A Shrine to Japan’s Tainted Past

By Gary J. Bass

PRINCETON, N.J.
Dec. 7 is the date that Americans remember for the infamy of Pearl Harbor, then Aug. 15 is the wrenching code remembered by Japanese: the date on which, in 1945, Japan agreed to surrender in World War II. Under Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, Japan’s image in the world has become a political weapon. Koizumi is a candidate for the leadership of the Liberal Democratic Party, which has been in power since 1955.

Mr. Koizumi visited Seoul and Tokyo in late August and early September, seeking to improve Japan’s image. He has been praised for his efforts to rehab Japan’s image in the world, but his efforts have also been criticized for their ideological content.

If Mr. Koizumi changes his own position on the shrine, he would go against the wishes of the people of Japan. He is known for his strong stance on the issue, and his leadership is seen as vital for the country’s future.

Will Koizumi revisit a war memorial that honors criminals?

While the question of what to do with the shrine is complex, the underlying issue is the importance of history and memory. If Japan is to move forward, it must come to terms with its past.

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