

USAPC Washington Report
March 2010

Interview with Prof. Mike Mochizuki
Associate Dean for Academic Programs, The Elliot School of International Affairs
Associate Professor of Political Science & International Affairs
The George Washington University

USAPC: The logjam between Washington and Tokyo concerning the relocation of the U.S. Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station on Okinawa has become a major point of contention between the two allies. What factor(s) fueled this discord? A mishandling of it by the Obama administration? The governing inexperience of the Hatoyama administration? A little of both?

Mochizuki: The disagreement about the relocation of the Futenma Air Station developed because of problems on both sides. On the U.S. side, a number of Japan specialists had warned in the run up to the August 2009 lower house elections that Washington should be prepared for a new government. It was very clear that the former ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) was in trouble and that the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) could win enough seats in the lower house elections to gain control of the government. But I'm not sure the Obama administration was fully aware of the implications of a change in government in Tokyo.

There seemed to be a tendency to regard the possibilities in an extremely binary manner. One view was that the DPJ basically was not much different from the LDP so it would be business as usual. The other view was that the DPJ would be very, very different. But in the final analysis, the prevailing opinion seemed to be that the DPJ-led government would support the U.S.-Japan alliance without substantial changes in policy.

Japan experts in the U.S. government certainly were aware of the DPJ's campaign rhetoric, which stated that a DPJ-led government would focus on issues such as revising the Status of Forces Agreement, reconsidering Host-Nation Support, and taking another look at the force realignment package. But it evidently was not clear which one of those the DPJ would emphasize. So my sense is that the Obama administration was caught off guard by the Hatoyama government's initial focus on Futenma relocation.

I was taken aback when former Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage said earlier this year that we were all caught by surprise by the DPJ's unwillingness to readily implement the force realignment package.¹ He may have been caught by surprise, but I think many of us who follow Japanese politics pointed out that the DPJ's victory amounted to a structural change in governance.

¹ In May 2006, the U.S. and Japanese governments concluded an agreement that calls for (1) relocating the Marine Corps Air Station Futenma from a densely populated urban area in Okinawa to a less populated part of the prefecture adjacent to Camp Schwab, and (2) reducing the size of the U.S. military "footprint" in Okinawa by moving 8,000 Marines and 9,000 dependents currently stationed there to Guam by the end of 2014.

This doesn't mean that the Hatoyama government will pursue abrogation of the U.S.-Japan security treaty and throw U.S. forces out of Japan. But the DPJ is interested in changing some of the terms of the U.S.-Japan alliance.

On the Japanese side, there is great personal admiration for President Obama and what he has been advocating. The DPJ saw Obama's victory and his agenda for change as a model that they could internalize. The Democrats in Japan also saw in President Obama a convergence in terms of his more multilateral approach to global affairs and his preference for listening to potential or actual adversaries rather than immediately turning to more military-type solutions.

In this regard, I think the DPJ was under the impression that the Obama administration would be more willing to listen and accommodate them on various foreign policy and security matters. So, for example, DPJ officials may have felt that if their government stopped the re-fueling mission in the Indian Ocean but compensated for this by providing a great deal of aid to Afghanistan, the Obama administration would be receptive to this alternative way of contributing to global security.

In short, both sides held very rosy views of the other, with the U.S. side assuming that a DPJ government basically would perpetuate the alliance policies of predecessor LDP governments, and the Japanese side thinking the Obama administration would be very open and flexible about changing aspects of the alliance.

USAPC: So you don't think that Secretary of Defense Robert Gates was unduly tough in his remarks last October when he warned Japanese officials that a failure to move expeditiously on the Futenma relocation would jeopardize other aspects of the force realignment plan?

Mochizuki: No, I don't think the U.S. government was intentionally trying to be tough or push Japan against the wall on Futenma, but naturally Washington thought it had an agreement. The 2006 force realignment accord was concluded after very arduous negotiations. It wasn't a perfect solution, but neither side could find a better solution. Moreover, there was the equivalent of a treaty that both sides signed as well as Japanese legislation **authorizing** this plan.

In the early days of the Obama administration, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Foreign Minister Hirofumi Nakasone secured the legal framework for implementation. So from the U.S. perspective, there was the view that this agreement has been signed, sealed, and now should be delivered. That was the expectation. But when U.S. officials reminded their Japanese counterparts about this, it came off as "pressure," and that caused some negative feeling in Tokyo.

Now we are at the stage of pulling back and patience appears to be the operative word. However, I think there still is an expectation in Washington that after the Hatoyama government re-examines the agreement, Tokyo will reach the same conclusion -- or something very close to it -- and, in the end, ultimately accept the 2006 agreement.

But what if the Hatoyama government does not accept the 2006 deal or a close variation of it? I have no idea what Tokyo will do, but there are many DPJ defense experts who have been skeptical of whether so many Marines need to live and train in Okinawa and what deterrence role their presence actually plays. They ask questions the LDP did not ask.

One could still be a realist and argue that the United States does not need the full range of combat units living and training in Okinawa in order to deal with foreseeable contingencies in the region. So if that's the case, why have them there? Also, why is such a large offshore air facility required?

The DPJ government has floated quite a few ideas. For example, it has proposed that certain nearby islands might be used for the replacement air station. American officials evidently have argued that even a nearby island location is too far because the United States needs the ground forces very close to the air capabilities. I think that's a compelling reason.

Another idea that has been floated is to have a much smaller facility built elsewhere in Camp Schwab. In any case, it is quite possible that the Hatoyama government could propose a plan different from the 2006 one. And at that point, the main question will be how the United States responds.

USAPC: Do you think the preoccupation with resolving the disagreement about Futenma relocation is distracting us from addressing other important issues?

Mochizuki: There are some issues that have receded but still are important. For example, there is a broad consensus in Japan that the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) should address environmental problems caused by US military facilities in Japan. The U.S. position has been that the SOFA would not necessarily have to be revised to address such issues. We simply would change the way it is implemented. But I sense that the Japanese government will try to push the envelope and insist on formal revision of SOFA.

The United States has been reluctant to open up the SOFA for formal revision. There has been much focus on the implications of handing over a U.S. soldier suspected of wrongdoing to Japanese authorities. Washington has insisted that the rights of the accused receive the same sort of protection in Japan as he or she would in the United States. But the Japanese legal system is somewhat different. So, on that point, I can understand why the United States is reluctant to open up the SOFA for formal revision. But it is harder to argue against changing the agreement to address environmental concerns.

There also is missile defense. There are quite a few DPJ members who question how effective missile defense would be in protecting Japan and, therefore, whether substantial resources should be allocated to develop those systems.

In addition, the DPJ is re-doing the 2009 review of National Defense Program Guidelines, so there may be some changes that arise as a result of that exercise. And then, of

course, there is the notion of the East Asia Community – generally, a regional trade grouping based on the 16 member countries of the East Asia Summit.²

The idea isn't fleshed out by any means, but there is quite a bit of support for it in Japan. Japanese proponents certainly don't want an East Asia Community that would diminish the U.S. role in East Asia, but they also feel that it is important to build trust among countries in the region.

USAPC: On the subject of Japan's regional diplomacy, what is the significance of Mr. Ozawa leading a delegation of 600 DPJ members to China as he did in early January? Was the former DPJ chief simply grandstanding? Or, was his trip indicative of a deeper desire by Japan to develop its own relationship with China in a way that effectively insulates it from the myriad problems now confronting U.S.-China relations?

Mochizuki: Previously, there might have been concern in Japan about potentially being sucked into a problem in Sino-American relations, especially with respect to Taiwan. Political scientists often refer to such concerns as entrapment. But the more recent easing of tensions in cross-Straits relations appears to have lessened such concerns in Tokyo – notwithstanding Beijing's strong objection to President Obama's announcement in late January of a \$6.4 billion arms sale to Taipei.

Now, there is a separate logic to Japan's desire to develop relations with China. These changes, in reality, have been building gradually since 2006. I believe that former Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi fundamentally wanted to have stable relations with China, but he was stubborn about visiting the Yasukuni Shrine.³ For all of my criticisms about former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, I think he did the courageous thing by not visiting the shrine. He was able to do this precisely because he was a nationalist. As a consequence, the ice began to break in Sino-Japanese relations.

After Abe's term, Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda followed his lead and did not visit the Yasukuni Shrine. This continued to build a foundation for improved relations with Beijing. These actions established a clear trajectory. Ozawa's trip to China in January, which enjoyed the full support of Prime Minister Hatoyama, effectively reinforced in this trend. Ozawa and his DPJ delegation showed the Chinese leadership that Japan is really serious about developing a more stable and, hopefully, more friendly relationship.

Japanese officials have a lot of confidence and hope in this new, post-Jiang Zemin generation of Chinese leaders. Mr. Ozawa's visit is not the only effort by Tokyo to reach out to

² Current members of the East Asian Summit include: Australia, Brunei, Burma, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam.

³ The Yasukuni Shrine is a Shinto shrine in Tokyo originally built to commemorate those who died fighting for the Japanese Emperor. It has become a source of controversy because (1) it enshrines World War II war criminals, and (2) it houses a museum that has been roundly criticized for presenting a revisionist interpretation of World War II. When Japanese politicians visit the Yasukuni Shrine ostensibly to pay their respects to the war dead, the governments of China, South Korea, and other Asian nations that suffered under Japanese colonial rule in the pre-World War II era harshly criticize these politicians – and by extension, the Japanese government – for willfully denying Japan's history of war-time atrocities.

this new generation. Prime Minister Hatoyama also made sure that the Japanese Emperor formally received Chinese Vice-President Xi Jinping, who is one of the rising stars in this new crop of Chinese leaders.

Hatoyama suffered a lot of criticism domestically that the meeting did not follow proper protocol and that it misused the Emperor for diplomatic purposes. But precisely because this was not a cost-free gesture, it had a lot of positive meaning to the Chinese government. These are all efforts at building trust and doing things that are somewhat extraordinary. The hope in Japan is that these gestures will be reciprocated by the Chinese.

It's not that Japan is moving away from the United States and toward China. The DPJ government, as well as many moderates in the LDP, always felt that Japan needed a two-track policy. Japan needs strong relations with the United States, but it cannot just depend on that. Japan is right next door to China and its economic future is tied to its neighbor. The Japanese government may have some suspicions about China, but it recognizes that it must find a way to get along with China. That's all it is.

USAPC: How do you view the recent electoral losses the DPJ suffered in gubernatorial and mayoral contests? Some analysts have been quick to conclude that these outcomes are indicative of growing disappointment with Prime Minister Hatoyama, in particular, and the DPJ, more broadly.

Mochizuki: There is no question that voters have been disappointed with Prime Minister Hatoyama's leadership. They also have not approved of the manner in which Mr. Ozawa has addressed questions about a fund-raising scandal.

That disillusionment has influenced the decline in support for the Hatoyama cabinet and no doubt contributed to defeats in the Nagasaki gubernatorial race and Machida City mayoral election, both of which were held in February. Granted, these were local contests, so there were other factors that influenced voters. But there is no denying that these outcomes were not good news for the DPJ.

So what does this mean for the DPJ's staying power at the national level? It would have been better if the momentum the DPJ has enjoyed during the past two years would have continued. The Democrats then would certainly capture the majority in the upper house elections in July. I think the DPJ still could win a pretty solid majority. They already have a majority in the upper chamber, so they might be able to extend it.

The interesting thing is that even with the Nagasaki gubernatorial defeat, there still is no indication of a recovery of support for the LDP. What is more likely is that other political groups will do better in the upper house elections.

For example, Yoshimi Watanabe's party, *Minna no To*, advocates a conservative, administrative-type reform agenda along the lines pursued by Koizumi. Politicians disaffected with the DPJ may decamp to Watanabe's party or yet another party rather than joining the LDP. I also hear that there are real fissures within the LDP. All of this works in the DPJ's favor.

Also, Prime Minister Hatoyama's situation is different from that of former Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa.⁴ First, the decline in support for the Hatoyama government has not translated into an upswing in support for the LDP. And second, and perhaps most significantly, the Hosokawa government was a seven-plus-one coalition.

The DPJ enjoys a huge majority in the lower house and a razor-thin majority in the upper house. It is a plurality party. There may be different streams within the DPJ, but while members are in the ruling party, even if they disagree with what Hatoyama has been doing, they are not going to break away from the party. More likely, there will be LDP defections to the DPJ. Even if the DPJ does not win a majority in the upper house, the Democrats will stay in power through the full term of the lower house until 2012.

USAPC: You mentioned disaffection within the LDP. In addition, the bureaucrats do not enjoy the influence they once did under LDP rule. Has the DPJ's rise to power precipitated the break-up of the so-called "iron triangle?"

Mochizuki: This is potentially the most revolutionary aspect of what the DPJ is trying to do. In some sense, the party may be getting at the heart of the political order that was established during the Meiji era.

During the Occupation era, the power of bureaucracy was not challenged. The United States ruled through the bureaucracy and, in fact, even enhanced its power because the major contender for that power – the military – was gone. The civil bureaucracy, especially the economic-oriented bureaucrats at the Ministry of Finance and the Minister of International Trade and Industry, became so powerful.

The DPJ is quite serious about trying to change this. Rightly or wrongly, of all the different things the DPJ is trying to do, this is the one policy goal that enjoys strong public support. Thirty years ago, there was a feeling that the bureaucrats were the best and the brightest in Japan, who were un-corruptible, had the nation's interests at heart, and worked for low pay. So in a sense, they deserved *amakudari*, the "descent from heaven."⁵

But the last 20 years of discourse has been stridently negative, stemming from numerous corruption scandals and the creation and bursting of the economic bubble, the latter of which Finance Ministry bureaucrats are being held responsible. It doesn't matter whether those criticisms are right or wrong. At the grass roots, there has been a feeling that a lot of Japan's problems were caused by the bureaucrats, who have been this privileged class.

⁴ Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa led Japan from August 9, 1993 to April 28, 1994 and, in so doing, broke the long chain of post-World War II LDP rule. His coalition government was composed of the Japan New Party, the Japan Socialist Party, the Japan Renewal Party (Shinseito), Komeito, the Democratic Socialist Party, the Socialist Democratic Federation, the New Party Sakigake, and RENGO. The latter is an umbrella organization that represents the interests of Japanese union members.

⁵ *Amakudari*, translated as "descent from heaven," refers to the practice where Japanese senior bureaucrats retire to high-profile positions in the private sectors. They "descend" from the "heaven" of very senior bureaucratic positions to the "earth," represented by the business sector.

The DPJ is using the budget-trimming process to rein in the power of the bureaucracy. There has been a lot of resistance, but the fact that these budget meetings have been televised reflects the strong level of public interest. This is not a revolution in the streets, but it's truly revolutionary.

The Democrats more recently developed legislation that would transform the way top officials are appointed. In the past, each ministry would select the people based on seniority. It was very hierarchical and basically entirely up to the ministry.

Now, the DPJ has proposed pooling all of the top officials, from the administrative vice minister all the way down to department chief-level, which is at least four levels down. Through a centralized government process, the best person for each ministry would be selected based on merit and policy expertise. This means that it would be possible for someone much younger to occupy the top position.

In the United States, that happens all the time, but in Japan, this is unheard of. On the up-side, loyalties will change and people lower in the bureaucracy would be better able to challenge the views of the top officials. On the down-side, though, this change could politicize the civil service.

The DPJ also plans to look at the *amakudari* practice. This is something that *Minna no To* chief Watanabe tried to do when he served as Minister of State for Financial Policy and Administrative Reform in Prime Minister Fukuda's government, but he met with a lot of resistance.

The *amakudari* system was based on the notion that the top bureaucrats would retire at the age of 50 or 55. Very few stay until 55. But they're still in the middle of their careers. If you eliminate the *amakudari* system, you then have to figure out what to do with all of these bureaucrats. Do you raise the retirement age?

And if you politicize the bureaucracy too much, you might lose the professionalism and the expertise that is essential whatever government you have. So there will have to be some adjustments in order to change the seniority-based approach to promotion and the *amakudari* system.

Another point to bear in mind is that even though a large number of DPJ members hold government positions, it is a very small group compared to the total number of people in any given ministry, most of whom are career civil servants. So if access to information is critical to policy-making and policy implementation, I wouldn't say that the bureaucracy is as powerless as some observers contend.

There is mutual suspicion in the ministries. It's not clear that the bureaucrats who are supposed to work for the political appointees are indeed working with them. There may be a feeling of isolation on the part of the DPJ appointees.

This situation also has given rise to criticism within the DPJ that those members who do not hold appointed positions are totally outside the policy-making process. They sit in the Diet, but there is no way for them to get involved in decision making and policy advocacy. The LDP had the Policy Affairs Research Council (PARC). While policy was coming up through the bureaucracy, there would be consultation within the LDP committees of the PARC and then it would go up to the administrative vice minister. But the DPJ ended the activities of their version of PARC after winning the August 2009 election, so there is a lot of disgruntlement on the part of the members who are not in government.

Those DPJ members who do have appointed positions are so few that they are overworked. Moreover, they are trying to get access to information, but it is not clear that the bureaucracy is being totally cooperative. What this has created is a very complicated but also very ineffective policy-making process. And because the policy process is not clear, that is why the DPJ is experiencing these governing problems.