# Policy Forum 11-36: Ousting Kan Naoto: The Politics of Nuclear Crisis and Renewable Energy in Japan


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# Ousting Kan Naoto: The Politics of Nuclear Crisis and Renewable Energy in Japan

By Jeff Kingston

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Nautilus invites your contributions to this forum, including any responses to this report.

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**I. Introduction**

Jeff Kingston, Director of Asian Studies, Temple University (Japan Campus), examines why, in the midst of an unprecedented cascade of natural and nuclear disasters in Japan, the problem of Kan Naoto's ouster trumped all others in the national media and politics. Kingston claims that, following the meltdowns at the Fukushima-Daiichi nuclear power plant, the Japanese media helped to protect the vested interests of the powerful 'nuclear village' by dwelling on Kan's lack of leadership qualities and ignoring the institutional reasons why it is difficult for Japanese leaders to lead. "The ousting of Kan is an object lesson in crossing the powerful players who control Japan's energy policy...While the village is in trouble, it retains enormous power to influence public discourse and politics".

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**II. Article by Jeff Kingston**

- "Ousting Kan Naoto: The Politics of Nuclear Crisis and Renewable Energy in Japan" [1]

By Jeff Kingston

On August 26, 2011, Prime Minister Kan Naoto resigned from office after a tempestuous fifteen months in power. Since May 2011 a virtual lynch mob egged on by the media bayed for his resignation. Kan's ouster became an obsession of the nation's powerbrokers. This article examines why, in the midst of an unprecedented cascade of disasters, natural and nuclear, the Kan problem trumped all others.

The fiercely partisan politics of the complex T?hoku catastrophe has slowed action on recovery and discredited politicians of all political stripes. [2] The public views Diet members with growing contempt because too many politicians seem to have prioritized petty party politics over reconstruction and safety of the victims. In early June 2011, while nearly 100,000 evacuees languished in evacuation centers, and with relatively little progress towards recovery in many battered coastal communities or controlling the nuclear meltdown at Fukushima Daiichi, the Diet devoted its energy to a no-confidence motion to oust Prime Minister Kan Naoto. Naturally, the public was dismayed by this unproductive vendetta at a time when the nation was looking for substantial emergency measures. Polls taken at the time of the no-confidence motion showed that a vast majority of Japanese did not think ousting Kan was a pressing priority even though he was unpopular. In the court of public opinion, the verdict on national politicians is dereliction of duty.

On the eve of 3/11, PM Kan looked to be on his way out as scandals sullied his administration and he plunged in public opinion polls. In the wake of the multiple disasters, Kan enjoyed a brief bounce in

public support and a lull in the escalating vilification by the media and political opponents in the Diet. Within a month, however, this fragile solidarity unraveled and it was back to politics as usual featuring internecine sniping by the Ozawa Ichiro wing of Kan's Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) and shrill criticism coupled with stonewalling of many legislative initiatives by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP).

**Gridlock and the Blame Game**

Over the long years of LDP dominance of Japanese politics since 1955, policies and legislation were worked out in negotiations within the party's Policy Affairs Research Council (PARC) and between PARC and bureaucrats in the ministries rather than in open parliamentary compromise. As a result, the habits of compromise in the Diet were stunted. The emergence of a "twisted" Diet (the lower and upper houses controlled by different parties) since 2007 has led frequently to legislative gridlock with both main parties adopting scorched earth tactics. According to Aurelia Mulgan-George, "This situation has not been conducive to nurturing a "loyal opposition", meaning the main opposition party holds the ruling party accountable and debates policy, but allows effective government rather than obstructs the legislative process as a means to discredit the ruling party." (Personal Communication 8/6/2011) The Kan Cabinet lacked a 2/3 majority in the Lower House so could not override Upper House vetoes and also faced sabotage from within orchestrated by Ozawa Ichiro who lost the DPJ presidential election to Kan in 2010 and was subsequently sidelined by the premier.

On March 18, PM Kan invited LDP opposition leader Tanigaki Sadakazu to join his government, but this offer was spurned and ongoing polarization in the "twisted" Diet led to a slow-motion response to the crisis. The LDP used its control of the Upper House to tie up key legislation passed in the DPJ-controlled Lower House, slowing progress on recovery. This does not mean complete legislative paralysis as many important bills eventually got passed, such as the $50 billion emergency disaster relief budget approved by the Diet on May 2nd. However, it was not until June 20th that the Upper House finally enacted a basic law on reconstruction of the devastated T?hoku region.  While a similar bill for the Kobe quake recovery in 1995 passed within a month, it took 102 days for the 2011 Diet to hammer out an accord. Minor disagreements over the powers and functions of a planned reconstruction agency lay at the heart of this impasse and finally the DPJ capitulated to the LDP's views, sparing the Diet further indignity. This dawdling response reinforced negative perceptions of politicians among the public and, more importantly, left devastated communities feeling hostage to irrelevant political battles. The Diet session was extended until the end of August over the objections of the LDP, a stand that drew considerable public censure given the need for urgent action on pressing national issues such as relief and recovery measures, tax reform, rising public debt, renewable energy policy and the troubled nuclear industry.

In early June, the LDP tabled a no-confidence motion that Kan survived only by implying he would step down. What exactly he promised at that time remains a matter of dispute, but Kan publicly set conditions on June 28 for his departure, requiring the LDP to cooperate in order to be rid of him. His most controversial demand was that the Diet pass a comprehensive feed-in-tariff (FIT) aimed at stimulating expansion of renewable energy capacity. [3] This is the third rail of nuclear-dominated energy politics and explains why powerful vested interests rallied against Kan.

METI had drafted the FIT bill and the cabinet approved it on March 11th, but in the wake of Fukushima the implications changed dramatically. Initially, METI envisaged renewable energy

replacing fossil fuel-fired power generation, but suddenly it became apparent that the Fukushima crisis would ratchet up pressure for renewable energy sources to displace nuclear energy. On May 6th, after Kan requested Chubu Electric to shut down the Hamaoka nuclear power plant because of its high-risk location on a major active fault line, the "nuclear village" (pro-nuclear advocates in utilities, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), business federations, the LDP, media and academia) pressed hard for his ouster. Also in May, Kan declared that Japan would boost renewables to 20% of its electricity generating energy mix in the 2020s up from about 1%. (Japan Times 7/24/11) [4] Kan represented a serious threat to nuclear energy interests in Japan and they fought back. There are certainly other reasons why the no-confidence motion was tabled, but Kan's efforts to recast national energy strategy and target bureaucratic and utility interests related to nuclear energy put him on the village's hit list.

In many respects, PM Kan was an inept politician and his cabinet team lurched from gaffe to gaffe, provoking general dissatisfaction and a media-feeding frenzy. There are good reasons why very few people in Japan thought that the Kan cabinet was on top of things and dealing effectively with the crisis. Part of the problem was mixed messages, as the prime minister, cabinet ministers and spokesmen had difficulty staying on the same page or even convincingly conveying empathy. Matsumoto Ryu, for example, resigned in early July only a week after being appointed Reconstruction Minister following his arrogant and insensitive remarks to politicians from the devastated T?hoku region. Mostly, however, there was deep frustration about the slow pace of progress on mitigating the human misery unleashed by the tsunami and the nuclear meltdown.

Kan was a convenient lightning rod for this frustration, and because he stepped on powerful toes in the "nuclear village", there was an orchestrated campaign to oust him. For example, twice TEPCO spread false information that was aimed at tarnishing Kan, only to recant. TEPCO claimed that Kan's visit to the stricken reactors on March 12 was the reason why venting did not proceed, thus causing the hydrogen explosions on March 12th, 13th and 15th.

Later it turned out that the utility was divided over venting and argued all night, not obeying instructions from the government to proceed with venting. [5] (Mainichi Daily News 7/4/11) When the utility did try to vent, the system did not function because it depended on the same electricity sources that had failed and caused the crisis. Nobody at Fukushima Daichi had any experience with manually operating the vents and so the manual had to be retrieved from the radiation-contaminated control room, delaying the response. In the event, this also proved ineffective, but TEPCO had planted the disinformation in the public mind that somehow PM Kan was responsible.

The second attempt to discredit PM Kan backfired when TEPCO leaked information to the LDP blaming the meltdown on Kan because he had ordered the cessation of pumping seawater to cool the fuel rods. Later it was reported that Kan did not issue any such order. Rather it was a TEPCO employee serving as liaison with the prime minster's office who called the Fukushima plant manager and said that the "mood" in the prime minister's office was in favor of stopping the pumping of seawater and thus it should be stopped. Subsequently it was established that the Fukushima Daiichi plant manager did not follow his colleague's order to stop the pumping of seawater since under international protocols it is the onsite manager's call. (Japan Times, 5/27/11) Kan may have been exonerated, but both cases ignited a furor in the media and Diet that tarnished his credibility. The blame game for Fukushima is a very high stakes battle helping to explain these efforts to discredit Kan by spreading malicious disinformation.

**Crisis Response**

Overall, Kan probably deserves more credit than most observers are willing to give him. Under the dire circumstances of a complex catastrophe involving the triple whammy of an unprecedented earthquake, tsunami and nuclear crisis, Kan managed the initial relief operations reasonably well and set in motion processes that could enable Japan to comprehensively reassess energy options. A lot depends on the yardstick against which he is measured. Compared with other leaders dealing with natural disasters—think Katrina, the 2004 tsunami in Aceh and Sri Lanka, and the earthquakes in Kobe 1995, Sichuan 2008 and flooding in Europe in 2010—Kan's response was not that bad. Having witnessed the bungling response to the Kobe quake I am impressed by how much better the Kan government's initial disaster response was, although follow-up was slow because disaster-hit areas have been held hostage to party politics, TEPCO obfuscation and media manipulation. This is scant consolation to evacuees and others threatened by the crisis, but failure to meet public expectations or assuage frustrations does not mean that Kan was a failure.

Much of the public dissatisfaction expressed by citizens outside T?hoku stems from the Fukushima accident.  TEPCO bears primary responsibility for this catastrophe along with METI for failing to properly monitor the nuclear industry, a pattern established under LDP rule. Kan established an independent panel to probe the causes of the nuclear accident at Fukushima. It remains to be seen how independent and aggressive the panel will be and to what extent officials of TEPCO and METI will cooperate with the investigation. An interim report is expected in December 2011 and, whatever its conclusions, it will lead to intensified political maneuvering over national energy policy.

Where the government is perhaps most at fault is in its negligence over radioactive contamination and food safety issues. The government was slow to prevent contamination of the nation's food supply, for example failing to rapidly ban shipment of rice straw from contaminated areas that was sold as cattle feed to ranchers throughout the country. Agriculture Minister Kano Michihiko conceded the government did not foresee this problem. In addition, the government first relied on voluntary beef shipment bans in contaminated areas, only to discover local authorities and the media reporting the presence of unsafe levels of cesium in beef on supermarket shelves in Tokyo and elsewhere. Only then did the government act belatedly to ban beef shipments from designated prefectures. This government negligence imperiled consumer health while eroding trust in upscale "wagyu" beef brands carefully nurtured over several years.  The lack of a national system for checking radiation contamination in food left the task to the initiative of local authorities, supermarket chains, slaughterhouses and farmers conducting voluntary tests.

Parents of children are also incensed that the government has not done more to deal with radiation affecting schoolyards while there are broader anxieties that many hot zones lay beyond the 20 km evacuation zone. The brisk sales of personal Geiger counters reflect apprehension about government failures to keep the public informed about radiation risks. The government does have a system for assessing where winds would carry radiation, but this information was not made public during the initial days after the meltdowns and subsequent explosions spewed radiation into the air. [6] As a result, many residents and evacuees were exposed to radioactive contamination because they were not given vital information.  (New York Times, 8/8/2011)

Many farming communities have been ruined by the contamination and are impatiently awaiting compensation for the fallout from Fukushima, an accident people believe was triggered by nature,

but compounded by human error in placing the reactors in earthquake-prone regions, design flaws and exacerbating the consequences of the meltdowns through poor crisis management. They, like the 80,000 evacuees who once lived in the 20 km evacuation zone, are also waiting for answers about when and whether their land will be inhabitable so that they can resume their livelihoods. In August the government finally announced that the land in some affected areas might not be habitable for many years to come. The political fallout is diffuse, with a gathering collapse of faith in the powers that be.

Returning to the initial rescue and relief operations, PM Kan immediately mobilized 100,000 troops and accepted international offers of assistance in stark contrast to the fumbling response to the 1995 Kobe Earthquake by the LDP-dominated coalition government. Tsunami disaster relief was reasonably fast and effective under difficult circumstances and evacuees received basic needs. Certainly they had reasons to be frustrated with the pace of relief and recovery, but it is hard to imagine any government performing better given the devastation of ports and other infrastructure and the sheer scale of the disaster. Opposition politicians churlishly criticized the government for not meeting its target of building 30,000 temporary houses for evacuees by June, but it managed to build 27,200 units, an impressive performance in ten weeks given shortages of building materials, difficulty in finding suitable sites and damage to transport networks. By comparison, in Tamil Nadu (India) nearly seven years after the devastating 2004 tsunami, the government only managed to build a total of 7,800 units. Kan's efforts in this respect also compare favorably to the American debacle with trailer housing after Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

Whatever his deficiency in political skills, Kan demonstrated surprising leadership at least on energy issues. When it became apparent that TEPCO could not be relied on to provide accurate information in a timely manner, Kan spoke for the nation in dressing down the company on the day after the accident and also called on the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission and US military assets in Japan to get better information on the expanding crisis. He rejected TEPCO's early demand to evacuate all staff from Fukushima Daiichi and ordered them to stay at the site to try to restore cooling functions and bring the situation under control. (Fuji TV 9/12/2011) [7] He launched an independent investigation of the Fukushima meltdown, pressured Chubu Electric to shutdown its vulnerable Hamaoka nuclear plant, hit the reset button on the national energy strategy, called for splitting the Nuclear Industrial Safety Agency (NISA) [8] that oversees the nuclear plants from pro-nuclear METI, advocated splitting power generation from transmission to promote renewable energy and submitted comprehensive feed-in-tariff legislation to facilitate rapid expansion of renewable energy. Assertive as these plans were, Kan was widely derided in the media for failing to lead while popular frustration with the prolonged nuclear crisis translated into falling support in public opinion polls.

One of the key problems exposed by the crisis is the vacuum of power at the center of the Japanese political system—the prime minister does not have very much power and is at the mercy of parliamentary politics. This is especially problematic given the divided Diet and the Prime Minister's party is deeply fractured. Another key problem is inter-ministerial bickering and turf fighting as dysfunctional politics synergizes with a dysfunctional bureaucracy. The media dwelled on Kan's lack of leadership qualities while ignoring the institutional reasons why it is difficult for Japanese leaders to lead. One official involved with the nuclear crisis told me, "Battles won in one ministry had to be fought all over again in another. The amount of time and energy spent on smoothing inter-ministerial rivalries and ruffled feathers was enormous and unproductive, hugely slowing the government's response. These bureaucratic spats were a constant source of frustration for everyone who wanted to tackle the crisis and help."

Certainly Kan's leadership style was a factor contributing to his isolation and unpopularity. His go-i--alone, improvisational style sidelined his cabinet on key decisions, alienated party members and was prone to mistakes and subsequent zigzagging that discredited his initiatives. It was an unorthodox style in a nation where consensus is valued, but in any country, bold policy initiatives are resisted by vested interests.

Prioritizing consensus, however, does not make for bold and timely action, especially when it challenges a pre-existing consensus. To create a new consensus is time consuming and risky because it forces supporters of the existing consensus to reconsider their assumptions and change their longstanding views, ones that are tied to powerful institutional interests in the case of nuclear energy. As the Mainichi notes, a wide network of powerful interests support and depend on the nuclear industry: "Heavy machinery manufacturers are snuggled right up against them. Banks favor deep-pocketed power utilities as safe, high-interest borrowers, as do trading firms who find they can sell fuel to utilities at high prices." (Mainichi 7/18/11) Unmentioned by the Mainichi was the heavy dependence of the media on advertisements by TEPCO and other utilities.

Ignoring consensual politics helped Kan bypass vested interests and act boldly; perhaps this was his only option in taking on the nuclear village and their insidious influence that extended into his cabinet, but in doing so he alienated his own party. Moreover, realizing his disaster agenda, especially on energy issues, was very difficult because he also could not count on key bureaucrats, most of whom were eager for him to fail. His talent for making enemies and disinclination to reach out and cultivate support undermined his effectiveness. In addition, the media often trivialized his initiatives, portraying them as gambits to extend his tenure rather than delving into the policy details and implications.

Arthur Stockwin, a specialist on Japanese politics at Oxford, explains, "Perhaps the best hypothesis might be that he has, like many of his predecessors, faced the problems of a highly dysfunctional system, and despite the inevitable appearance of incompetence that this brings (because the media always focus on narrow personal failures - gaffes etc.), he has been feeling his way round the system, acting in unorthodox ways because he has little chance of making progress through 'normal channels'. Kan may not be a political genius, but the magnitude of the crisis has stimulated some interesting resourcefulness on his part." (Personal Communication, 7/20/11))

**Nuclear Politics**

The prime minister called for rethinking the national energy strategy, not only by cancelling plans to ramp up Japan's nuclear power generation to 53% of Japan's total electricity generating capacity by 2030 (up from 29% pre-3/11) but also by prioritizing renewable energy. In early July, the government announced that all 54 of Japan's reactors would be subject to two-stage stress tests, ensuring that, at a minimum, most of Japan's nuclear power plants would remain offline for several more months until certified safe. This abrupt decision to follow the EU example on nuclear reactor stress tests came after METI Minister Kaieda Banri had assured the public on June 18 that the nuclear plants had been checked and deemed safe as part of a PR campaign to convince local mayors and prefectural governors to approve restarting idled reactors. Also in June, Kaieda visited local politicians in Kyushu to reassure them about the safety of two reactors in Genkai, Saga Prefecture in order to gain approval for restarting them, a move that advocates hoped would propel their efforts to overcome widespread public anxieties and restart idled reactors all over Japan (at

that time only 19 of Japan's 54 reactors were online).

The darkest moment came on June 26 when METI arranged a public forum in Genkai aired on Internet and cable television. On this program, officials briefed local residents about safety measures and received online comments ostensibly representing local opinions calling on the government to restart the reactors. However, Kyushu Electric later admitted that it asked employees of related companies and subsidiaries to request their employees to post comments in favor of restarting the reactors. The utility helpfully provided these "citizens" talking points in support of resumption of operations, i.e. warning that blackouts might cause old people and children to suffer heatstroke, businesses to suffer and electricity bills to rise. [9] (NHK TV News 7/14/11; NHK TV News 7/30/2011)

Revelations about this orchestrated campaign to fabricate local support indicates just how worried the utility is about public sentiments, something that has not previously been a problem in local communities hosting nuclear plants because of the economic benefits lavished on them for doing so. [10] (Mainichi Daily News, 7/5/2011) Poor communities that agreed to host nuclear plants enjoyed special subsidies, steady jobs, and expensive and extensive facilities and infrastructure beyond local means that could only be maintained by continued subsidies from the central government and utilities operating reactors in their towns. (New York Times, 5/30/2011; Japan Times 7/14/2011; Mainichi Daily News 7/5/ 2011)

This dependence on nuclear plants left host communities few options, but local support has been shaken in many areas because everyone can see how the lives of those living within the long shadow of Fukushima Daiichi were devastated and how little help they received.  On August 4th, Minami Soma town in Fukushima, where plans had been announced to build new reactors, announced that it will no longer accept subsidies normally given to projected host sites by the utility, although cancellation of the project was already a foregone conclusion following the meltdown. (NHK 8/4/2011) NHK reported that other projected host sites may follow suit.

In the wake of the scandal, METI and Kaieda saw their PR campaign implode as the mayor of Genkai withdrew his support for restarting the reactors. Kyushu Electric lost all credibility and inadvertently stoked local opposition because of its high-handed deception. Nearly one half of the "votes" in favor of restarting the reactors came from the sham supporters (130 out of 286) so that in fact a narrow majority of local citizens (163) opposed plans by Kyushu Electric and the government to bring Genkai's two reactors back online. (Yomiuri 7/14/11) This was a public relations nightmare for the nuclear industry, a self-inflicted wound that amplified public apprehension and fueled distrust. Matters worsened on July 29th when utility executives claimed that NISA had been orchestrating other town hall meetings in Shizuoka( 2007) and Kagoshima (2011) in favor of nuclear energy. It was a startling revelation that the government asked them to stage-manage support. (NHK News, 7/29/2011) Further revelations suggest that the nuclear watchdog agency has long fabricated public support for nuclear energy. (Japan Times 8/4/2011) Aside from sowing further doubts among the public about nuclear energy, and the professionalism and ethics of watchdog agency officials, the spreading scandal indicated that solidarity within the nuclear village was unraveling as power companies claimed they were not acting on their own and implicated METI and NISA in the bogus schemes.

The Mainichi compares Japan's current commitment to nuclear energy with the Imperial Navy's ill-

fated wartime commitment to battleships, stating, “…sticking to something that we knew to be flawed led to our demise. During the Pacific War, Japan knew that it had entered the age of aerial warfare, and yet clung to its "taikan-kyoho shugi" ("big-ship, big-cannon policy"), focused on naval gunnery contests between battleships, ultimately losing the war.” (Mainichi 7/18/11) In the same opinion essay, Naval strategist Genda Minoru who served on the Imperial Navy General Staff, is quoted as follows, “Changing military policy was not just about changing one's weapons, but about changing an entire organization that had been built upon the 'big-ship, big-gun policy’. That's a difficult thing to do. . . ." Regarding nuclear energy, the Mainichi concludes, “So we apparently know what we're doing is wrong, but keep doing it anyway.”

**Shifting Public Opinion**

Initially, public opinion polls conducted in mid-April following the accident at Fukushima Daiichi did not show a significant decline in support for nuclear energy, but over the next two months there was a significant shift against nuclear power in various polls. (JAIF, June 2011) The Asahi reported that support for nuclear power declined from 50% in mid-April to 43% in May and to 37% in June 2011. Over the same period, opposition to nuclear power increased from 32% to 42%. Various public opinion surveys asked about the future of nuclear power in Japan. In April, proponents of increasing nuclear energy ranged from 4% (Sankei), 5% (Asahi), and 7% (NHK) to 10% (Yomiuri). By June, the NHK poll reported this figure declined to 1%. The NHK poll also reported that between April and June support for maintaining the status quo on nuclear energy declined from 42% to 27% while support for reducing nuclear power rose from 32% to 47%. In the NHK poll, those in favor of abolishing nuclear power increased from 12% in April to 18% in June.

The Mainichi Shimbun’s nationwide opinion poll in mid-May found that 66% supported Kan’s initiative to shutdown the Hamaoka nuclear power plant while 25% opposed. It also reported that 31% responded that nuclear power is unavoidable, down from 40% in April.

In a mid-June poll, the Asahi Shimbun asked:

*Do you support a policy to phase out nuclear power with a goal to abandon it?*

Agree 74%, Disagree 14%.

*Do you think natural (renewable) energy will be an energy source which will replace nuclear*

*energy?*

Yes 64%, No 24%.

Given efforts by the utilities and government over the years to reassure the public about the safety of nuclear power, and the necessity of relying on it, not only for energy security, but also to reduce carbon emissions, it is surprising that public attitudes shifted so far and so quickly. It appears that the late May revelation by TEPCO that it had misled the public about the scale of the crisis by not

acknowledging that there had been three meltdowns until then undermined public faith in the utility and nuclear energy. This admission of intentionally deceiving the public was a PR fiasco, an inept attempt at damage control on the eve of the arrival of an International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) investigation team.

Over the summer of 2011, prominent political leaders outside Tokyo expressed doubts about nuclear power. Niigata Governor Izumida Hirohiko announced that he won't allow the restart of reactors in his prefecture even after the stress tests which he dismissed as, "…only meant to make people feel better." (Yomiuri 8/9/2011) He said he intends to withhold approval for restarting idled reactors in Niigata, including TEPCO's massive complex at Kashiwazaki that was struck by a powerful earthquake in 2007, until the crisis is sorted out in Fukushima. The mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, previously staunch proponents of nuclear power, also weighed in on the August anniversaries of the atomic bombings of their cities, questioning its safety and urging a shift towards renewable energy.

**Renewable Politics**

On July 13, PM Kan announced his vision of gradually phasing out nuclear energy. This would mean abandoning current plans to build 14 new reactors by 2030 and thus overturn the current national energy plan that calls for nuclear reactors to generate more than one half of Japan's electricity by 2030.  Expressing his personal views, Kan, who was trained as an engineer, stated,

> "When we consider the risk of nuclear energy, I've come to strongly feel that this is a technology that cannot be controlled by our conventional thinking of securing safety. We should reduce nuclear dependency in a planned, step-by-step manner and eventually we can do without atomic energy."

Kan's spokesman clarified that Kan's bombshell was not national policy, but on July 29th, the government officially shifted its energy policy away from nuclear energy and backed Kan's call for reducing reliance on atomic power. (Japan Times, 7/30/2011).  This interim report raises, without quite endorsing, Kan's proposal for splitting electricity generation from transmission and also advocates a public debate aimed at bridging the gap between public sentiments and "expert judgments", implying disingenuously that all experts are pro-nuclear. There is no such doubt about public sentiments; an Asahi poll in mid-July found that only 1% of respondents favored expanding nuclear power while 77% favor gradually abolishing it. [11]

In line with the IAEA's recommendation advocating a separation of nuclear watchdog responsibilities from the purview of METI (Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry), Kan said, "We must fundamentally review the way nuclear power has for many years been administered. The regulatory body and the functions to promote nuclear energy have been under the same government ministry." Kan also supports ending the power transmission monopoly exercised by the ten regional power-generating utilities as a way of giving renewable energy providers access to the energy-generating market. Such a move would help boost prospects of renewable energy, but is fiercely resisted by the utilities. So too was Kan's plan for a comprehensive feed-in-tariff.

Kan's renewable offensive was opposed by the LDP, the party that oversaw the expansion of Japan's nuclear industry, and also by the leading business federations, Keidanren and Keizai Doyukai, the ten utilities, and METI, the ministry that has promoted the nuclear industry.

But there are signs that the nuclear village faces formidable challenges as prominent executives and corporations jump on the renewables bandwagon. Son Masayoshi, CEO of Softbank telecommunications, unveiled plans to invest $1 billion in ten massive solar farms; the comprehensive FIT passed in August 2011 is an important, but not sufficient, policy move supportive of his ambitions. Pricing, and agreement by the ten regional utilities to buy and distribute the electricity generated remain unresolved and substantial obstacles. Son has already convinced most of the governors of Kansai (western Japan) to jump on board the renewables bandwagon, a rather remarkable achievement given that Kansai is so heavily dependent on nuclear energy (50%) and hosts so many nuclear plants.  Son also established the Renewable Energy Council in cooperation with 35 prefectural governments on July 13 to lobby for the FIT legislation, and a smart grid next-generation electricity transmission and distribution network designed to manage renewable energy and lessen dependence on nuclear energy. Significantly, Son exercises considerable influence as he is an iconic figure and an alpha blogger with millions of loyal fans on social media. In addition, another high profile business executive known for his innovative thinking, Mikitani Hiroshi, president of Japan's leading online retailer Rakuten Inc., quit Keidanren in protest over its support for the energy status quo. Moreover, blue chip firms like Sharp and Mitsui, and even nuclear power giants such as Toshiba and Hitachi, are also eyeing profits in renewables, indicating that Japan, Inc.'s consensus in favor of nuclear energy may be unraveling and is certainly under siege. In short, innovative sectors of Japanese capital are committing to a renewable energy future in recognition that this could become the next industrial cutting edge.

In July, Kan stated that he would not hold a snap election as a referendum on nuclear energy policy. This made sense because the DPJ did not want to risk its majority in the Lower House; the DPJ is unpopular and has a miserable record to run on. At the same time, Kan positioned his party to reap the green, anti-nuclear vote whenever the elections are held, a strategy that recognizes the vulnerability of the LDP due to its longstanding support for the nuclear industry.

LDP advocacy for the utilities has been richly reciprocated as 72.5% of total individual donations to the political fund management body of the LDP in 2009 came from former and current executives of TEPCO and eight other utilities. (Mainichi 7/23/2011, Japan Times 7/24/2011) A stunning 92.5% of executives at the nine utilities made such donations, indicating just how close ties are between the LDP and the power companies and why the LDP strongly opposes Kan's goal of phasing out nuclear energy. [12] The revelations about the utilities donating nothing to the DPJ and considerable sums to the LDP reinforces perceptions about shady and collusive relations that place the nuclear village's interests ahead of public safety.

One of the enigmas of post-Fukushima politics is why Kan was not able to capitalize on the dramatic shift in public sentiments away from nuclear power to renewables given that he demonstrated leadership on this very issue. While support ratings for the Kan cabinet sank to 15% in a mid-July Asahi poll (from 22% in June), and the disapproval rating rose from 56% to 66%, support for his energy policies was strong as more than three quarters of Japanese agreed with his goal of gradually phasing out nuclear energy. Oddly, among proponents of phasing out nuclear energy, only 15% supported the Kan cabinet, showing just how hard it was for him, in the face of media headwinds, to translate a popular policy into political popularity. The media insisted that getting rid of Kan was

essential to recovery, but his successor, Noda Yoshihiko, inherits the same problem of a divided Diet and an LDP eager to precipitate early elections by handcuffing and discrediting the incumbent Prime Minister.

In many respects, the LDP has been copying the playbook of the Republicans in the US Congress, denying and minimizing its responsibility for the mess it created while in power, castigating the DPJ for not managing that mess very well and using its control of the Upper House to stall recovery legislation and then blaming the government for its slow response. The LDP has been nearly as cynical as the Republicans, also holding the nation hostage to petty party politics while major national problems fester.

PM Noda, like Kan, has indicated that he does not support building any new reactors, does not favor extending the operating licenses of aging plants beyond their original life spans and supports a gradual phasing out of nuclear energy, but overall seems more ambivalent about the issue than his predecessor. He states that nuclear energy remains important to Japan's economy, intends to restart reactors following stress tests and complete reactors already under construction. Given the long time-frame for phasing out nuclear energy, the nuclear village will be biding its time and wait for the LDP to resume governing and/or a possible shift in public sentiment  stemming from conservation measures, possible blackouts, higher electricity costs, flight of business overseas and higher carbon emissions. Can the anti-nuclear movement survive these stress tests? Much depends on how the media frames the debate.

**Transparency, Collusion and Complicity**

The Fukushima meltdown is the second largest nuclear accident ever, and has become Japan's Chernobyl. On May 24th, more than two and a half months after the event, TEPCO acknowledged that there had been a meltdown of the cores at three of the reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi complex within the first few days after the tsunami. Until then, TEPCO downplayed the severity of the crisis. This tardy nod towards transparency exposed the fact that TEPCO was misleading the public about the extent of the crisis from the beginning.

Belatedly, TEPCO has acknowledged that some of the damage at Fukushima may have been caused by the earthquake, counter to initial reports that the reactors had withstood the tremors and were only overwhelmed by the "unexpected scale" of the tsunami. Specifically, TEPCO admitted that the earthquake may have damaged the High Pressure Core Flooder (HPCF) that supplies coolant water to reactor cores during an emergency to prevent overheating and meltdown. The revelation that the damage to HPCF piping might have been caused by the earthquake carries safety implications for supposedly quake resistant designs at Japan's other nuclear reactors. (Adelstein and McNeill). [13] The costs of retrofitting all of Japan's aging nuclear plants to improve quake resistance on top of building higher tsunami walls would be enormous if not prohibitive. [14] In the wake of all this damning news, on May 22 the Japan Times editorial stated that the past half century of nuclear power, "…worked for a while, until, of course, it no longer worked. Now is the time to begin the arduous process of moving towards safer, renewable, and efficient energy sources."

There has been pointed, if belated, media criticism about the lack of transparency and inadequate information disclosure by TEPCO and the government. This dissatisfaction stems largely from TEPCO's failure to provide accurate information in a timely manner, a view shared by the

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA, June 2011). Moreover, the company president Shimizu Masataka disappeared, right after the disaster, staying MIA for nearly a month, fueling public anger and tarnishing the company's image.

The domestic media, however, never mentioned the "m" word (meltdown) until the end of May when TEPCO admitted, despite previous denials, that there had in fact been a meltdown soon after the tsunami struck. TEPCO knew about the meltdowns and that radiation leaks peaked in the initial days following the hydrogen explosions, but concealed this information and was not pressed to by journalists. Why was the media so inhibited and reluctant to press TEPCO on key questions and issues? The nuclear village is extremely influential and the media rarely confronts the Establishment until it inevitably must. The utilities not only have networks of power at their disposal, they command a massive advertising budget that gets the attention of media executives and makes them think twice before taking them on. In addition, the kisha club (press clubs) for utilities exerts a powerful influence on how the news is presented and what is covered because only members can attend industry press conferences and editors usually defer to their judgment. These press clubs are co-opted by, and are often deferential to, the organizations they cover, gaining insider access and information in exchange for soft handling (Hall, 1997; Freeman, 2000; Pharr and Krauss, 1996). Since the late May revelations, however, the media turned up the heat on the utilities, raising questions that were too long suppressed about nuclear safety and government oversight.

The media is drawing attention to the cozy and collusive relations between government and the nuclear industry, and how the former has not properly monitored the latter. The practice of amakudari (descent from heaven) involves bureaucrats taking up lucrative positions in companies that they formerly regulated, while industry officials are regularly represented on influential government advisory panels that shape policy in their area. (Colignon and Usui 2003; Amyx 2004). Like the revolving door in the US, there is considerable connivance between business and government in Japan. It seems that this pattern of interaction and the fixed mindset within the incestuous nuclear village has controlled Japan's energy policy and ignored contrary views. (New York Times, 4/26/11) Courts have also helped by usually rejecting plaintiffs' claims about unsafe sites, seismic science or design flaws. Any victories in the lower courts are overturned on appeal, most embarrassingly involving the Kashiwazaki plant that was shutdown in 2007 by a 6.8 earthquake that exceeded design specifications. This occurred not long after an appeal court sided with TEPCO in dismissing a suit claiming that the site was unsafe because the world's largest nuclear power complex was built on top of a fault line.  (Kingston 2011:152-53)

The nuclear industry is heavily regulated, but critics persuasively assert that the regulations are not effectively enforced as the layers of decision-making and cumbersome bureaucratic procedures insulate TEPCO and other utilities from robust supervision, leaving them to their own devices. (New York Times 6/21/11, Kaufmann, 2011; McCormack, 2011) Critics maintain that NISA regulators exercise their supervisory duties in a perfunctory "go along, get along" manner. In 2001, for example, TEPCO estimated that the maximum tsunami at the Fukushima plant would be 5.7 meters, but did not submit any documentation supporting this estimate. NISA never questioned this estimate or asked for documentation. In the event, the 3/11 tsunami was more than twice as high as this calculation. It is also troubling that nuclear safety measures tend to be more reactive than proactive, and rely on optimistic assumptions that downplay risks. Given that so many of Japan's reactors are aging (3 are over 40 years old and another 16 are over 30 years old) with the attendant risk of metal fatigue, and revelations of systematic falsification of repair and maintenance records in 2002, the stress tests imposed by PM Kan will be subject to careful scrutiny, especially as they are being administered by the utilities under the supervision of the Nuclear Safety Commission, headed by

nuclear advocate Madarame Haruki.

**Conclusion**

Political vision starts with hope of overcoming existing problems. GNPism, the unifying and motivating ideology of the post-WWII era, targeted recovery from the war and redefining national identity. Japan's biggest problems today are the aging population, economic stagnation, tsunami devastation and the nuclear crisis. Bold moves on these issues could capture the public's imagination. Renewable Energy Superpower might resonate among the Japanese, but it remains to be seen if the backlash against nuclear power will survive the stress tests of conservation, higher electricity costs, rising CO2 emissions, and counterattack by the powerful energy monopolies. PM Noda hardly seems the intrepid leader to pull this off. After all, he makes a virtue of not taking sides and was chosen mostly because he was the least objectionable candidate among DPJ colleagues. He may not be a card-carrying member of the nuclear village, but is somebody they can work with.

The ousting of Kan is an object lesson in crossing the powerful players who control Japan's energy policy. The nuclear village lobbies forcefully and persistently because it has so much at stake. The consensus that it nurtured over the years about the safety and necessity of nuclear power has never been so challenged as it is now. While the village is in trouble, it retains enormous power to influence public discourse and politics, so it is far too early to suggest that the opinion polls mean that Japan is phasing out nuclear energy. Ramping up renewable energy capacity will take many years and in the meantime there will be many opportunities for reversing the reversal; the battle has just begun. There are influential businessmen, firms and politicians betting, however, that renewable energy is the future and that nuclear energy, and the ways and means of the nuclear village, will join the list of jettisoned legacies from the 20th century. A citizen's campaign led by Nobel Literature laureate Oe Kenzaburo, among other luminaries, seeks to collect ten million signatures for an anti-nuclear petition. But they are fighting those who have so much to lose from a successful renewable energy campaign. In this siege, the moat may have been breached, but the ramparts remain well defended.

A new Zen koan reads: What happened that unhappened? At a Sept 19, 2011 rally, an estimated 60,000 anti-nuclear energy demonstrators gathered to voice their opposition to the nuclear consensus imposed from above over the past half century. Curiously, given that the rally was held across the street from NHK, the largest demonstration in Tokyo since the 1960s was not even mentioned on the evening news. It is this sort of media "unhappening" that raises alarms about the power it has over framing public discourse, because as we noted above, the domestic mainstream media were more lapdog than watchdog in covering the nuclear crisis until TEPCO "confessed" at the end of May. Citizens around the country may have been aroused in favor of phasing out nuclear energy, but as we have seen with the ouster of Kan, the media often trivializes and personalizes important policy issues to the detriment of informed public discourse and accountability regarding Japan's Chernobyl.

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**IV. Notes**

[1] This essay draws on my chapter in Jeff Kingston (ed.) Natural Disaster and Nuclear Crisis in Japan: Response and Recovery Since Japan's 3/11. Nissan Monograph Series (Oxford University), Routledge, London, 2012.

[2] The essay summarizing post-Fukushima political developments draws heavily on mass media reports that are widely available online. I am grateful for comments and suggestions by Rod Armstrong, Gerald Curtis, Andrew DeWit, Mure Dickie, Alexis Dudden, David Leheny, Aurelia Mulgan-George, Richard Samuels and Arthur Stockwin.

[3] At the end of August the Diet passed the FIT, an important Kan legacy that facilitated the Prime Minister's resignation.

[4] If large-scale hydropower is included, renewables account for 9% of Japan's electricity generating capacity as of 2010.

[5] The Associated Press detailed the first 24 hours of the nuclear crisis including the venting problem.

[6] System for Prediction of Environmental Emergency Dose Information (Speedi). The information from Speedi was first released on March 23rd.

[7] Corroborated by personal communication from US Embassy staff April 2011. Had he not ordered TEPCO to stay, the crisis would certainly have become worse, possibly involving a meltdown at the fourth reactor where the spent fuel pool contained recently removed material. An explosion there might have forced the evacuation of Greater Tokyo and severely compromised state functions.

[8] NISA and other relevant bodies are to be reorganized and consolidated into the Nuclear Safety and Security Agency (NSSA) under the Environment Ministry by April 2012. The NSSA will regulate the nuclear industry and conduct radiation monitoring. The Environment Ministry has been pro-nuclear energy as a means to reduce carbon emissions.

[9] Subsequently Saga Governor Furukawa Yasushi admitted it was inappropriate that he told Kyushu Electric executives before the forum took place that it would be important to solicit views from pro-nuclear voices in the business community to counter widespread anti-nuclear sentiments.

[10] In Genkai, 60% of the town budget comes from hosting the nuclear power plant. Between 1975-2010, Genkai received 26.5 billion yen in subsidies and grants and 1/6 of local jobs are at the plant or related enterprises.

[11] Asahi, 7/13/11.

[12] The systematic pattern of donations, clustered in December with strikingly similar amounts donated by executives of similar rank, suggests that they are in fact corporate donations disguised as individual contributions. Corporate donations by utilities were officially ended in 1974 due to public criticism about cozy relations between power companies and the LDP. Industry executives' donations accounted for 63.5% of individual donations to the LDP in 2007 and 70.1% in 2008. In 2009 presidents each donated Yen 360,000, vice-presidents Yen 240,000 and other executives Yen 100,000.

[13] Interviews with onsite TEPCO workers confirm that the earthquake caused damage that precipitated the nuclear crisis.

[14] Chubu Electric unveiled plans for building an 18-meter seawall and other measures to protect the Hamaoka plant from tsunami that will cost an estimated Yen 100 billion.

**V. Nautilus invites your responses**

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