

Role of Post-Kan Cabinet

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“The crafty schemer drowns in his own scheme.” If this proverb were cited for Prime Minister Naoto Kan, Zhuge Kongming would laugh bitterly and Cao Cao would click his tongue (see note). Kan’s scheme was too shameless and dirty.

The scheme failed only in one day. Offering to resign someday, Prime Minister Kan asked lawmakers of his Democratic Party of Japan to vote against a no-confidence motion against his cabinet. As soon as the motion was voted down in the House of Representatives, Kan resorted to vague statements in an apparent bid to remain in office longer. Such attitude prompted an anti-Kan mood to gain momentum inside and outside his party. Kan himself was eventually forced to touch on his early resignation. His scheme to survive the no-confidence motion backfired.

Kan’s presence is an impediment

We have never seen such a flimsy, cunning prime minister. Kan’s Machiavellism lacks the grand purpose of maintaining a good nation as cited by Niccolò Machiavelli. Only his ahamkara or ego-consciousness is behind the shameless scheme.

He has failed to understand that his presence itself has worked as an impediment to Japan’s reconstruction after the March 11 Great East Japan Earthquake. As far as the Diet is divided with the Lower House dominated by the ruling DPJ and the Upper House by the opposition camp, the ruling party cannot make policy decisions without cooperation with the opposition parties. Since most of opposition lawmakers have expressed no-confidence against the Kan cabinet, he has no choice but to be replaced, irrespective of whether the motion was passed or not.

At a meeting of DPJ Lower House members on June 2, however, Kan sought their confidence by giving top priority to the preservation of the DPJ’s unity and the prevention of the opposition Liberal Democratic Party’s return to power, rather than to the post-disaster reconstruction and relief measures for disaster survivors. Only in order to remain in office longer, Prime Minister Kan exaggerated the DPJ’s confrontation with the opposition. It has become even more difficult to realize national unity under the Kan cabinet. Prime Minister Kan should resign immediately.

A grand coalition could come on condition of snap election

If Kan resigns as prime minister, the ruling and opposition camps will have to

urgently build cooperative relations. Their grand coalition to form a government has been discussed. Such coalition may be advisable if the time span is limited and an early Lower House dissolution for a general election is considered. But a post-Kan cabinet's missions should be limited to (1) relief measures for disaster survivors and the restoration of the disaster-damaged regions, (2) the preparation and implementation of urgent reconstruction measures for the immediate future, (3) the management of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant accident and (4) preparations for the Lower House election. Full-fledged reconstruction measures, their financial resources, energy, economic growth and the like should be left for a new government emerging after the election.

This is because voters had not have the terrible disaster in mind when choosing the DPJ as the ruling party in the 2009 general election. The DPJ then won power by pledging pork-barrel spending measures such as child allowances, free senior high school education, the elimination of expressway tolls and greater subsidies for farming families, while denying tax hikes. The DPJ government is thus not eligible for working out post-disaster reconstruction measures that would require enormous financial resources.

An early Lower House dissolution for an election to test voters' will has to come before the development of full-blown reconstruction plans. The post-Kan cabinet will thus have an important mission to accelerate the restoration of disaster-hit regions to pave the way for an early election. At the same time, it will have to seriously consider and work for the realignment of the political world to resolve problems with the divided Diet.

Note: Famed ancient Chinese strategist Zhuge Kongming used the proverb to describe Cao Cao, one of the three competing warlords for control of China after the downfall of the mighty Han empire.

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