

**Noda Cabinet Should Serve Only as Caretaker**

Koichi Endo

Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda's appointment of Naoki Tanaka as defense minister might have stunned a large number of people. I was appalled at the appointment.

**Funny selection of defense minister**

Noda reshuffled his cabinet to push the integrated social security and tax reform and began to indicate his threat to dissolve the House of Representatives. But the readjustment of defense and national security policy is equally or even more important. Noda might have attempted to demonstrate his strong determination to implement the social security and tax reform by selecting former Foreign Minister Katsuya Okada as deputy prime minister. While it is doubtful whether the appointment of the fundamentalist could lead to achieving the difficult tax increase, the appointment and the threat to dissolve the lower house might have been combined to produce a fairly strong appeal.

But Noda's selection of new defense minister is too stupid. The defense minister is now in a key position to solve the much complicated issue of Futenma Air Station relocation while China demonstrates its maritime ambitions. Even after regretting his appointment of an inexperienced politician to the important post that only exposed the appointee's incapacity, the prime minister made an inadvisable selection again.

There should have been many alternative candidates for the defense post, including Senior Vice Defense Minister Shu Watanabe, Prime Minister Noda's national security adviser Akihisa Nagashima and some private-sector experts. Nevertheless, Noda gave priority to the unity of his Democratic Party of Japan, making a funny selection only to mix different issues. He exposed his limitations to the public.

The prime minister should not take the party unity into account when selecting the defense minister because the selection represents Japan's external message on its national security policy. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the United States might have been disappointed at the selection. Reasonable Taiwanese people might have drooped their shoulders in disappointment, concluding that they cannot rely on Japan. China might have been pleased to hear the selection, seeing Japan as easy to deal with.

**PM gives priority to DPJ unity**

The appointment of Okada, who cannot get along with former DPJ President Ichiro Ozawa, into the cabinet is viewed by some people as allowing Noda to get free from the spell of party unity. But this view is wrong. His cabinet reshuffle indicated his “loyalty” to Secretary General Azuma Okiishi who is close to Ozawa. Prime Minister Noda, who is a son of a Self-Defense Forces officer, sacrificed defense and national security in order to please the DPJ secretary general hailing from the leftist Japan Teachers’ Union. A wrapper band of Noda’s book, “Enemy of Democracy and DPJ,” says it is his only book discussing the pride of a “conservative politician.” I am appalled to hear that Noda is a conservative politician.

For Noda, the DPJ may be more important than the state. His top political priority may be to beat the enemy of the DPJ and unite the party. We cannot leave national priorities such as fiscal and security policies to this level of politician.

We can place no more expectations on the DPJ administration that has repeated and is likely to repeat errors. The reshuffled Noda cabinet should serve only as a caretaker government for the general elections.

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