

## *The DPJ Leadership Race and the Situation in East Asia*

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The Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) elected a new party leader on Sept. 14. Since Japan has a cabinet system and the DPJ is the ruling party this leadership race amounts to the election of a new prime minister. The leadership battle was fierce, because former DPJ Secretary General Ichiro Ozawa, who challenged incumbent party leader and Japanese Prime Minister Naoto Kan for the post, commands a strong following within the party, whereas the electorate and public opinion tend to support Kan. As it turned out Ozawa secured almost as many votes from ruling party legislators as Kan, but due to a political fund scandal and an extramarital affair he fared badly among local assembly members rank-and-file supporters. In the end Kan successfully defended the party presidency with a wider margin than expected, thus retaining the prime minister's post, while Ozawa, known as backroom dealer and election strategists, suffered defeat.

East Asia currently faces tension since the U.S. has been holding a string of joint military exercises with each South Korea, Japan and Vietnam in response to the Cheonan Incident, and the East Sea Fleet of the Chinese People's Liberation Army has staged large scale live ammunition drills. There's no doubt that the outcome of the leadership race in Japan's

ruling DPJ will have an impact on the situation described above.

Over the past dozen years South Korea has been cozying up to Beijing. As bilateral economic and political ties were gradually normalized, South Korea's relations with the United States became increasingly distant. When the DPJ took power in Japan, a fundamental contradiction between Washington and Tokyo emerged with regard to security and military affairs. But then the sinking of the South Korean vessel Cheonan by North Korea completely reversed the situation. China did not want to endorse the South Korean investigation report of the Cheonan Incident and even demanded that wording in the United Nations sanctions resolution, that was unfavorable for North Korea, be deleted. And Washington, for its part, imposed sanctions against Pyongyang that were stricter than the U.N. sanctions and intensified its joint military exercises with South Korea so that the situation in East Asia returned to a Cold War-like state. A DPJ leadership election taking place at this time has of course a major impact.

First, it is generally believed that in foreign policy Ozawa tends to seek closer ties with China, while pulling away from the U.S. Ozawa once grandly led a large delegation of more than 150 Diet members to Beijing

and took advantage of anti-U.S. sentiment among the local people on Okinawa to dare the U.S. military to relocate Futenma base out of Okinawa. But now that Kan continues as prime minister, he will uphold the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty, while the Cheonan Incident gave Washington an even better opportunity to strengthen the security relationship with its allies in the Asia-Pacific region. Ozawa and Kan differ with regard to their policies toward the U.S. and China. Thanks to Kan's victory the old policy of security cooperation between Washington and Tokyo can therefore be continued, which will also have a major impact on the situation in East Asia, in particular with regard to the current Diaoyutai problem.

Japan is notorious for frequently changing its prime minister. Following the five-year rule of previous Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, Japan's prime minister has changed every year since 2006. Had Kan lost this election he would have been in power for just three months. And while Ozawa is good at organizing and orchestrating election campaigns, he is saddled with critical negative baggage such as the political fund scandal. Japanese voters are not willing to forget this, so that had he won the party presidency his government would still have been only a shortlived one. Japan also finds it hard to win international trust due its revolving door of prime ministers.

Therefore Japanese voters are fed up with the frequent replacement of the prime minister. A number of recent opinion polls has shown that about 70 percent of the Japanese public want Kan to continue as prime minister, about four times more than those who would prefer Ozawa. Now that Kan remains at the helm of the DPJ he has temporarily averted the danger of becoming another short-lived prime minister. That Japan looks set for a longer lasting government will also be positive for its international status.

Still the fact that Kan remains in power has not eliminated the uncertainties that the Japanese voters are harboring with regard to the future. Kan has emphasized that he wants to change Japan's bureaucratic politics, that he hopes to bring about participatory democracy and a society based on mutual support. Yet these are not the most pressing problems that Japan presently faces. The Japanese people care most about economic recovery, their aging society and livelihood issues. Following Kan's victory, the Japanese yen temporarily appreciated to 83.09 yen against the U.S. dollar, reaching a 15-year high. But the situation in the global currency markets subsequently somewhat relaxed, because Kan took a hard-line stance with a two trillion yen intervention. In the future Kan's main job will be boosting the economy.

Kan's victory will not lead to major changes in Taiwan-Japan relations in the

short term. Presently it has become less likely that Japanese policy will affect Taiwan, while the possibility of Taiwanese policy affecting Japan has risen. The crux of the problem is whether the government of Taiwan President Ma Ying-jeou will adopt a hostile stance toward Japan to underpin its “leaning toward China” attitude. Shifting cross-strait relations cause the most severe impact for Japan. Tokyo worries that Taiwan’s excessive pro-China course will cause the regional power balance to shift in favor of China. Bilateral relations were already clouded in 2008 when the (Taiwanese recreational fishing boat) United sank after it was rammed by a Japan Coast Guard vessel and when Masaki Saito, then Japan’s top representative in Taiwan, stated that “Taiwan’s status is undetermined.” Japan even worries that Taipei and Beijing might move toward tacit cooperation over the disputed Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands, which has made Taiwan-Japan relations even tenser. This has particularly been the case since Japan seized the Chinese trawler Minjinyu 5179 off the Diaoyu Islands on Sept. 7. China has filed a protest with Japan, while patriotic organizations from Taiwan and Hong Kong have set sail for the Diaoyu Islands to proclaim sovereignty over the isles. The Ma government dispatched several Coast Guard Administration vessels to protect them, leading to a standoff with Japan Coast Guard patrol boats. Taipei even summoned Japan’s top representative

in Taiwan, Tadashi Imai, to reiterate the sovereignty of the Republic of China over the Diaoyu Islands. The government stressed that the patriotic groups had initiated the trip themselves and that Japan had no business interfering. Clearly such an approach will cause many uncertainties in bilateral ties.

Taiwan and Japan have a special relationship not least because of historic, geographic, humanistic, economic and political aspects. Among these bilateral trade cooperation plays a quite important role. Taiwan needs to draw support from Japan’s power and status in the regional economy and must therefore consider and promote opportunities for greater cooperation between the two sides. But as tensions run high in Northeast Asia the Ma government, nonetheless, one-sidedly hopes to speed up Taiwan’s incorporation into the Chinese economic system. The Ma government’s “pro-China” stance in dealing with the Diaoyu Islands dispute in particular has deepened concern that Taiwan-Japan relations will not only fail to make major progress, but even might face the latent danger of turning sour. **B**