japan is an important ally of the Obama administration, which attaches importance to Asia, at a time when the situation surrounding the Korean Peninsula is becoming increasingly unstable. But the Japan-U.S relationship could turn for the worse because of a difference in perception between the two countries of “human rights” that constitute the backbone of democracy.

Former U.S. Ambassador to Japan Thomas Schieffer recently said at a U.S.-Japan symposium in Washington that no one in the United States would accept a plan to review the 1993 statement issued by then Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono on the issue of wartime sexual slavery. The Kono statement acknowledged the Japanese military’s responsibility for forced recruitment of women into sexual servitude before and during World War II and apologized to the victims.

The U.S. government had taken a stance to carefully watch developments in the past without getting involved directly in and expressing its concern about the issue of Japan’s perception of its wartime history. That’s because Washington wanted to prevent Japan-U.S. relations from deteriorating as it saw the close bilateral ties as crucial to deal with North Korea. With respect to the “comfort women” issue, however, the United States is taking a harsh stance toward Japan because Washington regards it as a human rights issue.

Japan, on the other hand, fully understands the fact that Washington clearly differentiates between the issue of Japan’s perception of its wartime history and the issue of “comfort women.” A senior Japanese Foreign Ministry official commenting on the “comfort woman” issue said that, “The United States takes a harsh stance toward the issue of ‘comfort women.’ They wouldn’t listen to Japan’s detailed explanations in the first place.” While Japan wants to focus on the question of whether Japan’s military forcibly recruited women into sexual servitude, the United States firmly believes that the action taken by the Japanese military itself violated human rights regardless of whether the women were conscripted into the wartime brothels.

In 2007, the U.S. House of Representatives adopted a resolution demanding Japan apologize to the “comfort women.” Very few legislators stood against the resolution, and there were more than 150 cosponsors of the motion. The U.S. military itself has been dealing sensitively with women’s human rights. The then U.S. Pacific Command chief was forced to resign over his comments about the rape in 1995 of an Okinawa schoolgirl by three U.S. servicemen. Macke said at the time, “For the price they paid to rent the car, they could have hired a hooker.”

A senior official of the United States Forces Japan (USFJ) said Hashimoto’s remarks are in conflict with the set of values the U.S. military wants to instill in all of its personnel in Japan and run counter to its policy and law.

Hashimoto’s remarks were reported by major U.S. media. The New York Times sounded an alarm against Japan for drifting to the right, saying in its online edition, “His comments followed those of a string of Japanese politicians who have recently challenged what they say is a distorted view of Japan’s wartime history.”

If the “comfort women” issue were to be rekindled, Japan’s handling of the issue would be tested again because a harsh response would likely come from U.S. Congress.

Shinichiro Nishida, *Mainichi Shimbun* North America General Bureau, May 15, 2013
<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130515p2a00m0na016000c.html>

Hashimoto takes flak for sex slave rationale

OSAKA — The backlash against Osaka Mayor and Nippon Ishin no Kai (Japan Restoration Party) coleader Toru Hashimoto escalated Tuesday over not only his remarks that Japan’s wartime sex slave system was necessary but also over comments to U.S. military brass in Okinawa that American soldiers should use more prostitutes.

The uproar began Monday morning when Hashimoto told reporters in Osaka that Japan’s wartime sex slave system, which forced thousands of girls and women from around Asia into prostitution for the Japanese military, had been necessary in order to maintain military discipline.

The women “were necessary in order to provide relaxation for those brave soldiers who had been in the line of fire,” Hashimoto said Monday morning.

Hours later, Hashimoto created another stir by saying that, on a recent trip to Okinawa, he’d met with U.S. military brass there and told them that, on mainland Japan, there were legal facilities for releasing sexual energy, and that unless soldiers in Okinawa made more use of similar facilities, it would be difficult to control the sexual energy of the marines.

“I’m not merely making conversation. I want them to use sex shops more,” Hashimoto told the Americans, referring to bordellos.

The remarks about the comfort women prompted criticism from Seoul. In a telephone interview with *The Japan Times*, a spokesman for the South Korean government said Hashimoto displayed a parochial view that showed an ignorance of human rights.

“The wartime violations of women is a grave violation of human rights that is widely shared by the international community. The remarks by Hashimoto reveal a serious lack of perception for women’s human rights,” the official said.

In Washington, the Pentagon called Hashimoto’s remarks in Okinawa ridiculous, and said there were laws against prostitution.

In Tokyo, senior government officials offered various reactions. While Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga offered no comment, Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida said Hashimoto’s comments were personal, but added he hoped there was no negative impact on Japan-South Korea relations.

Administrative reform minister Tomomi Inada, who before joining the Abe Cabinet lent her name to an advertisement in the U.S. media last year that denied government involvement in managing the brothels, appeared to agree with Seoul’s view.

“The comfort women system was a grave abuse of female . . . human rights,” she said.

Defense Minister Itsunori Onodera said the Abe Cabinet will not support Hashimoto’s views. But Shintaro Ishihara, who shares Nippon Ishin’s helm with Hashimoto, defended the remarks.

“Any military is commonly associated with prostitution. It’s a principle of history and by no means preferable. But Hashimoto is not saying anything wrong, basically,” he told reporters.

Hashimoto was unavailable for comment Tuesday. Through his Twitter account, though, he attempted to shift blame for his thinking by repeating earlier statements that a Cabinet ruling in 2007, during Shinzo Abe’s first stint as prime minister, had declared there was no proof that the central government kidnapped females and forced them to serve in military brothels.

“If proof does appear, we have to apologize. At the moment, it is the opinion of the government that there is none. However, a recent Cabinet decision seemed to indicate new proof would soon appear and I think it’s good that related organizations are making efforts to gather it,” he said.

As to his remarks to U.S. military brass in Okinawa during a visit over Golden Week, Hashimoto said Tuesday military brothels and government-sanctioned sex services for soldiers were nothing new. He noted that immediately following World War II, Japan established the Recreation and Amusement Association, a series of brothels for Allied troops in Tokyo.

“In my comments to U.S. military officials at Futenma, where I suggested the use of (bordellos), I did not mean to promote something illegal. The U.S. military forbids entrance into (bordellos) that are authorized by law, but even if you forbid entrance, that doesn’t mean that soldiers’ sexual desire will fall to zero, and I don’t know if such shops will help control sexual incidents,” Hashimoto said.

Official figures on the number of sexual assaults in Okinawa by U.S. military personnel are hard to come by. The prefectural government’s most recent data, from 2011, show there were no arrests for brothel-related offenses that year. Human rights groups and Okinawa officials concur that most incidents are either not reported or not prosecuted.

Hashimoto’s remarks about the comfort women and Okinawa bordellos are likely to make it even harder for Nippon Ishin to attract female candidates. Only about 10 percent of Nippon Ishin politicians are female, an area of concern that party advisers have long noted needs to change.

Eric Johnston, *Japan Times* Staff Writer, May 15, 2013

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/05/15/national/bigtime-backfire-hashimoto-justifies-sex-slave>

Okinawa women's groups condemn Hashimoto justification of sex slaves

Women's groups and other parties in Okinawa Prefecture on Wednesday protested Osaka Mayor Toru Hashimoto's contentious remarks about the wartime sex slaves, with some calling for his immediate resignation.

The outspoken mayor's remarks came during a visit to Okinawa on Monday, where he also told reporters U.S. military personnel stationed there should make more active use of the local sex industry so they can ease their sexual frustration in a legal manner.

The Okinawa arm of the National Federation of Regional Women's Organizations and other women's groups in and out of the prefecture jointly issued a statement condemning Hashimoto's remarks as "an affront to dignity of all human beings regardless of sex" and a "justification of blatant discrimination."

"People have justified rape as being caused by (men's) inability to control their sexual urge, which we know is a lie," the statement said, adding it is also a lie that "women who work in the sex industry have accepted their role as an outlet for sexual frustration."

Similarly exasperated, Hiromi Hirayasu, secretary general of the women's division in the Okinawa chapter of the National Confederation of Trade Unions (Zenroren), questioned Hashimoto's suitability as coleader of Nippon Ishin no Kai (Japan Restoration Party) and called for his immediate resignation.

"I believe his remark aroused hostility not only in women in Okinawa, but those all over the world," she told *The Japan Times*.

Pointing out Japan has been traditionally behind global standards in gender equality, Hirayasu voiced concern that Hashimoto's statements might be taken by the international community as emblematic of the nation.

"What he said is absolutely unforgivable. We should all stand up to declaim against it," she said.

Yonekichi Shinzato, head of the Social Democratic Party's chapter in Okinawa, released a statement saying Hashimoto's comments indicate "his lack of historical understanding and respect for the issue of human rights," and demanded he retract them.

"All women have human rights and their dignity should be respected as human beings," Shinzato said of Hashimoto's remarks about present-day sex workers.

As for the wartime "comfort women," Shinzato said Hashimoto's comments "showed no consideration and apologies at all for the Asian women who were deprived of their human rights and dignity."

Tomohiro Osaki, *Japan Times* Staff Writer, May 16, 2013

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/05/16/national/okinawa-womens-groups-condemn-hashimoto>

S. Korea envoy raps Osaka mayor's remarks justifying wartime slavery

TOKYO (Kyodo) — South Korean Ambassador to Japan Shin Kak Soo criticized on Wednesday the Osaka mayor's remarks about sexual servitude being necessary for Japanese soldiers during World War II, saying he is disappointed with a lack of respect for women's rights among Japanese politicians.

Speaking at the Japan National Press Club in Tokyo, the departing ambassador also lamented the attempts among some Japanese politicians to revise the country's apologies for its colonial rule and aggression before and during World War II.

Osaka Mayor Toru Hashimoto, who co-heads a conservative opposition party, said this week that sexual servitude by women was "necessary" for Japan's soldiers during World War II to maintain discipline in the military.

"Following Mayor Hashimoto's remarks, I felt disappointed with the understanding of history and the lack of respect for women's rights among politicians who are supposed to be Japan's leaders," Shin said at the news conference.

The ambassador added he hopes the remarks would provide politicians with an understanding of history "far removed from that of the general public" with an opportunity to think about the pain suffered by the so-called comfort women as well as women's rights.

On the 1995 statement issued by then Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama that apologized for Japan's wartime aggression in Asia, Shin said Seoul strongly opposes attempts to revise the so-called Murayama Statement, noting that South Korea and other neighboring countries have based their relations with Japan on the statement over the years.

"It is extremely unfortunate that comments have been made on the Murayama statement and moves have emerged to modify it in the second decade of the 21st century," the envoy said, warning that such developments would bring instability into the future course of bilateral ties.

In April, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said his Cabinet would not necessarily adopt the statement in its entirety. Amid criticism from at home and abroad, the Japanese leader soon backpedaled on his remarks by saying his Cabinet "takes the position of carrying it on."

On Wednesday, Abe told a parliamentary session that his Cabinet has "never denied Japan's invasion or colonial occupation."

Kyodo News, May 16, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130516p2g00m0dm004000c.html>

Hashimoto clarifies remarks on 'comfort women' after flak

OSAKA (Kyodo) — Osaka Mayor Toru Hashimoto on Wednesday sought to clarify his remarks on a system to recruit women into sexual servitude for Japan's soldiers during World War II, saying he personally does not condone the scheme.

Two days after he made controversial remarks that the so-called comfort women were "necessary to maintain discipline" in the Japanese military, Hashimoto told reporters he simply stated a fact that people at the time had that kind of view.

The comfort women system is a practice that "should not exist," said Hashimoto, who co-heads the opposition Japan Restoration Party.

The outspoken politician's remarks triggered protests from Japanese Cabinet ministers as well as Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who said during a parliamentary committee session Wednesday that Hashimoto's views are "completely different" from his.

Hashimoto criticized Abe, saying remarks stating that the comfort women issue has been resolved legally are more hurtful for the former comfort women.

"I don't intend to justify (the comfort women system) but various countries at the time had similar schemes," the mayor said. "It's also a fact that countries in Europe and the United States used local women under the name of 'free love'."

He said that what he takes issue at is how only Japan is "unduly insulted" and singled out for the practice of sexual servitude.

"I wanted to raise the issue on why Japan alone is being criticized," he said.

Hashimoto, who is scheduled to visit the United States in June, said he is willing to discuss his remarks about comfort women if asked.

Since he made the remarks Monday, the Osaka city government has been flooded with criticism from residents and others, including the Chinese consulate general in the western Japan city protesting that it felt "shock and anger," city officials said.

According to the officials, a consulate staffer phoned the city office on Monday and conveyed a message from Liu Yiren, the consul general, urging Hashimoto to have a correct recognition of history as a mayor and politician.

In Okinawa Prefecture, 25 women's groups in the southwestern Japanese prefecture announced a statement, addressed to the offices of the Osaka city government and the Japan Restoration Party, demanding that Hashimoto retract his remarks and apologize.

Hashimoto also continued to express his view about his recent proposal for U.S. forces in Okinawa Prefecture to use Japan's legal adult entertainment industry to meet their sexual desires and curb the U.S. soldiers' crimes, saying they should "be serious in controlling their sexual desires."

Kyodo News, May 16, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130516p2g00m0dm005000c.html>

Ex-S. Korean sex slaves seek to meet Hashimoto, demand apology

SEOUL (Kyodo) — Elderly South Korean women forced into sex slavery during World War II plan to visit Japan this week to hold street rallies and seek an apology from Osaka Mayor Toru Hashimoto for his statement that sexual servitude to Japanese soldiers during World War II was necessary, a civic group said Wednesday.

Kil Won Ok and Kim Bok Dong, both in their 80s, plan to hold street rallies in Osaka and Hiroshima from Saturday and seek a meeting with Hashimoto around May 27, according to the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan.

In response to their request for a meeting with the mayor, the Osaka city government said it is “checking the mayor’s schedule,” according to the council.

The council said the former “comfort women” will “demand an apology (from Hashimoto) and show him evidence those women were forced (into sexual servitude).”

Meanwhile, Kil said in a rally held in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul earlier Wednesday that she “didn’t want to become a “comfort woman,” but she was forcibly taken to the ‘comfort woman place’ because her country had no power.”

“I am very angry about so many absurd remarks and I want to tell the truth to the Japanese people,” she said.

Kyodo News, May 16, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130516p2g00m0dm006000c.html>

Hashimoto fails to retract controversial remarks regarding sex industry

Osaka Mayor Toru Hashimoto, who co-heads the Japan Restoration Party, commented that his suggestion earlier this month that the U.S. military in Okinawa should have made better use of the local “adult entertainment” industry was “not appropriate insofar as it was directed toward another country with different values.” He added that he “did not have an international outlook” when making the remarks.

While therefore admitting the inappropriateness of the remarks, however, he made no move to retract them. In addition, he indicated that his related statements regarding the matter of the so-called wartime “comfort women” were unproblematic.

Hashimoto made the follow-up comments on May 16 to a group of reporters assembled at Osaka City Hall. He has earlier clarified that he made the original suggestion to the U.S. Marines commander regarding usage of the adult entertainment industry in order to help prevent incidences of sexual crimes.

“Clearly, the mention of such services in the United States immediately calls to mind the act of prostitution,” he noted. “I guess my understanding of U.S. culture and values was rather naive.”

In addition, Hashimoto defended his previous comments regarding the “necessity” of Japan’s wartime comfort women system during an appearance on a morning Fuji TV program on May 16.

“Why is Japan the only country being criticized in this regard?” he asked. “Even if it stirs up controversy, I believe this issue must begin to be discussed as a standard procedure across the globe.”

Mainichi Shimbun, May 16, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130516p2a00m0na015000c.html>

Hashimoto’s remarks on sex slaves ‘outrageous’: U.S. State Dep’t

WASHINGTON/TOKYO (Kyodo) — A State Department spokeswoman on Thursday branded remarks by a Japanese mayor defending Japan’s wartime system of sexual servitude as “outrageous and offensive,” in the first outright criticism of the comments by a U.S. government official.

Commenting on Osaka Mayor Toru Hashimoto’s contention that the system was considered necessary before and during World War II, Jen Psaki told a press briefing, “We have seen of course those comments. Mayor Hashimoto’s comments were outrageous and offensive.”

“As the United States has stated previously, what happened in that era to these women who were trafficked for sexual purposes is deplorable and clearly a grave human rights violation of enormous proportions,” Psaki said.

“We hope that Japan will continue to work with its neighbors to address this and other issues arising from the past and cultivate relations that will allow them to move forward.”

Hashimoto, meanwhile, hit back on Twitter, saying, “Didn’t the United States (also) use Japanese women during their occupation of Japan?” But he also said he approves of Japan’s expression of remorse and apology to neighboring countries for its aggression and colonization during World War II.

He said that Japan is singled out for criticism as “a special race” for using sexual slavery during the war but that other countries also dealt with “the problem of sex on the battlefield” by the system of “comfort stations.”

“It is impermissible to justify Japan’s use of comfort women even if other countries in the world were doing so. But it is unfair that only Japan is particularly condemned,” he said, urging the United States and other countries to also show remorse for their wartime behavior.

Kyodo News, May 17, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130517p2g00m0dm004000c.html>

11 women in Diet decry Hashimoto

A bipartisan group of female lawmakers Thursday called for Osaka Mayor and Nippon Ishin no Kai (Japan Restoration Party) coleader Toru Hashimoto to retract and apologize for his abrasive comments justifying the sexual enslavement of females during the war and suggesting that U.S. servicemen in Okinawa make use of legal brothels.

“Hashimoto’s comments harmed the dignity of both men and women,” said Keiko Itokazu, an independent representing Okinawa in the Upper House.

Itokazu said Hashimoto insulted the people of Okinawa, where women from Taiwan, Korea and Okinawa itself were forced to provide sex for Imperial soldiers at more than 140 wartime “comfort stations.”h Japan euphemistically refers to them as the “*gianfu*,” or “comfort women.”

Eleven women in the opposition, including the Democratic Party of Japan, People’s Life Party, Green Wind and the Japanese Communist Party, attended the press conference, but no one from the ruling Liberal Democratic Party or junior coalition partner New Komeito attended, even though the group had called on all female lawmakers in the Diet to unite.

Also notable by their absence were opposition party Nippon Ishin’s six female Diet members.

Hashimoto has refused to back down from criticism of his comments at home and abroad.

Social Democratic Party leader Mizuho Fukushima said Hashimoto was unfit to hold office. “I question his qualifications to be mayor, let alone a coleader of a public political party,” she said.

The bipartisan group also raised questions about Nippon Ishin members claiming Hashimoto’s remarks were his personal views, not the party’s, and demanded it take an official stance on the issue.

Nippon Ishin coleader Shintaro Ishihara has backed Hashimoto’s stance, saying prostitution exists where the military is.

The bipartisan group also blamed Prime Minister Shinzo Abe for not commenting on Hashimoto’s disparaging discourse, which was prompted by questions about what he thought about Abe’s view of Japan’s aggression during the war.

On Wednesday, when Abe was asked at the Upper House Budget Committee what he thought about Hashimoto’s views, he only said Hashimoto’s stance differed from that of his own Cabinet, but that he was not in a position to comment.

“The global community might misunderstand that Japan as a whole has a very despicable view of human rights, because Abe did not make any comments,” said People’s Life Party leader Yuko Mori. “Abe should have clarified how Hashimoto’s views were different from his.”

Ayako Mie, *Japan Times* Staff Writer, May 17, 2013

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/05/17/national/11-women-in-diet-decry-hashimoto/#.UZrOMNiz640>

Hashimoto stays in the hot seat

OSAKA — International condemnation of Osaka Mayor Toru Hashimoto's comment that the wartime sex slavery system was necessary continued Thursday, with the United States calling the mayor and Nippon Ishin no Kai (Japan Restoration Party) coleader's remarks outrageous and offensive.

Meanwhile, the city of Osaka announced Hashimoto would meet with two Korean former "comfort women" next week in a bid to defuse the situation.

Next month, Hashimoto plans to travel to San Francisco, where he is scheduled to meet with Edwin Lee, the city's first Asian-American mayor and the former director of its human rights commission. After that, Hashimoto plans to visit New York to meet with Mayor Michael Bloomberg.

But a U.S. official in Japan hinted Hashimoto could find himself an unwanted guest.

"As the U.S. has previously stated, what happened in that era to these women who were trafficked for sexual purposes is deplorable, and a grave human rights violation of enormous proportions," the official said. "We understand Hashimoto is planning to travel to the U.S. We are not sure that anybody will want to meet him."

Hashimoto will have a public meeting with the two former sex slaves on May 24 at City Hall.

The event was hastily arranged under tremendous pressure by members of Hashimoto's own party and others in City Hall out of fear the controversy is damaging Osaka's domestic and international reputation.

At the national political level, the fallout is affecting Nippon Ishin's relations with key ally Your Party, which has been scrambling to reassure voters that its views on history, at least, are different from Hashimoto's.

Your Party was planning to cooperate with Nippon Ishin in the upcoming Upper House election.

On Wednesday evening, however, Your Party leader Yoshimi Watanabe told reporters his party might end its election cooperation agreement.

"If Hashimoto's historical views are the same views as his party, we'll review our relationship," Watanabe said.

New Komeito, which cooperates with Hashimoto's local group, Osaka Ishin no Kai (One Osaka), in the municipal assembly, where they form the ruling coalition, is also furious.

New Komeito leader Natsuo Yamaguchi, in his email magazine Wednesday, called Nippon Ishin, with its coleaders Hashimoto and Shintaro Ishihara, who believe the sex slave system was necessary, a "reckless political party."

"The good sense of the voters will flatly reject a party with these kinds of leaders," he said.

As criticism continues, Hashimoto went on television Thursday to say it was inappropriate that he suggested the U.S. military in Okinawa should make more use of the legal sex industry as a way to curb servicemen's sexual impulses.

"My way of expressing myself was poor. I talked about legal establishments, which didn't mean I was promoting prostitution," he said. "My understanding of America's sex industry culture was insufficient. In America, if you say 'sex industry,' people immediately think of prostitution. . . . What I wanted to say was that I wanted to control sex crimes in Okinawa with a real argument," he said, adding that he lacked "international awareness."

But he stuck to his basic stance that the comfort women system had been necessary during the war and said international debate on the issue is important.

"If you get angry at the opposite reactions and don't proclaim your views, then you can't connect with people around the world," Hashimoto said.

He told reporters Thursday evening he agrees with the Nippon Ishin Diet group that his comments regarding sex establishments in Okinawa were inappropriate. However, he also urged the U.S. to think about not just the human rights of the comfort women, but also the rights of people living near U.S. bases in the prefecture.

He also admitted his remarks would likely negatively affect his U.S. trip in June and some Americans may choose not to meet him. But he added that if U.S. human rights groups ask to meet him and discuss his comments, he would.

Eric Johnston, *Japan Times* Staff Writer, May 17, 2013

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/05/17/national/hashimoto-stays-in-the-hot-seat/#.UZrP2Niz640>

Hashimoto's remarks draw flak from rights activists at U.N. meeting

GENEVA (Kyodo) — Japanese rights activists on Friday criticized Japan Restoration Party co-leader Toru Hashimoto's recent remarks supporting wartime sexual services for soldiers, urging a United Nations rights panel to take up the issue when it opens a review on Japan next week.

Activists including those from the Women's Active Museum on War and Peace and Amnesty International expressed their views at a meeting with experts from the Committee against Torture mandated under a U.N. human rights convention.

At the meeting, an activist cited Hashimoto's suggestion that U.S. servicemen stationed in Japan should use the country's legal adult entertainment services. A request was made that the Japanese government take steps to ensure that similar remarks would not be repeated.

The committee is scheduled to meet Tuesday and Wednesday next week to evaluate Japan's compliance with provisions of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

The so-called comfort women issue was included in the committee's previous recommendation to Japan that said the country had not provided sufficient relief measures to victims of sexual slavery and violence.

Given Hashimoto's charged remarks, Japanese government officials could be asked to offer their views in the upcoming review — a second for Japan following one in 2007 by the panel established in 1988.

Kyodo News, May 18, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130518p2g00m0dm009000c.html>

More controversy for Japan Restoration Party over sex comments

TOKYO (AP) — An emerging Japanese nationalist political party whose co-leader outraged many with remarks about Japan's wartime and modern sexual services became embroiled in more controversy Friday when a party lawmaker accused ethnic Koreans of involvement in prostitution.

The Japan Restoration Party urged the lawmaker, Shingo Nishimura, to retract his comments suggesting many ethnic Koreans are engaged in prostitution in Japan. Nishimura withdrew his remarks, but the party forced him out anyway.

Osaka Mayor Toru Hashimoto, a founder and co-leader of the party, angered Japan's neighbors by saying this week that the Japanese military's wartime practice of forcing Asian women into prostitution was necessary to maintain discipline and provide relaxation for soldiers. He also angered the U.S. by suggesting that American troops based in southern Japan should patronize legal adult entertainment establishments to reduce sex crime there.

The uproar over Hashimoto's comments, and Nishimura's predicament, typify the difficulties Japanese politicians can create for themselves when commenting on sensitive topics without considering how those outside their own circles might react.

Nishimura made the comments during a Restoration Party meeting Friday that was discussing the remarks made by Hashimoto, who continues to insist that other countries also commonly impressed women into military brothels during World War II and that Japan is being unfairly singled out.

Defending Hashimoto, Nishimura objected to media reports describing the women impressed into wartime military brothels as "sex slaves." Video footage of the meeting was broadcast by the TBS TV network.

"'Comfort women' is erroneously translated as 'sex slaves,' which might encourage anti-Japanese riots and conspiracies," Nishimura said. "We better fight back by telling them that the words 'comfort women' and 'sex slaves' are completely different and that there are numerous South Korean prostitutes roaming around Japan."

Nishimura said jokingly that he might return to his hometown of Osaka, go to crowded entertainment districts and tell them, "Hey, you South Korean comfort women!"

"So, let's fight," he said, suggesting the party stand by Hashimoto.

Even fellow lawmakers who usually support nationalist views appeared stunned.

“Please take back what you just said. Take back your comment. You should retract the word ‘South Koreans,’” said party member Kenta Matsunami.

Nishimura returned to the microphone and agreed to retract that part. He later said his remarks were inappropriate, but only because he had never conducted a survey to gather data to back up his comment, and because he singled out a particular country by name.

Urged by other party members who demanded a tougher penalty than just a retraction, Nishimura submitted his resignation from the party, but party secretary-general Ichiro Matsui refused to accept it immediately and said the party wanted to expel him instead.

“I’m completely baffled by the comment. I don’t think he should stay with our group anymore,” Matsui said.

The Restoration Party has so far not condemned Hashimoto. Government officials have avoided making comments on his remarks on the grounds that he is the leader of an opposition party.

Hashimoto attributed the backlash against his comments to a lack of sensitivity on his part. The U.S. State Department called his remarks “outrageous and offensive.”

On Friday, Hashimoto lashed back at his critics through Twitter, insisting that organized sex services were needed to prevent sex crimes by American troops during the 1945-1952 U.S. occupation following Japan’s defeat in World War II.

Nishimura has raised various hooplas in the past.

In 2005, the Democratic Party of Japan, an opposition party, expelled Nishimura for allegedly letting an unqualified employee do legal work on his behalf while taking a cut of the fees.

In October 1999, Nishimura was forced to resign as parliamentary vice-minister of defense for suggesting Japan should be armed with nuclear weapons, after serving in the post for only 16 days.

Associated Press, May 18, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130518p2a00m0na001000c.html>

Women’s group translates Hashimoto’s remarks, posts online

Translations of Osaka Mayor Toru Hashimoto’s remarks on Japan’s wartime sex slaves posted on Facebook by a women’s group have provoked heated reactions from all over the world.

All Japan Obachan Party, a group set up by Osaka-based middle-aged women in November, translated Hashimoto’s recent remarks into seven languages – English, Chinese, Korean, French, Spanish, Russian and Dutch – and posted them on the online social-networking service.

Hashimoto, the coleader of Nippon Ishin no Kai (Japan Restoration Party), said the wartime sex slave system was necessary and noted U.S. Marines should use sex establishments in Japan.

“Dear friends all over the world, what do you think?” the group asks on its Facebook page. “How barbaric! And he’s a mayor?!” read one comment. “He should be removed from his office,” said another in English. “At first, we thought it would be embarrassing if we posted the messages to the world,” said Mayumi Taniguchi, an associate professor at Osaka International University and a representative of the group. “But we wanted to know how his words would be considered based on global standards.”

Taniguchi said the group doesn’t plan to file any sort of protest with Hashimoto.

Many of the comments praised the group for translating the remarks, some even asking the group to include more languages, such as Arabic.

Kyodo News, *Japan Times* Staff Report, May 18, 2013

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/05/18/national/women-translate-remarks-for-world/#.UZsnKdiz640>

The main question: Why did Hashimoto open his mouth?

OSAKA — Since Monday, when news broke that Osaka Mayor and Nippon Ishin no Kai (Japan Restoration Party) coleader Toru Hashimoto said Japan’s wartime “comfort women” system, which forced thousands of young females around Asia into sexual slavery, had been necessary at the time and that U.S. soldiers in Okinawa should use more prostitutes, the one unanswered question has been: Why did he say this?

Despite defending his remarks in hours of media briefings and more than 160 tweets to his more than 1 million followers nationwide, there is no consensus in or out of Osaka on what the motivation behind his remarks might have been.

Public and media speculation has abounded, though. First there is the thought, voiced by his most ardent supporters, that Hashimoto sincerely believed these issues needed to be aired now and that many Japanese in power quietly agree with him.

They say he’s been made a scapegoat for saying out loud what Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s administration and many of his supporters privately think.

Then there’s the theory the remarks were a form of misplaced anger over the lack of Diet action on Nippon Ishin’s key goals.

Decentralization, local government reform, and progress toward ending the current prefectural system in favor of regional blocks, one of the primary reasons Hashimoto created a national political party, have made virtually no progress.

Or, there is a theory floating around Osaka that Hashimoto made the remarks out of a realization his party is extremely unpopular, wracked by internal dissent and increasingly unlikely to achieve its original goals, especially integration of the city and prefecture of Osaka, which Hashimoto has pursued since 2008 when he became Osaka governor, and thus he had nothing to lose.

Perhaps, they conclude, he is tired of being a politician, wants to end his political career to return to

the more financially lucrative world of television punditry, and figured the quickest way to do that was to make himself unpopular.

“Whether or not he intended to, the result of his remarks was that he self-destructed,” said Yuji Yoshitomi, an Osaka journalist and author of a book on Hashimoto.

Hashimoto visited Okinawa earlier this month and met with U.S. officials.

His suggestion to use more prostitutes reflects what supporters say is a direct solution to a problem he saw, while critics point to a history of inflammatory and discriminating statements. And then there was the timing of the comments, which came on the same day.

“The two issues became linked and people in and out of Japan wondered if Hashimoto wasn’t advocating a comfort women system for U.S. servicemen in Okinawa,” said one Osaka-based reporter for a major media outlet, speaking anonymously.

Hashimoto has vehemently denied he was advocating a modern-day comfort women system. But his anger at what he perceives to be American hypocrisy on human rights is clear.

In rhetoric that sounded oddly similar to some anti-U.S. base protestors, Hashimoto berated the U.S. for its Okinawa policy on his Twitter account Friday, implying his solution of sex establishments for U.S. soldiers would help solve a human rights problem.

“Due to the behavior of a small number of U.S. soldiers, the human rights of Okinawans are being trampled upon. I recognize America respects human rights. But human rights are universal, and the American people need to pay direct attention to the human rights of the Okinawans,” he said.

Eric Johnston, *Japan Times* Staff Writer, May 18, 2013

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/05/18/national/the-main-question-why-did-hashimoto-open-his-mouth/#.UZsoZtiz640>

Hashimoto now blames public for misreading him, snubs press

OSAKA — Nippon Ishin no Kai (Japan Restoration Party) coleader Toru Hashimoto, the Osaka mayor in hot water for apparently trying to justify Japan’s wartime sex slaves, said Friday that the public’s “lack of reading comprehension” has caused the current situation in which his remarks have been “misunderstood.”

The embattled outspoken politician also said he will shut out the media from any reporting opportunities except for his official news conferences.

Facing reporters at City Hall in the evening, Hashimoto blamed the media for perpetrating “big misreporting,” without delving into specifics. He stressed that he has never endorsed Japan’s wartime military brothel system but said his remarks have been taken to suggest otherwise.

“I hope people will have the ability to read and understand (my remarks),” he said.

Hashimoto tried to counter U.S. criticism against his sex-slave remarks by saying U.S. servicemen

used Japanese women as an easy outlet for their sexual desires while Japan was occupied after its defeat in the war.

"I think the U.S. should look at what it did," he said.

Touching on the infringement of women's human rights, Hashimoto pointed out that Britain, France, Germany and South Korea are in no position to blame others. He didn't elaborate.

Kyodo News, May 18, 2013

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/05/18/national/hashimoto-now-blames-public-for-misreading-him-snubs-press/#.UZsp19iz640>

Hashimoto denies 'comfort women' were sex slaves

TOKYO (Kyodo) — Japan Restoration Party co-leader Toru Hashimoto, facing a barrage of criticism over his recent remarks about wartime sexual servitude, said Sunday he does not believe that so-called comfort women were "sex slaves who were forced into service through violence, threat and abduction."

Hashimoto, who doubles as Osaka mayor, reiterated in a TV program that Japan "has a responsibility" toward the women, but said it is "unfair" to single out Japan.

"Whether they were sex slaves or not will affect how the world assesses (Japan). The militaries of other countries similarly used women during World War II. It is unfair to criticize only Japan."

Hashimoto said he will clarify his views at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan in Tokyo on May 27.

Despite the anger and criticism at home and abroad stirred by his remarks, Japan Restoration Party executives, including Hashimoto, co-leader Shintaro Ishihara and Secretary General Ichiro Matsui, agreed Sunday during a meeting in Nagoya that Hashimoto does not need to retract his comments.

"Mr. Hashimoto is making his points clear every day with sincerity. It's a responsibility for a politician to perform his or her duties with clear explanations," Matsui, who doubles as Osaka governor, told reporters after the meeting.

But in a political blow, Yoshimi Watanabe, leader of the small opposition Your Party, said it would withdraw its cooperation for the House of Councillors election this summer and field candidates in districts that the Japan Restoration Party is also aiming to win.

"There's no choice but to dissolve (the partnership)," Watanabe told reporters in Tokyo. The Japan Restoration Party "is not a party to work with ... I don't understand why he continues to make such remarks only to hurt public trust. It's just outrageous."

"I would never listen to their explanations. Even if I hear their excuses a million times, it won't help us get back together. We are cutting off ties," Watanabe said.

The two parties had considered jointly fielding candidates in some constituencies.

Kyodo News, May 19, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130519p2g00m0dm066000c.html>

Japan not to review stance on 'comfort women': gov't spokesman

TOKYO (Kyodo) — Japan will not review its stance on the “comfort women” issue, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said Tuesday, rejecting for now a move suggested by Shinzo Abe before he became prime minister.

Suga’s remarks came amid criticism not only in Asia but also the United States of Tokyo’s stance on Japan’s wartime conduct, with former U.S. Ambassador to Japan Thomas Schieffer saying last week that reviewing Japan’s 1993 statement on the issue of sexual slavery would damage Japanese interests in the United States.

The statement, issued by then Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono, acknowledged the Japanese military’s responsibility for forced recruitment of women into sexual servitude and apologized to the victims.

Saying the Abe government does not wish to turn the controversy over the matter into a political or diplomatic issue, Suga told a news conference that Tokyo “has not said it would consider a review.”

At a separate news conference, Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida said Abe shares the views expressed in a 1995 statement issued by then Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama that apologized for Japan’s wartime aggression in Asia.

“At a certain period during the previous great war, Japan caused tremendous damage and suffering to the people of many countries, particularly to those of Asian nations,” Kishida said.

“The Japanese government has accepted the facts of history in a spirit of humility, expressed once again our feelings of deep remorse and our heartfelt apology, and expressed our feelings of profound mourning for all victims, both at home and abroad, of the previous great war. And Prime Minister Abe shares the same view,” he added.

Kishida said the Abe government intends to double its efforts to carefully explain its stance on history to the international community.

China and South Korea have sharply reacted to Abe’s recent remarks on Japan’s wartime aggression. Abe suggested last month that the definition of the word “invasion” varies from country to country, and that his Cabinet has not necessarily inherited the so-called Murayama statement in its entirety.

Kyodo News, May 7, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130507p2g00m0dm078000c.html>

Japan pulls back on denials of WWII sex slavery

TOKYO (AP) — Japan has acknowledged that it conducted only a limited investigation before claiming there was no official evidence that its imperial troops coerced Asian women into sexual slavery before and during World War II.

A parliamentary statement signed Tuesday by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe acknowledged a document produced by a postwar international military tribunal containing a Japanese soldier's testimony about abducting Chinese women as military sex slaves.

That evidence was not included in Japan's only investigation of the issue, in 1991-1993. Tuesday's parliamentary statement said documents showing forcible sex slavery may still exist.

Abe has acknowledged so-called "comfort women" existed but denied they were coerced into prostitution, citing a lack of official evidence. He stated that view as prime minister in 2007, and reiterated it in February after he regained power.

AP, May 7, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130508p2g00m0dm104000c.html>

Abe's comments on history raise concern in U.S.

WASHINGTON (Kyodo) — The U.S. Congressional Research Service has noted that comments and actions by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on historical issues "have raised concern that Tokyo could upset regional relations in ways that hurt U.S. interests."

In its May 1 report, the research arm of Congress said Abe is known as a "strong nationalist" and that his approach to issues relating to wartime sex slaves, history textbooks and visits to a war-linked shrine in Tokyo "will be closely monitored" not just by China and South Korea but also by the United States.

The report said that if Abe revises a 1993 government statement on the issue of the so-called "comfort women," it "would be sure to degrade Tokyo's relations with South Korea and other countries."

The 1993 statement acknowledged the Japanese military's responsibility for forced recruitment of Korean women into sexual servitude and apologized to these women.

Although before becoming prime minister, Abe had suggested revising the statement, his government said this week that it will not revise its stance on the "comfort women" issue.

The report also noted that visits to the Yasukuni Shrine last month by more than 170 Japanese

lawmakers, including four Cabinet ministers, also drew protests from China and South Korea.

The shrine is seen by Japan's neighbors as glorifying Japanese militarism, in part because it enshrines people convicted as Class-A criminals by the Tokyo war crime tribunal, as well as millions of Japan's war dead.

Kyodo News, May 9, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130509p2g00m0dm066000c.html>
