



## Analysis of the Cabinet Reshuffle

*3 August*

The Cabinet reshuffle conducted on 3 August 2017 is important to Prime Minister Abe's Administration and the implementation of his long-term goals. With the Cabinet approval ratings down after several months of negative publicity, the reshuffle on 3 August 2017 has drawn intense focus, with some arguing it could potentially alter the course of the Abe Administration.

Overall, Prime Minister Abe appears to be playing it safe by heavily favoring the appointment of senior Diet members with previous experience in the Cabinet or other senior leadership positions within the LDP. Only 6 of the 20 ministers named have no prior experience at the ministerial level, compared to 8 of 19 in the previous reshuffling in 2016. This should be seen as a reaction to the performance of two officials in the previous Cabinet who were first-time ministers and failed to live up to the Prime Minister's expectations. Masahiro Imamura of the Reconstruction Agency was forced to resign over inappropriate comments made to the press concerning the 2011 Tohoku Earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster. In addition, Katsutoshi Kaneda, now formerly of the Ministry of Justice, failed to perform particularly during debates in Diet meetings in which he often appeared shaky and unreliable, contributing to the impression of the anti-conspiracy bill being ill-thought and scarcely prepared. Instead, the Prime Minister has opted to choose stable hands, appointing ministers with previous experience, such as Minister of Defense Itsunori Onodera and re-appointing Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Hiroshige Seko.

The Prime Minister also seems eager to balance competing factions, trying to unify the party for a new start. Fumio Kishida's transfer from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the LDP Chair of the Policy Research Council appears particularly noteworthy. Many assumed that Kishida, who leads the Kouchikai faction within the LDP, preferred a position outside of the Cabinet to allow him to prepare to potentially take charge of the LDP after Prime Minister Abe. Generally, the Prime Minister faces a turbulent political landscape in which alienating any of the key factions within the LDP could be fatal. Complicating the situation, several smaller factions in the LDP have recently merged, forcing the Prime Minister to consider their preferences in his Cabinet appointments. Appointing Seiko Noda, a vocal critic of Abe as the new Minister of Internal Affairs and Communications, also shows that he wants to solidify the support within the party and "move on." Kishida, as head of the LDP Policy Research Council, can also help create support within the party for constitutional reform, given his credibility as a "dove." The same goes for the appointment of Taro Kono as a Foreign Minister whose world views are very

different from those of Abe. Keeping Kenichi Ishii in his position of Minister of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism was the least dramatic decision but shows that Abe is keen to keep good working relationships with the Komeito.

Abe is playing it safe and although there will be no dancing on the streets in Tokyo tonight out of enthusiasm for the new Cabinet, we expect that the appointments will give the pressured Prime Minister a bit of breathing in the form of improved approval ratings. All signs now, are that he will focus on constitutional reform moving forward. Should this not be enough to improve his approval numbers in the run-up to the LDP Presidential Elections in September 2018, Abe can take comfort in the fact that he at least secured his legacy as the Prime Minister who took Japan out of the “post-war period.”

The immediate focus will be on deciding the timing for an extraordinary Diet session in the autumn, the agenda being work-style reform led by newly appointed Minister Katsunobu Kato, who can complete what he started in his previous position, as well as the initiation of constitutional reforms.

### **Cabinet Reshuffle Results**

- Prime Minister: Shinzo ABE
  - Deputy PM/Minister of Finance: Taro ASO
  - Chief Cabinet Secretary: Yoshihide SUGA
  - Minister of Foreign Affairs: Taro KONO
  - Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry: Hiroshige SEKO
  - Minister of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism: Keiichi ISHII\*
  - Minister of Internal Affairs and Communications: Seiko NODA
  - Minister of Justice: Yoko KAMIKAWA
  - Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries: Ken SAITO
  - Minister of Defense: Itsunori ONODERA
  - Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology: Yoshimasa HAYASHI
  - Minister of Health, Labor and Welfare: Katsunobu KATO
  - Minister of Environment: Masaharu NAKAGAWA
  - Minister of Economic Revitalization: Toshimitsu MOTEGI
  - Minister of Olympics: Shunichi SUZUKI
  - Minister of Reconstruction: Masayoshi YOSHINO
  - Minister of State for Okinawa and Northern Territories Affairs: Tetsuma ESAKI
  - Minister of State for Regional Revitalization: Hiroshi KAJIYAMA
  - Minister for Promoting Dynamic Engagement of All Citizens: Masaji MATSUYAMA
  - Chairperson of the National Public Safety Commission: Hachiro OKONOGI
- \*From coalition partner, Komeito