

Abe Shinzo: Japan's New Prime Minister a Far-Right Denier of History 安倍晋三 新しい日本の首相は極右の歴史否定論者

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In December 2012, not a few people in Japan remembered the 75th anniversary of Nanjing Massacre. Those people hoped that the lessons from war crimes committed by the Japanese Army from 1931-1945 would be learned so that Japan would never wage war against another country again, and peace would be achieved in East Asia. These Japanese, however, now face a major challenge.

In Japan's general election of Dec. 16th the Liberal Democratic Party, which had been in opposition since August 2009, won an overwhelming majority putting it back in power. With Abe Shinzo, a right-wing historical revisionist back as prime minister, the change of government is no longer just a Japanese issue.

The LDP is a nexus for history deniers who regard calls for historical reconciliation from neighboring countries as unjustified, deem their historical accounts as inaccurate, and claim that listening to such appeals for Japan to remember the past would be "masochistic." As LDP president, Abe most eloquently embodies this character of the party.

With the signing of the Treaty of Peace in San Francisco (September 1951), Japan was allowed to resume its place in the international community. Japan's neighbors in Asia expected it, in return, to scrap its imperial past and apologize sincerely for perpetrating a string of wartime atrocities. But while the Federal Republic of Germany began its postwar period by breaking from Nazism and apologizing for the

Holocaust, the LDP, which ruled Japan for most of the postwar period, has acted as a hub for history revisionists, and so it remains.

It is impossible to imagine that somebody who denies the Holocaust would be elected as Chancellor of Germany. What the world is witnessing right now in Japan, seventy-five years after the Nanjing Massacre, is the reappointment as prime minister of an extreme rightist who sides with the Nanjing-deniers.

The people of Asia, where millions were killed by Japanese wartime aggression, and where many witnesses and survivors are still alive, have the right to ask this prime minister if he really believes that the Nanjing Massacre was a myth, and if he recognizes that Japan invaded neighboring countries.

The people of both Koreas and Koreans around the world are entitled to challenge Abe on whether he recognizes the Japanese Army's wartime enslavement of thousands of women (so-called "military 'comfort women'"), one of the most ferocious and dishonorable crimes of Imperial Japan. This prime minister has been adamant about removing any description of these crimes from textbooks and classrooms.

Here is a fundamental question. Sixty-one years after the resumption of sovereignty, does Japan, led by such a prime minister, truly deserve to be a legitimate and credible member of the international community? It is the people of

Japan who, first and foremost, are responsible for asking that question, and the people of Asia and beyond are entitled to pursue it, and to demand clear answers.

1. Who is Abe Shinzo?

Abe Shinzo's father was Abe Shintaro, who held various key government positions including Foreign Minister and was at one point a candidate for an LDP presidential election. Abe Shinzo used his father's coattails to get elected to the Diet for the first time in 1993. He is a peculiar existence within the LDP, having climbed the party by consistently advocating extreme right-wing policies. Here are some of his career highlights.

- As soon as Abe was elected in 1993, he became a member of the LDP's "History and Deliberation Committee." This committee held about twenty meetings with right-wing scholars, and as a result, published a book called "Overview of the Greater East Asia War," on August 15th, 1995, the fiftieth anniversary of Japan's defeat in the Asia-Pacific War. The book argues: 1) "The Greater East Asia War" (the Asia-Pacific War) was not an aggressive war, but a war for self-existence and self-defense, and for liberation of Asia from Western powers; 2) Events such as the Nanjing Massacre and the "comfort women," are fabrications. Japan did not

commit war crimes and was not a perpetrator; 3) Since “biased” school textbooks contain false information about Japan’s wartime activities, a “textbook struggle” (an attack on education) is necessary. Abe still holds these positions.

- In December 1994, a right-wing group called “Diet Members’ League for the 50th Anniversary of the End of War” was formed to counter a parliamentary move to pass a resolution in August 1995, critically reflecting on Japan’s aggressive war. Abe was selected as deputy executive director. This group organized the “Steering Committee of Japanese People’s Movement for the 50th Anniversary of the End of War” in conjunction with far-rightist religious groups (mostly Shinto). It led twenty-six prefectural assemblies and ninety municipal assemblies across the nation to pass resolutions opposing the critical resolution and arguing that Japan did not invade its Asian neighbors.
- The same right-wing members of LDP in June 1996 formed a new group to attack history textbooks, called “Bright Japan - League of Diet Members,” and Abe was appointed deputy executive director. In February 1997, he formed a group called “Group of Young Diet Members for

Consideration of Japan’s Future and History Education,” and became its executive director (“Young” was dropped from the group’s name in 2004).

- Abe has always been on the frontline of such groups and has worked hard to scour descriptions of Nanjing and the sex slaves, who he argues were “prostitutes,” from textbooks. He pressured not only education ministry officials responsible for textbook screening, but also presidents of textbook publishers and textbook authors, to remove references to such crimes, claiming that they were “distorted.”
- While Abe was Chief Cabinet Secretary, he complained about the content of an NHK (Japan’s national public broadcaster) program on the sex slaves issue before it was broadcast, demanding that the head of the Broadcasting Bureau make the program “fair and objective,” or resign. As a result, significant changes were made to the program before it was screened on January 30, 2001. One of the changes was deletion of the part where the Women’s International War Crimes Tribunal, held in Tokyo in December 2000, deemed the rapes and the military sex slavery system by the Japanese military as “crimes against humanity,” and held Japan and Emperor

Hirohito responsible for them.

2. Attack on the Kono Statement

On August 4, 1993, during the Miyazawa administration, then Chief Cabinet Secretary Kono Yohei released a statement on the result of a study into the “comfort women” issue. Commonly called the Kono Statement, it said the following:

As a result of the study which indicates that comfort stations were operated in extensive areas for long periods, it is apparent that there existed a great number of comfort women. Comfort stations were operated in response to the request of the military authorities of the day. The then Japanese military was, directly or indirectly, involved in the establishment and management of the comfort stations and the transfer of comfort women. The recruitment of the comfort women was conducted mainly by private recruiters who acted in response to the request of the military. 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. They lived in misery at comfort stations under a coercive atmosphere.

The fiercest criticism against the Kono Statement came from within LDP, namely Abe.

- He and his “Group of Young Diet Members for Consideration of Japan’s Future and History Education,” called Kono to a meeting and argued that Kono had recognized the “coerciveness” of the act without convincing evidence, as the Korean side demanded so, but Kono stuck to his guns. At the House of Representatives Budget Committee on May 27, 1997, Abe further said there was no need to specifically reference the issue in textbooks unless the women were coerced, and no document had been discovered to verify this.
- On June 14, 2004, Abe, then Secretary General of LDP, told a symposium organized by the “Group of Diet Members for Consideration of Japan’s Future and History Education,” that “there was no such historical fact as the military comfort women,” totally ignoring the Kono Statement. Abe went on to say that he would actively work with MEXT (Ministry

of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology) to “improve textbooks,” meaning the removal of all descriptions of “military ‘comfort women.’”

3. Double-tongued Prime Minister

Abe was first elected Prime Minister on September 26, 2006. As a state head, there was only so much history revisionism that he could get away with. History denial might be tolerated within the LDP or even within Japan, but it was evident that it would invite international animosity and backlash. One area where his position caused much international embarrassment was the military sex slavery issue.

- At the House of Representatives’ plenary session on October 4, 2006, Abe said: “The government’s basic position is that it follows the Kono Statement.” Perhaps due to the subsequent criticism from the right-wing forces that supported Abe, on March 5, 2007, he again stated that the government would “continue to follow the Kono Statement,” but added that “there was no evidence that verifies coercion, narrowly-defined coercion such as authorities breaking into houses to take away women like kidnappers would,” suggesting that the “coercion” part of Kono Statement needed to be modified.
- On January 31, 2007, when a Democrat Congressman Mike Honda introduced a resolution calling for the Japanese government to “formally acknowledge, apologize, and accept historical responsibility in a clear and unequivocal manner for its Imperial Armed Forces’ coercion of young women into sexual slavery,” Prime Minister Abe fought back. He said he had “no plan to apologize” even if the resolution was adopted, and argued that there was “no evidence that supports ‘narrowly-defined coercion,’ or the allegation that Japanese soldiers kidnapped women and coerced them.” This was despite the fact that the Kono Statement had expressed “sincere apologies and remorse to all those, irrespective of place of origin, who suffered immeasurable pain and incurable physical and psychological wounds as comfort women.” Abe’s statement, which suggested the women had voluntarily provided sex to Japanese soldiers, was criticized by U.S. newspapers including *The New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *The Boston Globe*.
- Abe could no longer ignore such criticisms, particularly those coming from the US and other Western countries. The *BBC* reported on April 27, 2007 that Abe, in

a meeting with President Bush at Camp David, said, "I feel deeply sorry that they [the victimized women] were forced to be placed in such extremely painful situations." *Newsweek* interviewed Abe prior to his departure to the US, and reported on April 27, 2007 that Abe said "We feel responsible for having forced these women to go through that hardship and pain as comfort women under the circumstances at the time." He apparently admitted "coercion" in these reports, revealing his double-tongued strategy.

4. Abe bares his teeth again

Right after his policy speech on September 12, 2007, Abe suddenly abandoned his job on the day he was supposed to answer questions by all the parties' representatives. He was criticized from all sides for his irresponsibility. However, somehow helped by the forgetful nature of the people of Japan, he was re-elected as president of LDP on September 26, 2012. Around the same time he started to intensify his far-rightist rhetoric as if trying to recover his reputation and career, which had disappointed right-wing supporters during his previous term.

- On February 20, 2012, Kawamura Takashi, Mayor of Nagoya City stirred controversy when he expressed his doubts over the occurrence of the "so-called Nanjing

Incident" in a meeting with leaders of the Nanjing City Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. In response, right-wing forces in Japan held an urgent meeting titled "Supporting the 'Kawamura Statement' - Condemning the myth of 'Nanjing Massacre,'" to which Abe sent a message of support. The August 3 and September 24 versions of the *Sankei Shimbun* virtually the official newspaper of Japan's right, ran an advertisement supporting Nagoya Mayor Kawamura's Nanjing Statement. Abe acted as one of the proposers.

- In an interview with the *Sankei* on August 28, 2012, Abe laid out his agenda. If the LDP returned to power, it would be necessary to review the Kono Statement, he said and to issue a new government "understanding" of it. His subjects for review included "The Statement by Chief Cabinet Secretary Miyazawa Kiichi on History Textbooks," known as the "Miyazawa Statement" or the "Neighboring Countries Clause," in which Miyazawa stated that "from the perspective of building friendship and goodwill with neighboring countries," Japan will "pay due attention" to criticisms by the neighboring countries such as China and Korea on some descriptions in

Japanese textbooks, and “make corrections at the Government’s responsibility.” He would also review the “*Murayama Statement*” (“Statement by Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi ‘On the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the War’s End”), issued on August 15, 1995.

The Murayama Statement says, “During a certain period in the not too distant past, Japan, following a mistaken national policy, advanced along the road to war, only to ensnare the Japanese people in a fateful crisis, and, through its colonial rule and aggression, caused tremendous damage and suffering to the people of many countries, particularly to those of Asian nations. In the hope that no such mistake be made in the future, I regard, in a spirit of humility, these irrefutable facts of history, and express here once again my feelings of deep remorse and state my heartfelt apology.” Abe, in his previous term as Prime Minister, had in fact said that this statement was “the government’s understanding.”

- Suga Yoshihide, Chief Cabinet Secretary of the new Abe Cabinet said in a press conference of December 27, 2012 that “there have been many studies by experts, and it is desirable to continue academic examination” about the Kono Statement. It

is possible that Abe will again change his position on the issue of “coercion” in military sex slavery, which he admitted during his previous term by “following” the Kono Statement. Regarding the Murayama Statement, Suga in the above press conference said the government would “follow the position of the past cabinets.” Only three days later, on December 30, Abe, in an exclusive interview with the *Sankei Shimbun* reportedly said, “The Murayama Statement was one issued by the Japan Socialist Party’s Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi. I would like to release a future-oriented statement that is suitable for the twenty-first century.” As discussed above, Abe originally attacked the Murayama Statement when it was issued in 1995. When he became prime minister in 2006, he changed his position to “follow” the statement. Then after he resigned in 2007, he publicly stated his intention to review” it, and within a week of his re-appointment as prime minister, he and his Cabinet sent a mixed message to the world, to “follow” and “revise” it.

- On April 10, 2012, a joint meeting of LDP’s “Education and Science Committee” and the “Group of Diet Members for Consideration of Japan’s future and

History Education” was held, in which MEXT officials discussed the latest screening of high school textbooks. Abe condemned the MEXT officials, saying that some textbooks said the “comfort women” were “mobilized” and “rounded up.” Abe interrogated the officials on how and when such “changes” were made, even though he had denied coercion in the “so-called ‘comfort women’” cases in the Diet when he was prime minister. According to Abe, textbooks with descriptions of the “comfort women” were “far from common sense.” LDP Diet members at the meeting blamed MEXT for leaving such references in high school textbooks even though junior high school textbooks had been cleansed.

Abe’s argument that the MEXT officials “changed” their understanding of “coercion” is groundless. What he was referring to was a written answer that got Cabinet approval on March 16, 2007 in response to a written inquiry by a member of the House of Representatives Tsujimoto Kiyomi, while Abe was prime minister. There he stated that the basic position of the government was that it would “follow” the Kono Statement. The statement recognizes “coercion,” as it states, “their recruitment, transfer, control, etc. were conducted generally against their will,

through coaxing, coercion, etc.”

The written answer in the Diet in 2007 when Abe was in office states, “there was no description that directly suggested coercive mobilization per se by the military or administrative/military personnel, in the documents that the government discovered.” But this does not contradict the Kono Statement, because as Ishihara Nobuo, Vice Cabinet Secretary when the statement was put together in 1993 admitted in 2006:

After all, we could not locate any physical evidence that verified coercion, such as notices and directives, but seeing the result of the hearing of the sixteen people who were actually made into comfort women, we concluded that it was impossible that they were making it up, and it was unmistakable that these people were made into comfort women against their will,” ... “We, as the government, recognized that coercion existed, based on the report by the study group. (From an interview with

Ishihara Nobuo by the Asia Women's Fund Oral History Project, March 7, 2006)

Therefore, it is illogical for Abe to complain in 2012 about expressions making clear that the women were "mobilized" and "rounded up." These expressions were based on hearings with the victims, which the Japanese government recognized as credible in 1993. There were no "changes" in the expressions in the textbooks precisely because all governments since the Kono Statement have declared that they would "follow" it. When he attacked the MEXT officials in 2012, was Abe stupid enough to misunderstand his own actions when he declared adherence to the statement five years before?

- On December 26, 2012, Abe announced his nineteen new Cabinet members. Nine, including Abe, are members of the "Group of Diet Members for Consideration of Japan's Future and History Education," which has consistently worked to remove the description of the military sex slavery and the Nanjing Massacre from textbooks. Thirteen, also including Abe, are members of the "Discussion Group of the *Nippon Kaigi* Diet Members," affiliated with the

"*Nippon Kaigi*(Japan Conference)," the biggest right-wing organization in Japan. These numbers show the far-right character of the new Abe administration.

- One of the Cabinet members, education minister Shimomura Hakubun requires attention. He is secretary general of the "Discussion Group of *NipponKaigi* Diet Members." He is head of a new department within the LDP called "Headquarters of Education Renaissance," which prepared the party's "Pledges for Education Policy" for the December 2012 general election. The pledges advocate: 1) cancellation of "biased education" based on the "masochistic view of history;" 2) abolition of the "Neighboring Countries Clause" in the textbook screening process, as expressed in the Miyazawa Statement; 3) reinforcement of patriotic education. Shimomura argues that recognizing the history of Japan's aggressive war and critically reflecting on it would represent a "masochistic view of history." The world will pay close attention to how Japanese history textbooks may be distorted under Shimomura's leadership.

5. Why the world should be alarmed about Japan

Now that Abe is prime minister again, is he going to try more double-speak, behaving as a far-rightist history revisionist in Japan but saying things like “I feel very sorry” (for what Japan did) and “I feel responsible” in the US? We should never let him get away with such a double standard.

Abe appeared on TV on August 28, 2012 and said that Japan could not form true friendship with Korea if the Kono Statement remained unchanged. Koreans might retort that “true friendship” is impossible with Japan as long as somebody like Abe can be prime minister, or even an influential politician; and as long as an anachronistic clique like the LDP rules the country. This sentiment is shared not just in Korea but most probably in the whole of Asia.

Let us repeat the big question again. Is Japan, now with far-rightists history revisionists like Abe holding power, eligible to be a responsible member of the international community?

Shimomura Hakubun, now Education Minister, said in the interview on October 3, 2012:

The “departure from the postwar regime” slogan that the previous Abe administration put forward means revising all aspects of Japan’s modern history, including the Tokyo War Tribunal view of history, the Kono Statement, and the

Murayama Statement.

The “Tokyo War Tribunal view of history” presupposes that the International Military War Tribunal for the Far East (1946 to 1948), in which Japan was tried and convicted as an aggressor, is unacceptable as it was a victors’ trial.

But Article 11 of the Treaty of Peace with Japan says, “Japan accepts the judgments of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East and of other Allied War Crimes Courts both within and outside Japan.” This means that Japan accepted that it invaded neighboring Asian nations.

If Abe and Shimomura want to “review” the “Tokyo War Tribunal view of history,” the logical requirement would be that the Japanese government would formally disavow the Tribunal’s conclusions and notify all the forty-eight countries that signed the Treaty of Peace with Japan accordingly. It appears that Abe and his far-rightist ilk do not understand how unrealistic and ridiculous such a move would be regarded.

These forces insistently deny the facts of Japan’s aggressive wars, openly defend the indefensible view of the war as “for self-existence and self-defense,” and condemn any admittance of aggression as masochistic. The fact that such forces grasped power again poses a serious threat to Japan’s democracy and its credibility in the

world. It is also a major challenge to the international community, particularly Asia.

We hope the world will counterattack Abe's far-rightist history revisionist challenge, and once he is outside of Japan that there will be protests wherever he goes, and at press conferences; and that journalists will confront Abe at press conferences with the facts laid out above. This is the only effective way to let Abe know what a shameless human being he is, according to all international standards.

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