

# The new Tokyo government plans to keep all options open

by Peter Ennis

The view is widespread that the new government formed in Japan last week will not result in any changes in the basic policies that have governed Japan in recent years. "There will be a continuity in policy," many Japanese and Americans have said.

This view however, is mistaken, and fails to take into account two vital aspects of the current situation in Japan. First of all, with the formulation of the new government, the Japanese political system has fully returned to the more traditional "consensus" style of policy-making, in which the major power centers in the country—the business community, the bureaucracy and the ruling Liberal Democratic Party—reach decisions broadly accepted as standing in the national interest.

This is a vast though subtle change from recent years, in which intense factional strife within the ruling LDP allowed the late Prime Minister Masayoshi Ohira to dominate both domestic and foreign policy—to the advantage of the Carter administration and the detriment of Japan.

This revival of the "Japanese system" has paved the way for the second major change, a deep reappraisal of the international strategic environment, and resulted in the "consensus" view that Japan must keep open all its policy options including an effort to improve relations with the Soviet Union, rather than blindly following the path charted by the United States.

These two changes in Japan will not take the form of a dramatic announcement or public shift in the country's domestic or foreign policies. Indeed, the government will attempt to reinforce the view that a continuous policy path exists in Japan. Nevertheless, Japan is a very different country now than it was just a few weeks ago under Ohira, and it is best to watch the country's actions rather than the government's words.

## Enforced political peace

The new government is headed by Zenko Suzuki, a 33-year veteran of the parliament (Diet) and the top arbiter of the LDP faction formerly led by Ohira. Suzuki's rise to power follows the sudden death of Ohira last month, and the subsequent victory of the

LDP in national elections.

High-level Japanese sources have stated that the Suzuki government is the product of a "political peace" dictated by the country's powerful business community (zaikai). These sources, backed up by Japanese press reports, emphasize that the zaikai "laid down the line" to LDP leaders and insisted that intraparty factional bickering be replaced by a unified cabinet, enabling Japan to deal effectively with such pressing issues as the economy and relations with Moscow.

Suzuki was chosen to head the LDP and the government as a compromise after factional disputes in the party prevented the recognized front-runners, Yasuhiro Nakasone and Toshio Komoto, from winning the top post. The makeup of Suzuki's cabinet, which he announced July 17, reflects this compromise in its balance among party factions.

## Keeping options open

There are several important factors underlying the "all options open" consensus that has developed in Japan, but all of them stem from the view that the political, economic and military instability throughout the world requires that Japan not be overly committed to any one policy or bloc. For this reason, Tokyo has watched with great interest such developments as the independent initiatives to extend détente undertaken by the leaders of France and West Germany, as well as their peace initiatives in the Middle East.

Overall, Japan is very much aware of the declining power of the United States and the growing power of the Soviet Union. While virtually no one in Japan questions the need to maintain relations with the United States as the fundamental cornerstone of the country's foreign policy, the view certainly prevails that shifts in world power requires certain "adjustments" on the part of Japan.

The new consensus was evident even before Suzuki was named to his new posts, especially in the first week of July, when President Carter met Chinese Premier Hua Guofeng in Tokyo while attending the funeral services for Ohira. Perhaps more than anything else, it

was the content of the Carter-Hua talks that provoked the new consensus to surface.

Many in Japan were shocked at that time by the blatant Chinese-American effort to include Japan in an alliance against the Soviet Union, and action was quickly taken to distance Japan from this policy. A top Foreign Ministry official told reporters in Tokyo "off the record" that one of the yet-to-be-named government's highest priorities would be to repair the damage of Japanese-Soviet relations inflicted by Ohira's Peking tilt.

Just as this announcement was made, one of Japan's powerful newspaper columnists, Minoru Hirano, wrote that "to mend Japan-Soviet ties will be a major task for the new Cabinet," especially "in view of the recent talks between French President Giscard d'Estaing and Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev, and between West German Chancellor Schmidt and the Soviet leader." Hirano then stated emphatically: "Japan should take steps to avert misunderstanding, not only by the Soviet Union but also by other countries, that it is a member of the tripartite alliance with the United States and China."

Following his inauguration, Suzuki himself told his first press conference that improving ties with Moscow would indeed be a priority for his government—a statement which sealed the all-important consensus on this policy. In making this announcement neither Suzuki nor his Foreign Minister, Masayoshi Ito, retreated from Japan's tough stance against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and other sources of tensions between the two countries. Rather, they both emphasized that there are "special circumstances" that lead Japan to maintain good ties with Moscow despite political frictions. These circumstances include especially the need for economic cooperation, they said.

Thus, nothing dramatic will come out of these announcements, but a revival of long-stalled talks on cooperation in developing resources in Siberia is one opening to look for. More importantly, the announcements represented a signal on Tokyo's part that it is uncomfortable with the very cool relations with the Soviets that have developed under Ohira.

### **Suzuki the Fixer**

As for the choice of Suzuki as premier, this surprised almost everyone in Japan, because he has never been considered "prime minister material." Instead, Suzuki has made a career of being a party mediator or "fixer," working quietly behind the scenes to smooth out factional differences and reach consensus decision.

Japanese newspapers carried headlines such as "Zenko Who?" when the decision was announced, reflecting the fact that despite his long career as a very powerful LDP leader, Suzuki rarely allowed himself to step into the limelight.

Well liked by all factions within the party, Suzuki is

said to be the only LDP leader called by his first name by members of the Diet. While a leader of the Ohira faction, Suzuki has also maintained close personal ties to former Premier K. Tanaka, the party's kingmaker. Tanaka, who is still on trial in Japan for his reported role in the Lockheed bribery scandal, earned the anger of Henry Kissinger during his premiership for pursuing independent Japanese diplomacy.

Since that time, however, Tanaka had kept Kissinger's "favorite Japanese" Ohira in power, both for factional reasons and also because Ohira reportedly made a deal to keep Tanaka out of jail. Tanaka is likely to have a lot of policy influence over Suzuki, as will former Premier Takeo Fukuda, who also backed Suzuki for the top post.

At this point, Suzuki's personal views are not widely known, largely because he has never been in a position where top-level policy decision were required. But Suzuki has held three cabinet posts, including Agricultural and Fisheries Minister, and negotiated a major fishing agreement with the U.S.S.R.

This latter point could give an important insight into Suzuki, and brings out one of the more intriguing aspects of the current Cabinet. Three of the top four ministers—Suzuki himself, Foreign Minister Ito, and Finance Minister M. Watanabe—have very close ties to the nation's powerful fishing community. Fishing is an important industry in Japan, and, due to the waters shared with the Soviet Union, the fishing interests traditionally favor decent relations with Moscow.

### **Other cabinet posts**

The new Minister for International Trade and Industry, R. Tanaka, is also from the former Ohira faction, and part of the "younger generation" of leaders. He formerly held the post of Chief Cabinet Secretary for Ohira, and it is widely said that Suzuki awarded Tanaka with this new post because Tanaka worked hard to make Suzuki premier.

The new Chief Cabinet Secretary, who is the official spokesman for the government, is former Foreign Minister Kiichi Miyazawa. Miyazawa is one of the leaders of the Japan wing of the Trilateral Commission, and is often criticized in Japan for being more international than Japanese. He will probably have important policy input with Suzuki, who is less experienced than Miyazawa, especially in foreign affairs.

The most surprising aspect of the cabinet is the minor role afforded to Nakasone and Komoto, the two front-runners in the race for premier. Both were expected to get top posts, but were given the portfolios of Administrative Management Agency and Economic Planning Agency respectively. This was seen as an effort by Suzuki to weaken the two leaders, but Suzuki did it in such a way that neither could effectively protest.