

Karol Żakowski

University of Lodz

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Politicians' Role in Foreign Policy Making in Japan before the Central Government Reform

The decision-making process in Japan has been characterized by extensive powers possessed by the bureaucrats who often overshadowed their political superiors. Foreign policy making was not an exception. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) boasted strong control over Japan's diplomacy. While the role of civil servants was theoretically limited to the implementation of the decisions made by politicians, in reality the administrative staff used a range of informal sources of power to act as arbiters of state matters. Only after the entry into force of Hashimoto's administrative reform in 2001 did top-level decision makers gain new institutional tools that helped them to conduct an independent foreign policy on a more regular basis. Without denying this conventional wisdom, I argue that the politicians could occasionally play a significant role in Japan's diplomacy even before implementation of institutional changes at the beginning of the 21st century. Under special circumstances, prime ministers, chief cabinet secretaries and foreign ministers were able to exert a considerable influence on the course of foreign policy, sometimes even changing its direction. Up to the 1990s the most influential figures in the government had enough authority to overcome the domination of the bureaucrats and impose their own will on MOFA.

Keywords: *Japan, foreign policy, decision-making process, prime minister's leadership*

1. Introduction

The topic of Japanese politicians' role in foreign policy making has been seldom explored by researchers. Up to the 1990s the heads of government and their closest entourages were considered as largely passive in this area, which explains why scholars preferred to focus on the activity of MOFA bureaucrats or simply perceive Japan as a country subservient to the interests of the United States (US). Foreign media used to even mock that before participating in summit meetings Japanese premiers received only three instructions from MOFA: not to say anything, to smile in front of cameras, and not to be late for the flight home (Shima 2000, p. 168). Only when the central government reform entered into force in 2001 did it shed new light on the prime minister's prerogatives in all legislative spheres. The head of government gained the right to independently announce new policies during cabinet meetings, the Cabinet Secretariat was allowed to lead drafting of important national policies, and the Cabinet Office (Naikakufu) was established to support the endeavors of frontbenchers of the ruling party. As a result, the first comprehensive analyses on the head of government's role in diplomacy and security issues started appearing in Japan (for example: Shinoda 2007).

I argue that while the central government reform indeed enabled the prime minister to play an active role in foreign policy making more easily, under special conditions Japanese politicians had already been able to exert a considerable influence on diplomacy even before the revolutionary institutional changes.

The approach of veto players has often been used to explain informal constraints to the role played by cabinet members in decision making in Japan. As defined by George Tsebelis, a veto player is "an individual or collective actor whose agreement is required for a policy decision." (Tsebelis 1995, p. 293) In the Cold War era both bureaucracy and interest groups connected with influential figures in the ruling party often hindered governmental plans regarding foreign policy. Nevertheless, prime ministers, chief cabinet secretaries and foreign ministers could use a range of strategies to overcome the resistance against new policies. Thanks to the strong position as faction bosses, cordial relations with the bureaucrats, interministerial coordination skills or vast experience in international affairs, the frontbenchers were occasionally able to bend the institutional constraints and direct Japan's diplomacy to new paths. In the article I give

short examples of prime ministers, chief cabinet secretaries and foreign ministers who managed to exceed the traditional framework of foreign policy making despite the lack of institutional tools introduced by the central government reform.

2. Prime Ministers as Supreme Decision Makers in Foreign Policy

On paper, Japanese prime ministers enjoyed broad prerogatives. As the heads of government they nominated and dismissed cabinet members and acted as superior decision makers in all legislative fields. Serving concurrently as presidents of the ruling party, they theoretically had a majority of lawmakers in the Diet under their control. Additionally, they possessed the right to dissolve the House of Representatives, which gave them a formidable tool to exert pressure on opposition parties. Despite these formal prerogatives, however, Japanese prime ministers rarely were able to display a strong top-down leadership. After all, they had to cater for maintaining harmony between various factions in the ruling party and keep balance between distinct ministries that were actually ruled by the bureaucrats. As pointed out by Hayao (1993, pp. 184–210), Japanese prime ministers could be called reactive leaders, because instead of imposing their own policy vision on other political actors, they usually merely supervised the enactment of issues decided upon by their subordinates in the bureaucracy or ruling party. Foreign policy left little more space for the prime ministers' individual initiatives than other legislative fields, but in reality it was subject to the same constraints as domestic policy making.

Nevertheless, prime ministers could use two sources of power that enabled them to play a more active role in formulating foreign policy than the institutional constraints would normally allow. Thanks to extensive personal connections in the bureaucracy and ruling party they were sometimes able to overcome the resistance of both veto players. Equally effective was relying by the prime ministers on popular support in promotion of their initiatives. Figures who were powerful enough to take advantage of any of these two tactics rarely became heads of government, but when they did, they enjoyed more freedom in foreign policy making than other prime ministers. Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei effectively used the former strategy in 1972–1974, and Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro the latter in 1982–1987.

When Tanaka Kakuei assumed office in 1972, he declared that one of the main goals of his government would be to normalize diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China. Despite US President Richard Nixon's visit to Beijing in February 1972, it was a difficult task to achieve. Not only did influential pro-Taiwan groups in the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) object to abandoning official recognition of the Guomintang regime, but also MOFA bureaucrats were extremely reluctant to agree to such a sudden policy shift. As a result, Tanaka had to impose his will on both veto players.

Because Japan had maintained official diplomatic contacts with the government in Taipei for two decades, MOFA civil servants were determined to protect the status quo. However, Tanaka Kakuei boasted strong influences among the bureaucrats. He was famous for the fact that he ordered his secretaries to constantly gather personal data on the administrative staff. This extensive database enabled Tanaka to send gifts to bureaucrats on different occasions, for example to congratulate them on the birth of a child (Fukuoka 2011, pp. 58–59). Tanaka found an ally in MOFA particularly in the person of China Division Director-General Hashimoto Hiroshi. Soon after the Nixon shock Tanaka, who was the LDP secretary general at that time, entrusted to Hashimoto the task to prepare a report on the feasibility of normalizing diplomatic relations with Beijing. Thanks to Hashimoto's full support, the prime minister managed to force MOFA to cooperate (Hayasaka 1993, pp. 401–409).

As the leader of one of the biggest LDP factions, Tanaka Kakuei boasted as strong connections in the ruling party as among bureaucrats. In order to discuss the problem in the LDP, he established the Conference on the Normalization of Japan–China Relations (Nitchū Kokkō Seijōka Kyōgikai). It was attended by 249 out of 431 LDP lawmakers (Hayasaka 1993, p. 415). Thanks to this move the prime minister bypassed the jurisdiction of other LDP decision-making bodies (Zhao 1999, p. 99). The proceedings of the Conference were violent, but through backstage persuasion Tanaka mitigated the right wing's resistance to some extent (Hayasaka 1993, p. 419; Huang 2006, pp. 74–75). Eventually, the Conference authorized the normalization of diplomatic relations with Mainland China upon the condition of the continuation of hitherto relations with Taiwan (Tamura, Tomashima & Koeda 2000, pp. 161–162; Hayasaka 1993, pp. 419–420). The ambiguous term “hitherto relations” (*jūrai no kankei*) was coined by the Tanaka camp in order to maintain intraparty

harmony despite a lack of consensus on the China issue. According to the pro-Taiwan faction, it meant the maintenance of diplomatic relations with Taipei, but the prime minister later claimed it only obliged the government to pursue unofficial contacts with Taiwan. Lulled by this equivocal expression, the pro-Taiwan lawmakers eased their protests against Tanaka's visit to Beijing until it was too late.

Thanks to the skilful pacification of both MOFA bureaucrats and anti-mainstream politicians of the ruling party, Tanaka Kakuei achieved a breakthrough in Japanese foreign policy that would have been otherwise impossible in such a short period of time. After only three months in office, Tanaka visited Beijing at the end of September 1972. Together with Chinese Prime Minister Zhou Enlai, he signed a Joint Communiqué that regulated bilateral relations after the normalization of official contacts. Both sides exchanged ambassadors, Japan expressed deep remorse for war atrocities as well as recognized the People's Republic of China (PRC) as the sole legal government of China, and China, in return, renounced its right for war indemnities (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 1972).

While Tanaka relied on extensive connections with the bureaucrats and backbenchers, Nakasone Yasuhiro managed to exert strong influence on foreign policy thanks to maintaining a high popularity among the public. When he became prime minister in 1982, he served as a leader of one of smaller factions in the LDP and would not have had a chance to win the LDP presidential election without the support from Tanaka. As a result, Nakasone was initially perceived as Tanaka's "puppet." Despite this fact, he gradually strengthened his position as a supreme decision maker by appealing directly to the public and distancing himself from Tanaka.

According to *Yomiuri Shinbun* opinion polls, Nakasone started his premiership in 1982 with a 40.1 percent support rate, and he ended his long tenure in 1987 with the support of 48.8 percent of respondents (*Yomiuri Shinbunsha Yoron Chōsabu* 2002, pp. 488–489). Nakasone's popularity explains why he gained leverage over both the ruling party and bureaucrats. He used his position to conduct the privatization of Japan Railway, but also to strengthen an alliance with the US. By emphasizing the military aspect of cooperation with the US government, Nakasone went one step further in interpreting the security policy of Japan than had been allowed by the Yoshida Doctrine.¹ After assuming office he an-

1 The Yoshida Doctrine referred to a set of policies pursued by Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru (1946–1947, 1948–1954). They encompassed the renunciation of immediate

nounced “general settlement of post-war politics” (*senjo seiji no sōkeshan*), which meant a “revision of hitherto basic systems and mechanisms without treating them as taboos.” (Nakasone 2004, p. 171) In January 1983 Nakasone paid a visit to Washington, where he told President Ronald Reagan that Japan and the US were “a community of fate” and that Japan could be called “an unsinkable aircraft carrier” against the Soviet invasion (Nakasone 2004, p. 174). These words were much more far-going than the balanced stance of MOFA bureaucrats. In order to strengthen position of Japan in the alliance with the US, Nakasone used his high rates of support to impose on the bureaucrats and the ruling party a decision to exceed a one-percent GNP limit on military expenses as well as allow export of military technology to the US. Moreover, Nakasone played an active role in the investigation of the Korean Air Lines Flight 007 crash in 1983. A Japanese listening post intercepted communications of Soviet fighter pilots with a command centre on Sakhalin Island, which proved that the airliner was shot down by the Soviets. As the release of this recording would compromise the Japanese secret security outpost, it was vehemently opposed by MOFA, Defense Agency and the Ministry of Justice. Nevertheless, Nakasone did not bend to the pressure from the bureaucrats, and he independently decided to disclose the transcripts at an emergency session of the UN Security Council (Nakasone 2004, pp. 165–185).

Nevertheless, even without Tanaka-like connections or Nakasone-like popularity, the prime ministers were sometimes able to exert some influence on foreign policy if they only were determined enough to promote their ideals. For example, Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi (1994–1996) managed to leave as his legacy a statement in which he apologized to East Asian countries for war atrocities. Though Murayama had the support from MOFA in this regard, he had to break the resistance from conservative LDP politicians. When the Japanese Socialist Party (JSP) formed a government together with the LDP in 1994, issuing explicit apologies on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Japan’s surrender that ended the Second World War on August 15, 1945, became one of the points of the coalition agreement. Nevertheless, a parliamentary resolution on this issue was watered down due to pressure from rightist organizations. Ig-

remilitarization of Japan after the Second World War, maintenance of alliance with the US as protector of Japanese territory and focus on achieving a high rate of economic growth.

noring the protests from nationalists, Murayama decided to make up for this failure by issuing a separate statement. Seeing the determination of the prime minister, none of right-wing ministers dared to object, and the statement was adopted unanimously as a cabinet decision on August 15, 1995 (Murayama & Sataka 2009, pp. 30–32).

The examples of Tanaka, Nakasone and, to a lesser extent, Murayama, confirm that under special circumstances Japanese prime ministers were able to impose their will on the bureaucrats and ruling parties even before the enactment of the central government reform. It is connections with the two kinds of veto players, high popularity among the public and determination in being faithful to one's ideological convictions that helped the heads of government to overcome the institutional constraints to foreign policy making.

3. Chief Cabinet Secretaries as Crucial Interministerial Coordination Actors

Chief cabinet secretaries were often dubbed as “wives” of heads of the government (Bochorodycz 2010, p. 31), because they usually recruited from among the most trusted associates of the prime minister. They served as spokespersons of the cabinet, supervised the activity of the Cabinet Secretariat as well as oversaw a general policy coordination between all ministries and between the government and the ruling party. Despite a relatively broad range of responsibilities, chief cabinet secretaries usually stayed not only in the shadow of the prime ministers they served, but also in the shadow of their bureaucratic subordinates. In reality it were administrative deputy chief cabinet secretaries who played the crucial role of seeking a consensus on difficult policy matters between all the involved ministries.

Nevertheless, chief cabinet secretaries could still play an important role in foreign policy making, provided they possessed enough experience in conducting consensus-seeking activities, both in bureaucracy and the ruling party. The most exemplary was Gotōda Masaharu who served as chief cabinet secretary under the Nakasone cabinet in 1982–1983 and 1985–1987. As a former bureaucrat and a former administrative deputy chief cabinet secretary, Gotōda boasted vast knowledge of bureaucratic procedures and strong connections with the administrative staff of many ministries. At the same time, he was an influential politician of the Tanaka faction that remained the largest group in the LDP throughout the

1980s. Thanks to his extensive connections among the bureaucrats and politicians, Gotōda was dubbed “razor” (*kamisori*) by the media (Kikuchi 2013, pp. 116–120).

In order to enable a more active policy coordination by the prime minister and his closest entourage, Gotōda reorganized the structure of the Cabinet Secretariat. He created five offices in charge of public relations, information and research, security affairs, internal affairs, and external affairs. MOFA bureaucrats were opposed to the establishment of the Cabinet Counsellors’ Office on External Affairs (Gaisei Shingishitsu), as they perceived it as a potential back channel for diplomacy. Eventually, however, Gotōda managed to force MOFA to cooperate (Shinoda 2007, pp. 33–36). The influential chief cabinet secretary skillfully used the new institutional tools to strengthen the prime minister’s control over foreign policy making, especially in the areas that required extensive interministerial coordination.

Gotōda Masaharu faithfully supported Nakasone’s initiatives to strengthen the alliance with the US, but as a moderate politician he reacted whenever he thought that the prime minister exaggerated in his right-wing endeavors. For example, in 1987 he adamantly opposed MOFA’s plans to send patrol vessels and minesweepers to the Persian Gulf. Despite the fact that tankers transporting oil to Japan were endangered by hostilities between Iraq and Iran, Gotōda was determined to maintain a neutral stance in the conflict. He argued that sending Maritime Self-Defense Forces to a war zone would lead to an infringement of Article 9 of the constitution which prohibited Japan from waging wars. When Nakasone tried to forcefully submit this issue for cabinet’s approval, Gotōda warned that he would not put his signature under a decision to send military ships abroad. Eventually, the prime minister listened to the advice from the chief cabinet secretary. Instead of sending forces to the Persian Gulf, Japan provided money for the creation of a navigation system that informed ships about dangers in the region (Gotōda 1989, pp. 104–108).

Although Gotōda can be considered as the most powerful chief cabinet secretary before the implementation of the central government reform, also other politicians who assumed this office managed to occasionally exert influence on diplomacy, especially if they had considerable experience in foreign policy making. For example, Miyazawa Kiichi, who served as chief cabinet secretary in the Suzuki government from 1980 to 1982, had earlier been foreign minister under the Miki administration in 1974–1976.

Thanks to his vast knowledge of international matters and proficiency in English, Miyazawa enjoyed a special position vis-à-vis MOFA bureaucrats. In the summer of 1982 Japanese media reported that the Ministry of Education recommended replacing expressions referring to the Sino-Japanese war in history textbooks with milder versions, which met with accusations from China and South Korea that Japan tried to whitewash its difficult history (Rose 1999, pp. 205–207). In order to solve this diplomatic crisis, Miyazawa issued a statement in August 1982, in which he promised that during textbook screenings in the future, the government would give consideration to “building friendship and goodwill with neighboring countries” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 1982). Thanks to this declaration he managed to alleviate protests by China and South Korea, but this intervention in foreign policy making was criticized by LDP right-wing politicians, who argued that the Miyazawa statement infringed upon the principle of non-interference by other countries into Japan’s domestic affairs.

Another example of an influential chief cabinet secretary who left an important statement as his legacy was Kōno Yōhei under the Miyazawa cabinet in 1992–1993. In August 1993 Kōno, who would later become LDP leader and foreign minister, decided to issue a statement in which he apologized to the “comfort women” for the harm done by the Japanese Imperial Army. “Comfort women” (*jūgun ianfu*) signified women, mainly Koreans, who served as sexual slaves for Japanese soldiers during the Second World War. When the truth about their difficult past started emerging as a serious problem in relations between Japan and South Korea at the beginning of the 1990s, the government in Tokyo ordered to conduct a comprehensive investigation on this issue. The documents that were found in ministerial archives confirmed that the army had been involved in the establishment and maintenance of “comfort stations,” though there were no written proofs that the military directly recruited women against their own will. Under these circumstances, LDP right-wing politicians adamantly opposed issuing any form of apologies. However, Kōno Yōhei was determined to redress the wrongdoings of Japan. He decided to accept the testimonies of former “comfort women” as decisive evidence and convinced Prime Minister Miyazawa Kiichi about the need for explicit apologies. In August 1993 he issued a statement, in which he extended “sincere apologies and remorse to all those, irrespective of place of origin, who suffered immeasurable pain and incurable physical and psychological wounds as comfort women.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 1993)

The examples of Gotōda, Miyazawa and Kōno indicate that, depending on the situation, chief cabinet secretaries occasionally became important decision makers in the sphere of external affairs. Especially in the case of matters that necessitated coordinated efforts by several ministries, ideological leanings of chief cabinet secretaries could tip the scales in favor of one decision or another, sometimes even contrary to the stance of the head of government or MOFA bureaucrats.

4. Foreign Ministers as MOFA Bureaucrats' Bosses

Ministers of foreign affairs were, obviously, key persons in charge of Japanese diplomacy – just as prime ministers and chief cabinet secretaries. However, their decision-making competences were subject to severe informal constraints. Due to the logic of frequent cabinet reshuffles, foreign ministers usually exchanged too frequently to be able to grasp full control over the issues dealt with by MOFA before stepping down from office. As a result, they often ended up being only passive executors of the plans instituted by their administrative staff.

The most powerful weapon that could be used by foreign ministers to gain leverage over MOFA bureaucrats was extensive experience in diplomacy and knowledge of international affairs. As this area of policy making could hardly assist politicians in gaining votes in their constituencies, the lawmakers were seldom interested in specializing in foreign affairs. Nevertheless, some of politicians served as foreign ministers long enough to gain much authority over their administrative subordinates. Among the most prominent examples one must mention Ōhira Masayoshi in 1962–1964 and 1972–1974, Abe Shintarō in 1982–1986, as well as Kōno Yōhei in 1994–1996 and 1999–2001.

Thanks to his deep knowledge of international affairs, Ōhira Masayoshi played a crucial role in supporting Prime Minister Tanaka's efforts to normalize diplomatic relations with China in 1972. What helped him greatly was the fact that he had already served as foreign minister eight years earlier, and thus understood the vested interests of MOFA bureaucrats. In 1962–1964 Ōhira supported Prime Minister Ikeda Hayato's plans to establish semi-official exchange with the communist China. Thanks to Ikeda and Ōhira's efforts, in 1962 Japan entered into the Liao-Takasaka agreement, which enabled initiating trade on a limited scale with the PRC (Sun 2007, pp. 57–59).

Ōhira's first attempt at rapprochement with Beijing eventually ended in failure due to the Cultural Revolution in China. Nevertheless, when Ōhira once again assumed the office of foreign minister in 1972, the international environment was much more favorable to the idea of normalizing diplomatic relations with the PRC. Even though Ōhira constantly received threat letters and was afraid of an assassination attempt by right-wing extremists, he was determined to overcome opposition by veto players (Tamura, Tomashima & Koeda 2000, pp. 168–169; Morita & Arai 1982, p. 186). Before leaving for China, he wrote his last will and told his closest associates that in case of failure in the negotiations he would probably be unable to return to Japan (Wang 1996, p. 73). During talks in Beijing Prime Minister Tanaka, afraid of the reaction by nationalists in the LDP, tried to promote a weak version of apologies for war atrocities, by mentioning “causing troubles” to China during the war. This behavior, however, was harshly criticized by Mao Zedong. Eventually, it was Ōhira Masayoshi who in the last moment added words “deep remorse” to the treaty, thus exposing himself to protests from the Japanese right-wing radicals (Okada 2008, pp. 19–63).

Another foreign minister who managed to exert considerable influence on Japan's diplomacy was Abe Shintarō. The mere fact that he served as foreign minister as long as four years, from 1982 to 1986, was exceptional. Thanks to his stable position in the government, Abe had enough time to build an extensive experience in international affairs and grasp control over MOFA bureaucrats. Moreover, Abe was a leader of the second largest faction in the LDP that had been established by his father, Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke. Thanks to Abe's strong position in the ruling party, Prime Minister Nakasone had no choice but to treat the foreign minister's initiatives seriously.

Taking advantage of his extensive knowledge of foreign affairs, Abe Shintarō coined his own concept of a “creative diplomacy” (*sōzōteki gai-kō*). As he explained, “creative diplomacy” was based on five principles:

- 1) Strengthening of cooperation with the free world;
- 2) Promotion of friendly relations with the neighboring countries in the Asia–Pacific region;
- 3) Development of mutual trust with the Eastern block;
- 4) Invigoration of the developing countries through economic exchange;
- 5) Initiatives for demilitarization and detente (Abe 1984a, p. 52).

Abe explained that, while preserving basic rules of a non-military power, Japan should become more active on the international arena. He emphasized that Japan had to try to shape the international environment to its liking – that is promote peace and prosperity as well as defend democracy and freedom, without imposing forcefully these values on the others (Abe 1984a, pp. 26–44). In order to realize his vision, Abe intensified visits abroad to the level that had not been achieved before by any Japanese foreign minister. While his efforts did not bring any spectacular results, the extent of Abe’s personal engagement in diplomacy was extraordinary. Staying in line with his principles, the Japanese foreign minister decisively condemned both the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in 1978 and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Moreover, Abe used his extensive connections with foreign diplomats to appeal for peace in the Middle East during visits to both Iraq and Iran in 1983. Additionally, he actively participated in the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, held in 1984, where he strongly appealed for the renunciation of all nuclear bomb tests (Abe 1984b, pp. 8–206).

Kōno Yōhei held the post of foreign minister as long as Abe, though his term in office was divided into two parts – from 1994 to 1996 and from 1999 to 2001. Due to the fact that in 1993–1995 Kōno was concurrently the LDP leader (the first one who never became prime minister), and in 1994–1995 he additionally served as vice-premier, the extent of his power in the government and the largest ruling party was considerable. As a moderate politician, he fully supported Prime Minister Murayama’s efforts to apologize East Asian countries for war atrocities on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Japan’s surrender in 1995.

While under the Murayama cabinet Kōno’s political convictions matched the ideological leaning of the head of government, under the Mori cabinet (2000–2001) Kōno became conflicted over diplomatic strategy with the prime minister. The most exemplary was his opposition to the visit to Japan by former Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui. Kōno Yōhei belonged to a pro-Beijing group in the LDP and was determined to avoid any decisions that could jeopardize relations with the PRC. The Japanese foreign minister argued that despite the fact that Lee was no longer head of the state, his visit would be inevitably accompanied by a political context. Kōno Yōhei admitted, however, that it was extremely difficult to block this initiative, because it was Prime Minister Mori who personally

insisted on issuing a Japanese visa to the former Taiwanese president². Nevertheless, Kōno used all of his influence to prevent the visit. Lee Teng-hui wanted to participate in a Japan–Taiwan symposium in Nagano in October 2000, but MOFA refused to give permission for this plan.

The situation changed in the last weeks of Mori's term in office. Having nothing to lose after announcing his resignation in the nearest future, the prime minister was determined to invite Lee Teng-hui to Japan in April 2001. Kōno Yōhei tried to convince Mori against this idea together with another pro–Beijing politician, Chief Cabinet Secretary Fukuda Yasuo. Nevertheless, MOFA bent to pressure from the pro–Taiwan faction and issued a Japanese visa to the former Taiwanese president. In the last moment, however, Kōno Yōhei warned Mori that he would step down from office if the visit took place. Eventually, due to Kōno's protest, Mori agreed to severely restrain Lee Teng-hui's activities in Japan. The former Taiwanese president was prohibited from delivering policy speeches and from leaving the region that he planned to visit. As a result, Lee Teng-hui was only allowed to be subjected to heart treatment in a hospital in Kurashiki (Żakowski 2012, pp. 296–297).

The examples of Ōhira, Abe and Kōno confirm that not all foreign ministers were ignorant of the affairs of their ministry. At the moment of assuming this important office some of politicians had already boasted extensive skills and knowledge of international matters, or they served as foreign ministers long enough to grasp considerable command over their administrative staff. As a result, they were able to occasionally exert a strong influence on the direction of foreign policy of Japan.

5. Conclusion

Cabinet members in Japan have been often depicted as mere puppets in the hands of the bureaucrats and influential ruling party figures. Without denying strong influence of veto players on decision–making, I tried to give several examples that even under the old system before the central government reform, prime ministers, chief cabinet secretaries and foreign ministers were occasionally able to succeed in conducting relatively independent foreign policy making. The heads of government could take advantage of their connections with the bureaucrats and LDP backbenchers,

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2 Author's interview with Kōno Yōhei, Tokyo, March 13, 2009.

or they could force both veto players to cooperate through appealing for public support. The chief cabinet secretaries' main instrument of power were their interministerial coordination abilities. The foreign ministers, in turn, could exert considerable influence on decision making if they possessed extensive knowledge and expertise in foreign affairs.

Perhaps the most important factor, however, was coherence of the activities of all three main political actors. As shown by Gotōda's opposition to sending Self-Defense Forces to the Persian Gulf and by Kōno's protest against issuing a visa to Lee Teng-hui, difference of opinions between the prime minister and chief cabinet secretary or foreign minister could cause postponement or even renunciation of controversial diplomatic initiatives. In this light, determination in pursuing harmonized policy goals by the three political decision makers seemed to be a necessary prerequisite for the success of all difficult foreign policy endeavors.

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