



Institutional Foundation for the Abe Government's Political Power—The Development of Prime Ministerial Control and Responsibility for National Policy

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The Five Years of the 2nd Abe Administration

“The German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, who put Germany on the path to recovery after it lost World War II, became Chancellor when he was 74, continued in the job until 88, and then passed away one year later. To avoid any misunderstanding, I have absolutely no intention of continuing on in this job for that long, but what I am trying to say is that if everyone around the world is able to make full use of their abilities then the world will become a more fulfilling place and everyone will be able to lead more fulfilling lives.” (Website of the Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet)



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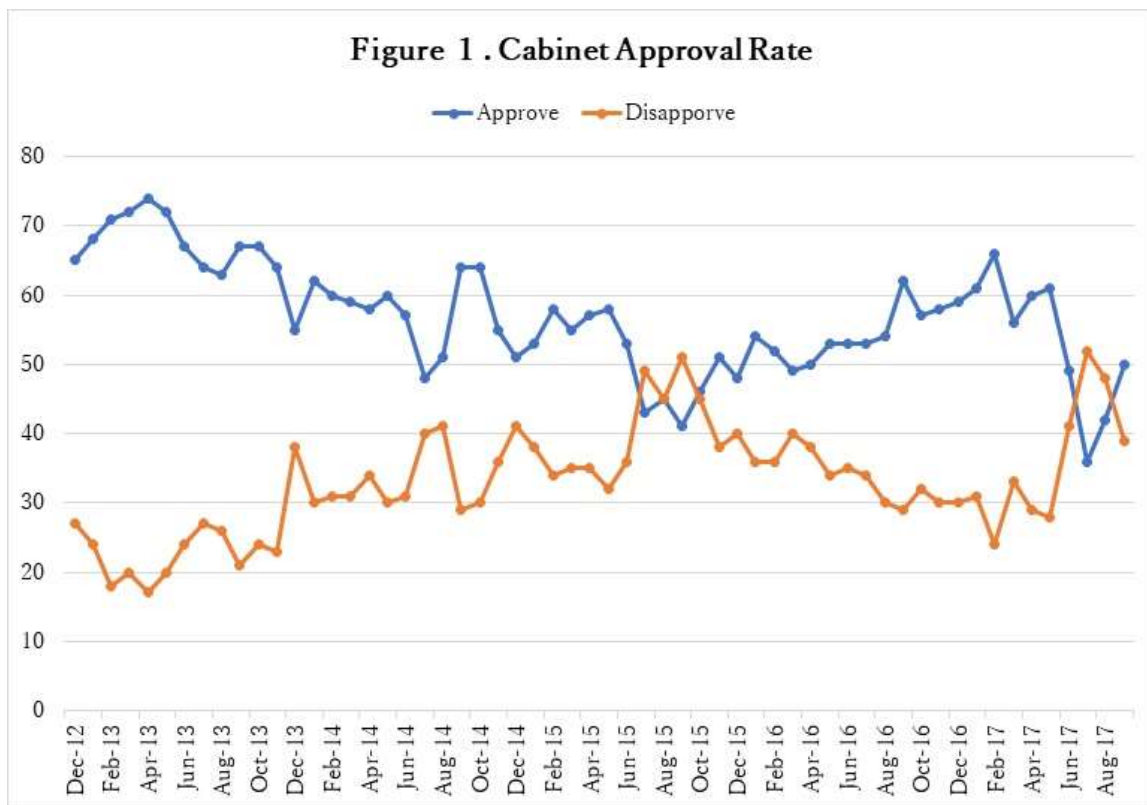
Prime Minister Abe Shinzo made this comment when he convened the first meeting of the Council for Designing 100-Year Life Society on September 11, 2017.

Prime Minister Abe reshuffled his Cabinet on August 3, 2017 to halt the drop in his approval ratings due to the Kake Gakuen issue. The Prime Minister has identified the “revolution in human resources development” as the most pressing issue for the reshuffled Cabinet, and established the Council for Designing 100-Year Life Society to discuss specific measures.

Although there is clearly no question of his term extending to the fourteen years Adenauer spent in office, Prime Minister Abe's present term is approaching the six-year mark, reaching a total of 2101 days on September 25, 2017. This is the third longest tenure of a Prime Minister in the postwar period. In December this year, the Second Abe administration (here, this generic term refers to the second and third Abe Cabinets) will mark its fifth anniversary in office. If Abe scores a win in the general elections held this month, he will be eyeing the possibility of outlasting the term of Sato Eisaku, the longest serving Prime Minister in the postwar period, much as he says “I have absolutely no intention of continuing on in this job for that long.”

The Second Abe administration has been characterized by its ability to secure high approval ratings from the public with the exception of the periods when he pushed through the Act on the Protection of Specially Designated Secrets, and the new security legislation (**Fig. 1**). Prime Minister Abe also has a certain number of achievements under his belt. In terms of diplomacy

and security guarantees, he has exercised “diplomacy with a bird’s eye view of the globe,” visiting a total of 127 countries and regions. He has worked with the Obama administration to deepen the alliance between Japan and the United States, and he has also built stable relations with the Trump administration. He has succeeded in having the negotiation of the TPP 11 concluded in January 2018. He also has reached an agreement with the EU in the FTA negotiations in July 2018.



He has facilitated the right to collective defense under certain conditions, and established security legislation. On the economic side, he has realized a number of policies including resolving the deflationary recession, reducing corporate taxes, dismantling the policy of reducing acreage of rice cultivation (*gentan*), reforming corporate governance, and lifting the ban on private residences providing lodging services (*minpaku*).

Commenting on the stability of the Abe administration, the mass media now talk about *Abe ikkyo* (the Abe government’s political power) or *kantei shudo* (Prime Minister-led initiatives). One of the factors behind the stability is that compared to his first administration, Prime Minister Abe himself is now more skilled at controlling the administration.

But, more importantly, the power of the Japanese Prime Minister was systematically strengthened at the time of launching the second Abe Cabinet. In Japan, two major reforms—political reform and restructuring of ministries and agencies—were implemented between the 1990s and the early 2000s and prime ministerial power has been expanding ever since. The Abe government’s political power overlaps with this buildup. We also need to pay attention to the

fact that the Prime Minister's power base has grown even stronger under the second Abe administration.

But the growing power of the Prime Minister is also exposing cracks. This has been apparent in the past few months with fluctuating support for the Cabinet and the lowest Cabinet approval ratings and the highest disapproval rate since the launch of the administration.

Since February 2017, the Abe Cabinet has been criticized for selling state-owned land to the Moritomo Gakuen, for approving an application by the Kake Gakuen to open a veterinary school in a National Strategic Special Zone, and for concealing daily activity logs from the SDF troops posted to South Sudan on peace-keeping missions. The criticisms against the administration re-exasperated after it had become apparent in March this year that the Ministry of Finance had forged the official document, which was used to approve the selling of the state-owned land to the Moritomo Gakuen after the approval.

Cabinet approval ratings have fallen sharply since May when the spotlight was turned on the Kake Gakuen issue. Even a survey by the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, where one might generally expect high approval ratings for the Abe Cabinet, recorded a decline in the approval ratings from 61 percent in May to 49 percent in June, and 36 percent in July while the disapproval rating rose from 28 percent in May to 52 percent in July (**Fig. 1**). As a result, the LDP suffered an overwhelming defeat in the Tokyo Metropolitan Elections in July capturing a mere 23 seats in the 127-seat assembly.

The Abe Cabinet was roundly criticized during the phases of deliberating the Specially Designated Secrets Act and the security legislation. But at this time, Prime Minister Abe himself is facing unprecedented and strong criticism over the Moritomo Gakuen and Kake Gakuen issues. In the *Yomiuri shimbun* opinion poll, this is indicated point-blank by the sharp rise in the percentage of respondents who answered that they could not trust the Prime Minister—from 29 percent in May to 48 percent in June.

Why is the person of the Prime Minister criticized? To start with, the two issues have something in common. Firstly, there are the suspicions that a special relationship may exist between the Prime Minister and the operators of Moritomo Gakuen and Kake Gakuen. Secondly, the Prime Minister has invited suspicions of the two educational corporations affording preferential treatment. Rather than the right or wrong of any decisions involving Moritomo Gakuen and Kake Gakuen, another point is whether or not documentation exists that clarifies the relationship between the Prime Minister and public officials who were directly responsible for making a series of policy decisions related to Moritomo Gakuen and Kake Gakuen.

So far, there is absolutely no evidence that the Prime Minister directly issued any instructions in the two affairs of the Moritomo Gakuen and the Kake Gakuen.

In the case of the Kake Gakuen issue, we have leaks of internal government documents. There are, however, misgivings concerning the testimony of the persons involved and suspicions that persons close to the Prime Minister may have exercised their influence.

There are only “suspicions” that persons close to the Prime Minister have exercised their influence in the policy decision process. There is no conclusive evidence of influence-peddling in the documentation and testimony at the center of attention. The internal MEXT documents that have been brought to light are no more than summaries of statements by Hagiuda Koichi, Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary, and the Vice-Minister for Policy Coordination compiled by civil servants at the ministry. The Prime Minister has also denied any involvement during deliberations in the Diet, using the phrase “impression management” in his rebuttals (Committee on Audit and Oversight of Administration, June 5, 2017).

But the strengthening of prime ministerial powers over the past twenty years provides the context for the extent of the attention on the Moritomo Gakuen and Kake Gakuen affairs, and for the criticism of the person of the Prime Minister.

It is symbolic that all the politicians and bureaucrats who are the focus of attention where Moritomo Gakuen and Kake Gakuen are concerned are persons whose jobs bring them into the periphery of the Prime Minister. For example, did Hagiuda Koichi, the Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary at the time, exert his influence on the process of selecting Kake Gakuen as a business operator in a special deregulation zone? Parliamentary officials noted for their competence, including Ozawa Ichiro in the Takeshita Cabinet and Yosano Kaoru in the second Hashimoto Ryutaro Cabinet, have held the post of Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary in the past. But, they were both experienced Cabinet ministers, having clocked up seven election wins each. In contrast, Hagiuda, the previous Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary, who had the record of having won four elections, had had no Cabinet minister experience.

Reflecting on the series of issues in a television program broadcast on August 5 2017, the Prime Minister said, “As the proverb says that ‘don't do up your shoe in a melon-patch to avoid suspicions,’ it is regretful that I always have to consider the possibility of misrepresentation.”

In short, public opinion takes a stern view of the behavior of the Prime Minister because prime ministerial power has grown stronger, increasing the potential for strong criticism of any move that can be misrepresented. Although detailed testimony is an issue for the future, it has been pointed out that the broad coverage of the scandals involving lawmakers from the ruling parties in recent years has even influenced the Cabinet approval ratings (e.g., *Tokyo shimbun* dated July 19, 2017). The context here is, conceivably, the increasing power of the Prime Minister. In short, the Prime Minister now exerts more control within the administration, and as the head of the organization, he is perhaps held to account in a stricter manner than before.

In this article, I will keep the issues described above in mind while investigating the nature of prime ministerial power in the current political structure in Japan

To start with, I would like to discuss how the power of the Prime Minister is understood. I would also like to reflect on the gradual expansion of the power of the Prime Minister since the 1990s. In addition, I would like to demonstrate in detail how the power of the Prime Minister has further expanded since the launch of the second Abe Cabinet in 2012. Lastly, after addressing

some anticipated objections to the arguments presented in this article, I would like to consider the present general election.

I would particularly like to focus the discussion on two matters. Firstly, the gradual expansion of prime ministerial power under previous administrations, which provides the context for the strong power exercised by the Prime Minister under the present Abe administration. Secondly, since the Prime Minister has obtained strong powers, he is in a position where he can introduce reforms to further expand his own powers.

Many researchers have already focused on the recent expansion of prime ministerial power including *Kantei gaiko* (Diplomacy Led by the Prime Minister) by Shinoda Tomohito, *Nihon no tochi kozo* (Political Structures in Japan) by Iio Jun, *Koizumi seiken* (The Koizumi Administration) by Uchiyama Yu, and *Shusho shihai—Nihon seiji no henbo* (Prime Ministerial Control—Transforming Politics in Japan) by Takenaka Harukata, among others. There has been a particularly strong focus on Prime Minister Koizumi Junichi, but recently the published research is looking at the changes since the Koizumi administration. For example, *Abe Ikkyo no nazo* (The Riddle of the Abe Government's Power) by Makihara Izuru, *Jiminto—Ikkyo no Jitsuzo* (The LDP—The Reality of Government Power) by Nakakita Koji, and *Shusho seiji no seido bunseki* (An Institutional Analysis of Politics Led by the Prime Minister) by Machidori Satoshi. I would like to further develop the discussion based on this series of research.

Defining the Power of the Prime Minister

The power of the Prime Minister is supported by the following three elements. Firstly, there is the authority of the Prime Minister. Secondly, the resources, such as the politicians, staff, and organizations, which the Prime Minister can turn to in drafting policy. Thirdly, public opinion support.

The Prime Minister's power can be further divided into two parts: his power as the head of the ruling party, and his legal authority as prime minister.

In evaluating the power of the Prime Minister, we need to take into account the politicians, staff, and organizations assisting him as he would find it difficult to show strong leadership in the process of drafting policy were he not given these resources.

In this article, I will focus on the civil servants and the organizations that are recognized in law as resources available for the Prime Minister. Basically, I will treat the civil servants and organizations in the Cabinet Secretariat, and the civil servants and organizations in the Cabinet Office as the Prime Minister's resources.

In addition, public support is important because of the current electoral system. Under the single-seat constituency system, the political parties fight the election race with the party leader as the face of the election whose popularity influences the results for the party. The popularity of the Prime Minister is important for the ruling party. Whether or not the Prime Minister is able to freely exercise his power depends on whether or not he has secured sufficient support among

the public. Due to space limitations, I will only point out how public opinion acts on the power of the Prime Minister.

The phrase “Kantei Shudo,” which can be translated as “the Prime Minister’s Office initiatives,” is often used when the Prime Minister and the politicians, bureaucrats, and organizations around him put on a display of strength while drafting policy. Researchers and experts differ subtly on the range of the “Prime Minister’s Office” (Please note that Prime Minister’s Office exists as a name of the building. Yet, so such office exists as an institution within the Japanese government.) In addition to the person of the Prime Minister, the Prime Minister’s authority as well as the institutions and resources which directly support the Prime Minister can be understood as the “Prime Minister’s Office.”

Let us start from the authority of the Prime Minister. The power of endorsing candidacy and the right to allocate political funds are important sources of the prime minister as the leader of the ruling party. These two types of powers have become politically important because of the political reform introduced in 1994.

Under the political reform of 1994, the electoral system for the House of Representatives was reorganized from the SNTV (Single Non-Transferable Voting System) to a system combining the first-past-the-post voting system with the proportional representation system. For a candidate considering a run in an election under the single-seat constituency system, party endorsement is vitally important to win in elections. A candidate’s ranking is also important when running under the proportional representation system. The controls over political funds have also been strengthened. As a result, it is no longer easy for individual politicians to acquire political funding. In the meantime, as public subsidies to the parties have been introduced.

The party leadership with the head of the party at the top controls party endorsement to candidates in the elections and has the power over how to distribute political funds within the parties. Therefore, under the present system, the head of the party can project a strong influence on the party politicians.

The impact of the political reforms is gradually penetrated into Japanese politics. At the time of the general elections in 1996 and 2000, the electoral districts were adjusted among some of the ruling party candidates with the final decisions frequently taken by the party leadership. As a result of the tighter restrictions on the collection of the political funds after 1994 reform, there has also been a steady decline in the ability of factions to obtain funds. As a result, factions can no longer wield as much power as they did prior to the reforms.

The increasing power of the Prime Minister is vividly demonstrated in the way Cabinet posts are filled. Traditionally, the Prime Minister would take account of the influence of the factions when allocating posts in his Cabinet. He would also respect the recommendations of the factions when appointing the cabinet ministers. The Prime Minister had limited discretion to select Cabinet ministers. However, when Prime Minister Obuchi Keizo assumed office in July 1998, he was able to appoint about half of the Cabinet ministers at his discretion.

The reorganization of central government ministries and agencies in 2001 is important when considering the legal authority of the Prime Minister. Oddly enough, until that time, the Prime Minister of Japan had no clear formal authority to propose policy. In the Cabinet, it was the ministers who had the prerogatives to draft policy. Of course, the Prime Minister could take the initiative on substantial policy proposals. In initiating policies, he had to rely on informal power deriving from the position of the prime minister.

When the ministries and agencies were reorganized, amendments to the Cabinet Act assigned the Prime Minister the authority to propose policies. Specifically, Article 4-2 of the Cabinet Act was amended to affirm that the Prime Minister “may propose basic principles and related matters concerning important policies of the Cabinet.”

In addition, Article 12-2 of the Cabinet Act established that one of the tasks of the Cabinet Secretariat was the “planning, drafting, and overall coordination concerning the basic principles involving important policies of the Cabinet.” In short, providing assistance to the Prime Minister when he was formulating important policies was added to the tasks of the Cabinet Secretariat.

Prior to the reorganization of ministries and agencies, it was recognized that the Cabinet Secretariat retained the power to coordinate policy among the ministries and agencies and it was possible to rely on this power to draft policy. For example, the Cabinet Secretariat formulated the PKO bill, which involved several ministries and agencies including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Japan Defense Agency. However, this was an exception and it was rare for the Cabinet Secretariat to take initiatives in formulating policy.

The Cabinet Office was established as a body to assist the Prime Minister with the formulation of policy in addition to the Cabinet Secretariat. The Council on Economic and Fiscal Policy for drafting economic and fiscal policies, and the Council for Science and Technology Policy for discussing science and technology policy (currently, the Council for Science, Technology and Innovation) were set up under the Cabinet Office.

Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro took office in April 2001 amid the expansion of the authority of the Prime Minister and the enhancement of the supporting organizations.

Prime Minister Koizumi largely ignored the intentions of the faction in appointing ministers to his Cabinet. He also implemented one policy after another that would have been unthinkable under a conventional LDP administration including cuts in public construction expenditure, the privatization of the Japan Highway Public Corporation, and the privatization of the postal services.

Prime Minister Koizumi used the Cabinet Secretariat and the Cabinet Office when designing the policies that he wanted to focus on. In the process of formulating economic and fiscal policies, in particular, he made maximum use of the clout of the Council on Economic and Fiscal Policy, essentially using the Council as the forum where he made decisions on key policies such as reducing public works expenditure, writing off non-performing loans, and privatizing the postal services. Takenaka Heizo, Prime Minister Koizumi’s appointee to the post of Minister of

State for Economic and Fiscal Policy, was put in charge of managing the Council from April 2001 to October 2005.

Prime Minister Koizumi also made use of the Cabinet Secretariat with the formulation of important legislation. In terms of economic policies, for example, the Cabinet Secretariat prepared the bill related to the privatization of the postal services to implement the privatization, and the bill establishing the Promotion Committee for the Privatization of the Four Highway-Related Public Corporations to discuss the privatization of the Japan Highway Public Corporation. As security policies, the Cabinet Secretariat formulated the bill on anti-terrorism special measures to facilitate cooperation with the war on terror after 9/11, and the bill on special measures for humanitarian relief and reconstruction to dispatch Self-Defense Forces to Iraq after the Iraq War.

After the Koizumi Cabinet

Prime ministerial powers have steadily expanded since the Koizumi Cabinet. Nakakita Koji, one of the authors listed above, has carried out a detailed verification of the expanding authority of recent Prime Ministers as leaders of the ruling party. Nakakita focuses on the percentage of politicians with no Cabinet experience among those who have been elected to LDP seats in at least six elections as an indicator of the Prime Minister's enhanced authority over personnel issues. Calculating the percentages immediately before general elections from the 1980s to the early 2010s, he points out that although the percentage used to be below 15 percent, it has leapt to the upper 20 percent level under the second Abe Cabinet.

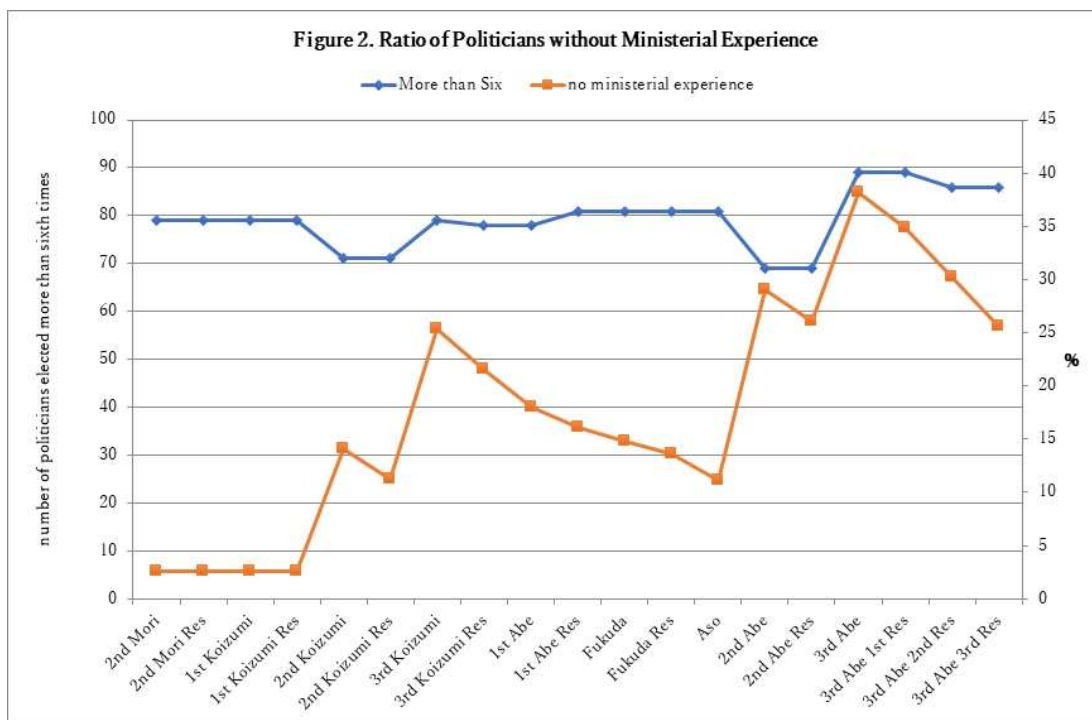
This indicator is significant because of substantial decline in the importance of factions in recent years. Conventionally, faction-related indicators were frequently used to scrutinize the strength of the Prime Minister's power in providing patronage, but it is now highly doubtful that these indicators have the ability to measure such strength.

The fading importance of factions is also indicated by the increase in Diet members who do not belong to a faction. At present, the number of members of the House of Representatives who are not aligned with any faction has risen to sixty, which is on the same scale as the number of members in the largest faction, the Hosoda faction.

The appointments to the posts of Chief Cabinet Secretary and Deputy Cabinet Secretary under the second Abe administration also symbolize the dwindling presence of the factions. Traditionally, with LDP administrations, the Prime Minister has appointed members of his own faction to the posts of Chief Cabinet Secretary and Deputy Cabinet Secretary. There are some precedents, including the appointment of Chief Cabinet Secretary Gotoda Masaharu (Tanaka faction) under the Nakasone Yasuhiro Cabinet, but, ultimately, these were exceptions. The second Abe Cabinet appointed Suga Yoshihide as Chief Cabinet Secretary, and Kato Katsunobu and Seko Hiroshige as Deputy Cabinet Secretaries, but Seko is the only one who is a member of the Prime Minister's original faction (currently, Abe is not aligned with any faction).

Consequently, the percentage of Diet members who have been elected at least six times without joining the Cabinet is a significant indicator replacing the faction-related indicator. The customary practice in the LDP of focusing on the number of election wins is thought to have begun at the time of the Sato Eisaku Cabinet. There is no doubt that the purpose was to guarantee the loyalty of LDP backbenchers to the prime minister and to restrain rebellions. If the power of the Prime Minister increases, it should be possible to step away from these practices and to appoint the right person to the right position as he wishes.

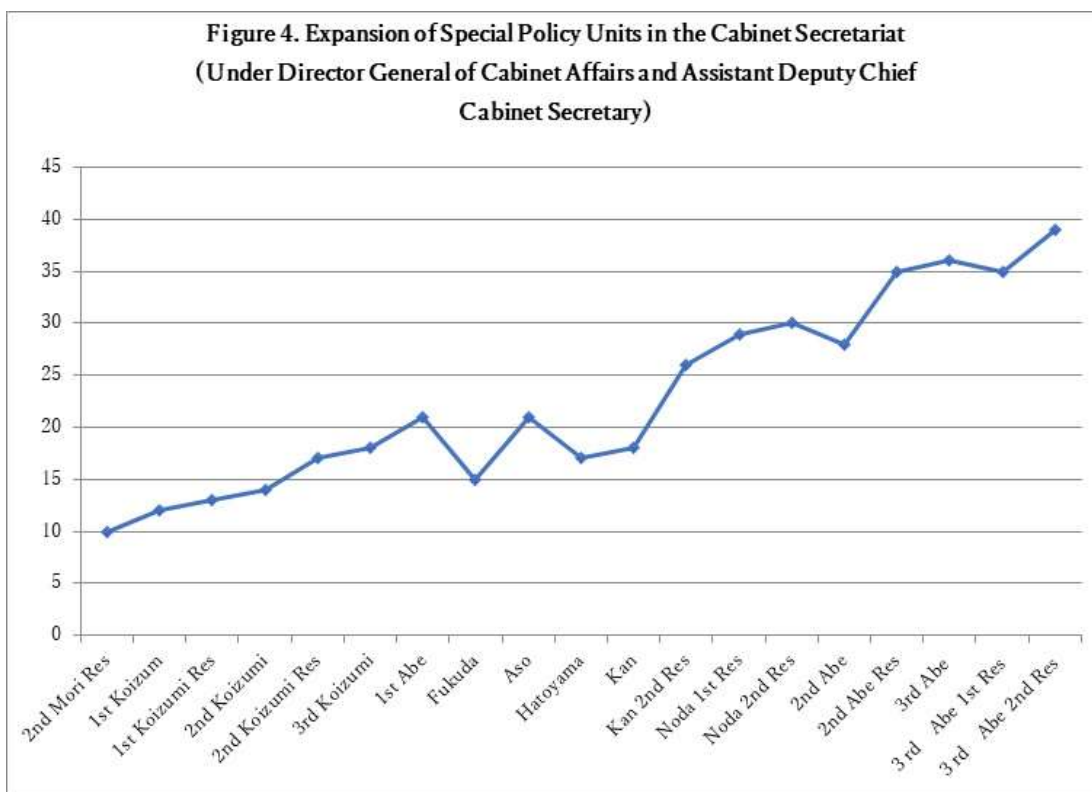
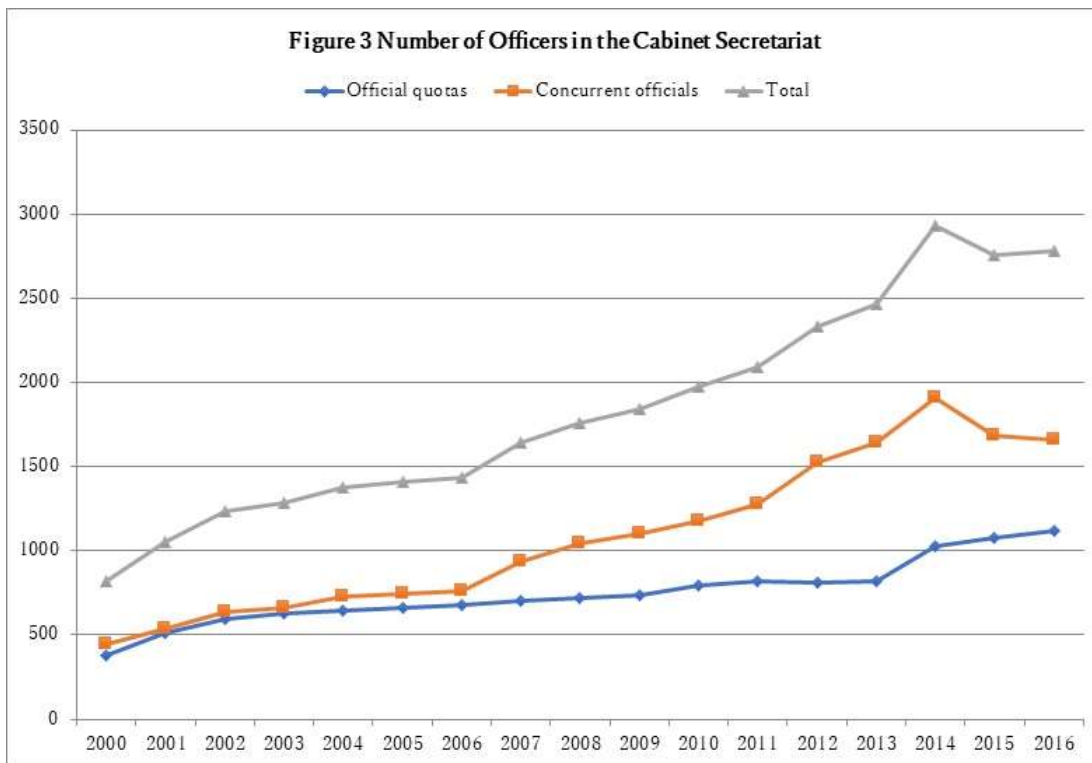
I have worked out the figures for each Cabinet from the second Mori Yoshiro Cabinet formed in July 2000 to the third reshuffle of the third Abe Cabinet. My conclusions are essentially the same as those in Nakakita’s study. The trend has remained unchanged since the 2014 general election when the percentage of Diet members who had been elected at least six times without joining the Cabinet leapt to 38 percent under the third Abe Cabinet. The level after the third Cabinet reshuffle was 26 percent, which is still high compared to the past (**Fig. 2**, based on the *Kokkai Binran*).



Next, I will consider changes in the Prime Minister’s authority and support system, both of which are aspects where prime ministerial power is expanding.

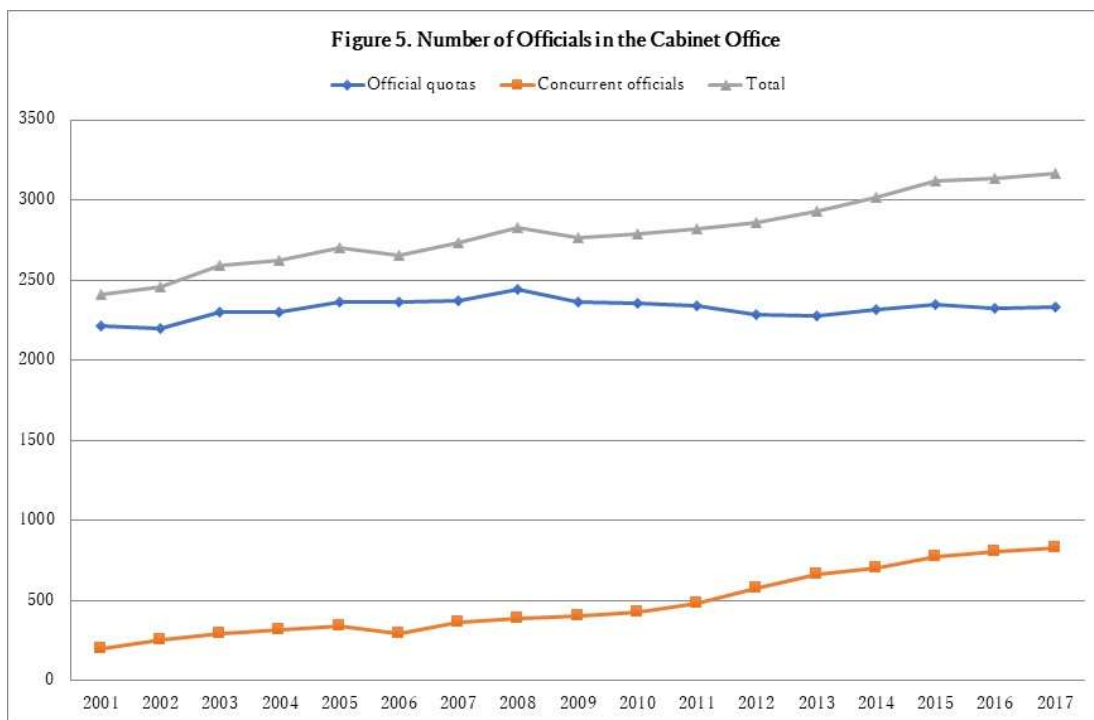
To start with, staff numbers at the Cabinet Secretariat, which is the core of the Prime Minister’s support organization, are rising rapidly. In fiscal 2000, prior to the reorganization of the ministries and agencies, there were no more than 377 regular staff at the Cabinet Secretariat, but by fiscal 2016 the number had risen to 1,119. With the number of persons holding concurrent posts also rising, the total number of regular staff and concurrent posts was 822 in fiscal 2000.

By fiscal 2016, the number had more than tripled to 2,779 (Fig. 3, based on the Cabinet Secretariat website, and other sources).



Within the Cabinet Secretariat, the number of divisions under the Cabinet Affairs Office and the Assistant Chief Cabinet Secretary, thought to participate closely in drafting policy, have also risen rapidly. In brief, under the reshuffled second Mori Cabinet immediately after the reorganization of the ministries and agencies, there were only ten divisions. In contrast, the number increased to 39 after the second reshuffle of the third Abe Cabinet (**Fig. 4**, based on the *Kokkai Binran*, and other sources).

The Cabinet Office organization is also expanding. There were 2,210 regular staff at the time of the reorganization of the ministries and agencies in fiscal 2001, but the number had risen to 2,324 by fiscal 2016 (**Fig. 5**, based on the Cabinet Secretariat website, and other sources). In addition, as outlined in the Act for the Establishment of the Cabinet Office, the Cabinet Office was responsible for 76 administrative tasks in 2001, but by the end of 2016, the number had reached 100. The number of councils under the Cabinet Office has also increased from 24 in 2001 to 39 in 2016.



There are three trends in the expansion of the Prime Minister’s support system.

Firstly, the Cabinet Secretariat, the Cabinet Office, and the number of Cabinet Councils have been expanding continuously over the long term. This trend was no different under the administrations of the Democratic Party of Japan when policymaking was unstable.

Secondly, in terms of the structure of the Cabinet Secretariat, there was a period between 2009 and 2012 when the number of internal groups specifically created to take charge of policy decreased briefly due to changes in the political administration (**Fig. 4**). This suggests a link with policy reviews when administrations change.

Thirdly, the Cabinet Secretariat structure and the Cabinet Councils have expanded rapidly since the advent of the second Abe Cabinet. At the end of 2012, shortly after the inauguration of the Cabinet, the Cabinet Secretariat had 807 regular staff, but by the end of 2016, the number had risen to 1,119. When concurrent posts are included, the numbers have expanded from 2,331 to 2,779 posts (**Fig. 3**). Directly after the inauguration of the second Abe Cabinet, there were 28 policy organizations, but by the third Abe Cabinet, the number had risen to 39 (**Fig. 4**).

As a result, the Prime Minister, the Cabinet Secretariat, and the Cabinet Office are now directly responsible for an increasing number of policy domains. The current Prime Minister is, of course, in charge of foreign diplomacy, security guarantees, and the economy, but his brief also ranges the whole gamut of policymaking from regional development to social security, and from the oceans to space.

The Second and Third Abe Cabinets

I would also like to take a close look at how prime ministerial powers have changed under the second and third Abe Cabinets.

There are two distinct features. Firstly, institutional reforms have further broadened the legal authority of the prime minister. Secondly, as I have already described, the Prime Minister's supporting institutions have been expanded.

The second Abe Cabinet has reformed the civil service based on the Basic Act on Reform of National Public Officers' Systems enacted by the Fukuda Yasuo Cabinet. In July 2013, an office for civil service reform was set up under the Headquarters for the Promotion of Administrative Reform at the Cabinet Secretariat to formulate a bill to deliver the reforms.

In November the same year, the bill related to the civil service reform was approved by Cabinet decision and the legislation was enacted in April 2014. The legislation has two key dimensions. Firstly, to increase the Prime Minister's authority over the civil service and its executive leadership. The Prime Minister has taken charge of the civil service system, traditionally the responsibility of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications. The Prime Minister has also acquired more political power in making the list which put the candidates for high ranking officials at the grade of Deputy Director-General and higher at each ministry and agency. Reasonably, the Prime Minister has entrusted the use of this authority to the Chief Cabinet Secretary.

Those who have the authority to manage personnel affairs, including each minister, must choose among the candidates listed in this list when making appointments to leadership posts. They also have to consult with the Prime Minister and the Chief Cabinet Secretary.

The Cabinet Bureau of Personnel Affairs was set up in May 2014 to manage preparation of the list of the candidates for high ranking positions and administer the civil service as a whole.

Prior to the reforms, the Prime Minister and the Chief Cabinet Secretary exercised a certain degree of influence on the appointment of senior public officers at the ministries and agencies.

In May 1997, the second Hashimoto Cabinet agreed to set up an advisory panel on reviewing Cabinet personnel affairs, which meant that all senior positions at the grade of Director and higher had to be reviewed in advance by the Chief Cabinet Secretary and the Deputy Cabinet Secretary. On such occasions, the opinion of the Prime Minister would, of course, be taken into consideration. But, it must be remembered that it was the relevant Minister who had the right to appoint and dismiss bureaucrats and the authority to independently manage personnel affairs. The Prime Minister and the Chief Cabinet Secretary may very well have rejected a proposed appointment, but it is difficult to find any examples where they would have endorsed a specific candidate for a post at a ministry or agency.

In this regard, Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga has made use of the new system to actively promote certain bureaucrats to senior positions in ministries and agencies. Specific examples include the vice-ministers at the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries, and at the Ministry of Defense, as well as the Commandant of the Japan Coast Guard. In an interview with the *Asahi shimbun*, the Chief Cabinet Secretary has personally acknowledged that he has used his influence (*Asahi shimbun*, online edition, February 27, 2017).

Another important institutional change was implemented at the same time as the civil service reforms in 2014. In brief, the Prime Minister gained the authority to set up new organizations and to make staffing decisions at the ministries and agencies (Cabinet Act Article 12-2, items 13 and 14). Seeing that the Prime Minister considers policy for the whole of Japan, it is only natural that he has the authority to make decisions about organization and staffing at each ministry. However, in the past, these tasks have been under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications. In this respect as well, the Prime Minister's influence over each ministry seems to be growing stronger.

Establishing the National Security Council

In December 2013, the Abe Cabinet reorganized the Security Council, which designed such policies as principles of Japan's defense policy and National Defense Program Guidelines, into the National Security Council (NSC). In January 2014, the National Security Secretariat was established as the secretariat for the Council.

The main purpose of the Security Council had been to discuss important matters related to the fundamental principles of defense policy as well as the National Defense Program Guidelines. In contrast, the National Security Council also discusses the principles for foreign and defense policies related Japanese security in addition to the policies discussed by the Security Council. Specifically, in principal, members of the 4-Minister meeting, which discusses foreign and defense policies are limited to the Prime Minister, the Chief Cabinet Secretary, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the Minister of Defense. The establishment of this meeting was a major reform.

The Cabinet Secretariat prepared the bill to revise the law to create a National Security Council and the bill was enacted in November 2013. Since the establishment of the National Security Council and the National Security Secretariat, the Prime Minister's ability to formulate security policies has increased significantly. The 4-Minister Meeting is convened regularly. Since the Assistant Chief Cabinet Secretaries, respectively seconded from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defense, serve as Deputy Secretaries General of the National Security Secretariat, it has become possible to coordinate foreign and defense policy much more effectively on a constant basis.

Within the Cabinet Secretariat, there are three Assistant Chief Cabinet Secretaries who coordinate policies involving various ministries. The way they coordinate security policies have drastically changed since the establishment of the Security Secretariat.

Their predecessor organizations are the Cabinet Office for Internal Affairs (COIA), the Cabinet Office for External Affairs (COEA), and the Cabinet Office for Security Affairs (COSA), which were set up by the Nakasone Cabinet in July 1986. The posts have often been held by officials seconded from the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Defense. The COEA was responsible for coordinating matters related international relations, while the COSA coordinated policies related to national security. Prior to the revisions, Article 4 of the Order for the Organization of the Cabinet Secretariat clearly specified that matters under the jurisdiction of the COSA were "excluded" from the jurisdiction of the COEA. It is necessary to coordinate foreign policy and defense policy to design security policies, but since COEA and COSA were separated, the Cabinet Secretariat could not make effective coordination of security policies. (In April 1998, the COSA also assumed responsibility for crisis management and the name was changed to the Cabinet Office for Security Affairs and Crisis Management).

The supporting institutions for the Prime Minister have expanded in an area which is not often noticed. In May 2013, the Abe Cabinet amended the Cabinet Act to establish the post of Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary for Information Technology Policy with responsibility for coordinating issues involving information and communication technologies. The Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary for Information Technology Policy works on the integration of information systems at each ministry.

The Cabinet Secretariat and Economic Policy

In addition to the series of institutional reforms, the decision-making process within the Cabinet Secretariat has also changed since the launch of the Second Abe Cabinet. The Prime Minister, the Chief Cabinet Secretary, the three Assistant Chief Cabinet Secretaries, and the Secretary to the Prime Minister has come to meet regularly to facilitate communications among them. It is perhaps surprising that there were no regular meetings of the Prime Minister, the Chief Cabinet Secretary, and the Assistant Chief Cabinet Secretaries under previous Cabinets.

Under the Second Abe Administration, the Cabinet Secretariat plays a central role in numerous policy formulation processes. I would like to consider this from the perspective of economic policy.

As soon as Prime Minister Abe assumed office, he made it clear that he intended to press forward with the three arrows of Abenomics—bold monetary policy, flexible fiscal policy, growth strategy to stimulate private investment—as his fundamental economic policy. To formulate the growth strategy, the Prime Minister established the Headquarters for Japan’s Economic Revitalization and created the post of Minister in charge of Economic Revitalization. Under the auspices of the Headquarters, he also set up the Industrial Competitiveness Council, which worked on the Japan Revitalization Strategy, an important Cabinet policy, on an annual basis until 2016. (In September 2016, the Industrial Competitiveness Council was reorganized as the Council on Investments for the Future. In 2017, the Council started coordinating the Investments for the Future Strategy in place of the Japan Revitalization Strategy.) To coordinate revitalization strategies, the General Secretariat for Japan’s Economic Revitalization was set up as the secretariat for the Headquarters and for the Competitiveness Council.

Specifically, in 2013 and 2014, the revitalization strategies included, for example, corporate governance reform, the reform of the Government Pension Investment Fund (GPIF), reduction of corporate taxes, and establishing National Strategic Special Zones. Each policy was delivered. Prime Minister Koizumi made maximum use of the Council on Economic and Fiscal Policy to formulate economic policy. In contrast, Prime Minister Abe has used the Cabinet Secretariat to formulate micro-economic policies.

After the general election in the fall of 2015, Prime Minister Abe launched the “Promotion of the Dynamic Engagement of All Citizens” as an important economic policy for the Cabinet, adding “Work-Style Reform” after reshuffling the Cabinet in August 2016. He created the posts of Minister in Charge of Promoting Dynamic Engagement of All Citizens, and Minister in Charge of Work Style Reform. He also established the Secretariat for Promoting the Dynamic Engagement of All Citizens and the Secretariat for Promoting the Realization of Work Style Reform at the Cabinet Secretariat as the organizations with responsibility for each policy. By March 2017, the Third Abe Cabinet designed the policy for limiting overtime and levying penalties on firms found to be non-compliant.

Prime Minister Abe has also relied on the Cabinet Secretariat for the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) negotiations. In March 2013, the Prime Minister announced that he would participate in the TPP negotiations and in April set up the Governmental Headquarters for the TPP in the Cabinet Secretariat. He appointed Economy Minister Amari Akira the director of the Headquarters. He also created the positions of Chief Domestic Coordinator to make coordination within the government and Chief Negotiator to lead negotiations. The Headquarters formulated basic policies for the TPP negotiations and handled domestic coordination. A general agreement was reached in October 2015. More than two and a half years passed since the Abe cabinet had announced that Japan would participate in the negotiations.

The Cabinet Secretariat and Security Policies

Next, I would like to take a look at security policies. As soon as Prime Minister Abe assumed office, he indicated that he was considering a review of the right of exercising collective defense. In February 2013, he also reconvened the Advisory Panel on Reconstruction of the Legal Basis for Security, which was established under the First Abe Cabinet, to review the policies vital for the security of Japan including the right of collective self-defense. The Cabinet Secretariat served as the secretariat for the panel. In May 2014, the Advisory Panel compiled a report which recommended that the government should allow exercise of collective self-defense under certain conditions and that it should provide more flexibly rear support for other countries in times of international crisis such as the Gulf War.

Subsequently, Prime Minister Abe had the cabinet make a cabinet decision to revise the Constitutional interpretation of the right of collective self-defense outlined and permit the government to exercise the right collective self-defense under certain conditions. The Cabinet Secretariat did the groundwork for the cabinet decision. Based on the decision, Prime Minister Abe went ahead with preparations for a security-related bill. In May 2015, the Abe Cabinet adopted the bill by Cabinet decision and the bill was enacted in September. The National Security Secretariat at the Cabinet Secretariat prepared and drafted the bill.

This is how Prime Minister Abe has developed, expanded, and made full use of his own supporting organizations to formulate important bills.

Reviewing the Support System

Prime Minister Abe has not only expanded his supporting organizations, but he has also carried out an institutional reform.

The reform was based on a recommendation by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). The LDP considered that organizations of the Cabinet Secretariat and the Cabinet Office became excessive and they asked for the reduction of the respective institutions. In January 2014, the LDP started to design complete plans for reductions and submitted a proposal to the government in November.

Based on the proposal, the Abe Cabinet examined ways to slim down the Cabinet Secretariat and the Cabinet Office. The plan became official by a cabinet decision in in January 2015. In September, the Cabinet succeeded in having the Diet pass the bill to implement the plan.

The plan consisted from two pillars. First was to eliminate some organizations in the Cabinet Secretariat and to transfer some of them to the Cabinet Office, while moving some of the organizations from the Cabinet Office to other ministries and agencies. Many of the abolished or transferred organizations were introduced prior to the formation of the Second Abe Cabinet. It is possible to interpret that Prime Minister Abe has reorganized the two institutions in such a way that they truly serve his own policy goals.

The second pillar was to amend the National Government Organization Act and to set up a mechanism whereby the Prime Minister by a cabinet decision can assign each minister of state with the responsibilities of “comprehensive” coordination between ministries and agencies concerning important cabinet policies. Until this reform the Cabinet Secretariat and the Cabinet Office were the only organizations which had power to make comprehensive coordination among the ministries. Therefore, the Prime Minister basically had no choice but to rely on the Cabinet Secretariat or the Cabinet Office when formulating policies that involved multiple ministries and agencies. With the reform it has become possible for the Prime Minister to turn to each minister of state, as well as the organizations below the minister for comprehensive coordination. For example, in January 2016, Prime Minister Abe instructed Foreign Minister Kishida Fumio to be in charge of making comprehensive policy coordination within the government for the EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement negotiations.

Evaluating the political developments between the First Abe Cabinet and the Noda Yoshihiko Cabinet

So far, I have argued that the powers of the Japan’s Prime Minister’s have continued to expand both in terms of his authority as well as supporting institutions. Here I anticipate that objections might be raised against the proposition of the continuous expansion of prime ministerial powers. The period between 2006 and 2012 was characterized by a series of short-lived governments. In fact, the Prime Minister changed every year during this period. Even the longest serving cabinet during this period, the Noda Yoshihiko Cabinet, lasted only for one year and four months.

In brief, if the prime ministerial power is so strong, the objection would be to question why it was impossible for successive prime ministers to sustain their administrations for a long period of time.

Certainly, it would be difficult to claim that the Prime Ministers exercised strong power during the period between the first Abe Cabinet and the Noda Yoshihiko Cabinet.

The First Abe Cabinet and the Hatoyama Yukio Cabinet were short-lived because the Prime Ministers poorly managed their administrations. A major reason for the short duration of the Cabinets of Prime Ministers Fukuda, Aso, Kan, and Noda is that the ruling parties were unable to secure a majority in the House of Councilors. The two chambers of the Diet were controlled by different parties, causing the policy process to stagnate.

However, even during this time, the Prime Ministers used their own support institutions to formulate many important policies. Basically, the function of formulating government policy was concentrated in the hands of the Prime Minister and those around him. The seeds for the expanding authority of the Prime Minister under the current Abe Cabinet were sown in this period.

Under the three LDP Cabinets after Koizumi, the number of councils, where the Prime Minister was the principal minister, increased, and the Prime Minister made use of the Cabinet Secretariat for formulating some important policies. For example, in 2006, Prime Minister Abe set up a Council on Strengthening the functions of the Prime Minister's Office on National Security, with its secretariat in the Cabinet Secretariat, to examine a possible establishment of the National Security Council. This council recommended the establishment of the National Security Council. Prime Minister Abe then set up a task force at the Cabinet Secretariat to prepare for the establishment of the National Security Council, asking them to draft a legislation to amend the Act for the Establishment of the Security Council of Japan. (However, the amendments were not delivered at the time.) He also set up the Advisory Panel on Reconstruction of the Legal Basis for Security to examine possible exercise of the right of collective defense and had the Cabinet Secretariat serve as the secretariat for the panel.

The Fukuda Yasuo Cabinet asked the Cabinet Secretariat to prepare the bill for the Basic Act on Civil Service Reform. A pillar of this bill was to set up the Cabinet Agency for Personnel Affairs to centralize the management of personnel policy of the civil service at the Cabinet. In the end, Prime Minister Fukuda did not set up the agency. Instead, he accepted a proposal from the Democratic Party of Japan to ask the Chief Cabinet Secretary to prepare the register of candidates for senior ranking officials for the ministries and agencies and he decided to introduce the Cabinet Bureau of Personnel Affairs at the Cabinet Secretariat. The bill was enacted in June 2008.

When Prime Minister Aso set up the Council for the Realization of a Reassuring Society to re-examine the nature of social security in Japan, he also put the secretariat for the council at the Cabinet Secretariat. This council proposed the expansion of social security for the working generation of people in employment, which clearly marked a departure from the social security policies which have been pursued so far. Under the Aso Cabinet, the Cabinet Secretariat also formulated the anti-piracy bill which would allow the MSDF to guard private vessels from the piracy off the coast of Somalia.

The DPJ administrations were unable to deliver on the plans for Centralization of policy formulation to the Cabinet and the National Policy Unit included in their manifesto for the 2009 general election, but even so, each Prime Minister used his supporting institutions to formulate several important policies.

Prime Minister Hatoyama Yukio established a National Policy Office instead of the National Policy Unit. The National Policy Office formulated two important policies under the Hatoyama and Kan Cabinets. Firstly, it set the targets for improving of fiscal conditions of Japan, which have been carried over to the Second and Third Abe Cabinets. In July 2010, the office also compiled the New Growth Strategy as the key economic policy of the Kan Cabinet. The strategy incorporated infrastructure exports, expanding exports of agricultural products, building airport facilities, and the introduction of other concessions to social capital. These policies have continued under the Second Abe administration.

The Kan Cabinet was in power in March 2011 when the Great East Japan Earthquake and the Fukushima nuclear disaster occurred. The Kan Cabinet has been criticized for its response, but the Cabinet Secretariat and the Cabinet Office played the central role in designing policies in response to the earthquake and nuclear disaster.

The Kan and Noda Cabinets also pushed for the Comprehensive Social Security and Tax Reform with an increase in the consumption tax as an important pillar of the reform. Prime Minister Kan appointed Yosano Kaoru as Minister for Social Security and Tax Reform while Prime Minister Noda appointed Okada Katsuya Minister for Social Security and Tax Reform.

The Headquarters of the Government and Ruling Parties for Social Security Reform reviewed the reform proposals and the Office for Social Security Reform in the Cabinet Secretariat served as the secretariat for the Headquarters.

Summary

As discussed at the outset, since the formation of the Second Abe Cabinet, the Prime Minister's strength which has become often apparent in the policy formulation process of the current administrations often referred to as *Abe Ikkyo* (the Dominance of Prime Minister Abe). Prime Minister Abe has, in actual fact, acquired more power than previous prime ministers. In addition to the expansion of the Prime Minister's legal authority, his supporting institutions centered on the Cabinet Secretariat and the Cabinet Office have also been strengthened.

The institutional strengthening of the prime ministerial powers has allowed Prime Minister Abe to manage the administration in a stable manner and to leave the record of steady policy performance until the first half of 2017. The Prime Minister used the Cabinet Secretariat as the forum for formulating security policies including changes to the interpretation of the right of collective self-defense. He also used the Cabinet Secretariat to formulate a Growth Strategy, Work-Style Reform, and other economic and social policies.

It should be noted that Prime Minister Abe has obtained stronger powers as a steady extension of the increase in prime ministerial powers since the 1994 political reforms. The Prime Minister's support system, in particular, has continuously expanded since the Koizumi Cabinet.

When you look at the institution of the Prime Minister rather than the individuals in the post, it is interesting to note that the Prime Minister can use his supporting organizations to implement institutional reforms to secure even stronger powers. The establishment of the Cabinet Bureau of Personnel Affairs and the National Security Council are examples of the Prime Minister using the Cabinet Secretariat to expand his own powers even further. The beginnings of the Civil Service Reform, which brought in the Cabinet Bureau of Personnel Affairs, can be traced back to the First Abe Cabinet, or from even a longer perspective, to the Second Hashimoto Cabinet (Final Report of the Administrative Reform Council, 1997). Likewise, the discussions about the National Security Council started during the First Abe Cabinet.

The political process under the Second Abe Cabinet also points to the risks of expanding his supporting institutions. The public has started to take a critical view of the Prime Minister as a result of the expansion of his powers. The problems involving the Moritomo Gakuen and Kake Gakuen have shown that any action that can be interpreted as the Prime Minister's use of power to favor himself or those close to him is likely to shake the foundations of the administration. The emergence of documents suggesting the involvement of politicians and bureaucrats in the Cabinet Secretariat and the Cabinet Office in the Kake Gakuen issue also suggests problems with management at the continually expanding Cabinet Secretariat.

If the Cabinet Secretariat becomes bloated, it is likely that the Prime Minister and the Chief Cabinet Secretary will be less scrupulous as regard to the management of the Cabinet Secretariat. If there is insufficient oversight, there is a growing risk that the politicians and bureaucrats in the Cabinet Secretariat will instruct the ministries of the alleged intentions of the Prime Minister in the same way that Mito Komon (anonym of the second daimyo of Mito Domain [currently Ibaraki Pref.], Mito Mitsukuni, 1628–1701) brandishes his *inro* seal in the television drama.

The potential problems caused by huge supporting structure for the Prime Minister were recognized when the Hashimoto Cabinet reorganized the ministries and agencies. It had already been pointed out that if a single organization is given the responsibility for the supporting functions, the issue of how to manage such an organization emerges. Therefore, when the ministries and agencies were reorganized in 2001, the original idea was to divide the supporting functions for the Prime Minister among the Cabinet Secretariat and the Cabinet Office. Cabinet Office would handle implementation and daily coordination, while the Cabinet Secretariat, as a small-scale organization, would only plan and formulate important policies.

Subsequent developments, however, suggest that the Cabinet Secretariat has become bloated. For example, the involvement of the Cabinet Secretariat in the process of deciding which university to be permitted to open new departments of veterinary medicine in the Strategic Special Zones is now under suspicion. It is indeed doubtful that such individual matters related to "basic guidelines for important Cabinet policies."

There is no doubt that the British system of government has been taken into account as a point of reference when implementing the political system reform in Japan since the 1990s. If we compare the Prime Ministers of Japan and Britain, the powers of the Japanese Prime Minister fall far short of those of the British Prime Minister due to the authority of the Diet committees and the restrictions imposed by the bicameral system. There is still room for improvements in the Diet system. However, the concentration of powers into the hands of the Prime Minister with regard to formulation of policies and drafting of legislation has progressed to a significant degree. In terms of the appropriate scale of an organization managed by a small group of politicians comprising the Prime Minister, the Chief Cabinet Secretary, and the Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretaries, it is doubtful that the Cabinet Secretariat will be able to continue to expand its personnel as it has done in the past.

Prime Minister Abe recovered his support ratings when he reshuffled the Cabinet on August 3, 2017. According to a *Yomiuri shimbun* survey, support for the Cabinet rose to 50 percent in September. The Prime Minister dissolved the House of Representatives on September 28 and general elections were held on November 22. There are undoubtedly two ulterior motives behind the sudden dissolution of the House. Firstly, there is the concern that the Diet will pursue the Kake Gakuen issue and that the support ratings will once again fall if the matter is discussed at an extraordinary session of the Diet. Secondly, there is the ongoing excitement generated by the Democratic Party. It would be more advantageous to contrive a general election before the new party of Koike Yuriko, the Governor of Tokyo, has completed preparations for entering the national political scene.

Although the Prime Minister's powers have been enhanced, it is up to the nation to decide whether the administration survives or not. The fact that the Prime Minister retains strong powers clearly indicates the seat of responsibility for national policy. Regardless of the Prime Minister's intentions, in this general election, there is a sense that a new wind is blowing with Governor Koike Yuriko's new party (the party of hope) and that it will "reset Japan." In this context, we are asked to make an overall assessment of whether or not to support an administration where the Prime Minister has accumulated certain achievements due to his enhanced power base, and where the management of the administration has started to unravel as a result of those enhanced powers.

Translated from "Koron 2017: Kaisan-sosenkyo Taigi to soten 'Abe Seiken wo tou (2) 'Abe Ikkyo' no seidoteki kiban—"Shusho-shihai" no hatten to kokusei eno sekinin (KORON 2017: Snap Election—Causes and Issues: Questioning the Abe Administration (2) Institutional Foundation for the Abe Government's Political Power—The Development of Prime Ministerial Control and Responsibility for National Policy)," Chuokoron, November 2017, pp. 98–115. (Courtesy of Chuo Koron Shinsha) [November 2017]

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