Fukushima Nuclear Power Stations Crisis and Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet: A Review Essay

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Hosono, Goshi and Shuntaro Torigoe, *Shogen Hsono Goshi: “Genpatsu Kiki 500 nichī” no Shinjitsu ni Torigoe Shuntaro ga semaru* (Testimony of Goshi...
The Great East Japan Earthquake occurred on March 11, 2011. A tremendous tsunami which was caused by the earthquake directly hit Fukushima Daiichi (First) and Daini (Second) Nuclear Power Stations. The condition of the former was especially bad. For some time after that, Tokyo Electric Power Company, Inc. (TEPCO or Tokyo Denryoku [Toden]) could hardly manage to control the nuclear power units. The Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet (Shusho Kantei [Kantei]) under the Naoto Kan administration mainly supported by the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), also tried to cope with this problem. It was the beginning of the severe condition which continued to this day.

Why and how did the accident happen? How and what emergency and safety measures did TEPCO and/or Kantei decide during this time? These questions are just an example, but we can realize that their common interests were focused on inspection of the processes and structure of this disaster. Specifically, analyzing “immediate disaster response (Crisis) issues and longer-term factors contributing to the disaster (Non-Crisis)” which are interrelated as Kushida (2012, p. 31) pointed out. This essay shares these interests.

Many people and governments at home and abroad are deeply interested in these tragedies. Therefore the process of review is already underway by some third party organizations, news media outlets, journalists, and so forth. Four major comprehensive reports including an abundance of information in relation to these questions and answers, for instance, were published recently. Namely, they were printed by the Independent Investigation Commission on the Fukushima Nuclear Accident (It was generally called “Minkan Jikocho”.) on February 27, 2012, the Fukushima Nuclear Accident Investigation Committee

In keeping with these contents overall or partly, several documents and reportages were published. Both the Japanese Association of Science and Technology Journalists (2013) and Economy, Trade and Industry Office and Division at the National Diet Library (2012) gave us an analysis and evaluation of the four reports from a comparative perspective (See also Suzuki [2012]). Asahi Shimbun Special Reporting Team (2012, pp.188–259) and Kimura (2012) inquired about decision-making processes within Kantei in detail. Their analysis was based on abundant materials and interviews of core executives, their technical advisers, and bureaucrats. Asahi Shimbun Special Reporting Team (2012) and Tokyo Shimbun Nuclear Power Stations Accident Correspondent Team (2012), likewise described such processes in their own ways, as they interviewed the victims, the stations’ workers, and local governments’ officials. Yomiuri Shimbun Politics Department (2011) dissected it from wider viewpoints, while analyzing the context of contemporary Japanese politics. Needless to say, it is certain that these works contributed to elucidate the disputed points.

The conclusions presented by them as a whole are severe for decision-makers. Kantei’s members, however, are open to criticism because they have to take responsibility for all of these decisions. It is something calling for special attention that they as the people under examination were not able to speak about their state of mind, attitude, and behaviors as described in the reports mentioned voluntarily, until now. Thus one of the outstanding issues, in addition to the above, is to collect and review the voices of the decision-
makers themselves. It is necessary to consider what emergency and safety measures did TEPCO/Kantei take during this time, and how? Asahi Shimbun (2012), for example, checked, to some extent, the raw data of the video conferences at TEPCO. Accordingly, the following will be focused on the actors at Kantei.

The four books reviewed in this essay were written by core executives at that time, after the four major reports were published. It is important for this paper to introduce the author’s position in connection with the “scenery”, the definition of which will be explain below, from Kantei’s members. Kan was Prime Minister from June 8, 2010 to September 2, 2011. Tetsuro Fukuyama was one of Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretaries. Banri Kaieda was Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry and after some time he also held Minister in Charge of Nuclear Incident Economic Countermeasures position. Goshi Hosono was one of Special Advisors to the Prime Minister. After leaving the post at the end of June 2011, Hosono was then appointed as Minister for the Restoration from and Prevention of Nuclear Accidents (He was reappointed to the post during the Yoshihiko Noda administration.). In addition he had also held Minister of the Environment, Minister of State for the Nuclear Power Policy and Administration positions since September 2011. Despite some dissimilarities that cannot be ignored among the four books, the contents of them in general consist of three points; (1) their intention of keeping records, (2) the decision-making processes during the Kan administration, and (3) their determination for recovery and future plans for Fukushima and Japan.

To begin with the first of the points mentioned above, Kan believed that he, as Prime Minister during the time of crisis, should record his thoughts, decision-making processes, action token, and feelings at the end of his administration (Kan, pp. 3-4). Kaieda also thought that the record from a responsible person’s point of view would be valuable in the future. He hoped
that he could bend the ears of the victims as one of the Diet members and show they were going to prevent future tragedies without fail (Kaieda, pp. 2-5). The aim of Fukuyama’s book was to write the “fact” of this disaster from Kantei’s point of view. He described that it was necessary to disclose the decision-making processes, verify where the problem was, and make use of the lessons from the crisis (Fukuyama, pp. 9-17). Hosono’s stance about how to record defers from the three, because the post he held before becoming Ministers had no competence to decide any policies. He personally requested to be interviewed by freelance journalist Shuntaro Torigoe, whom he trusted to have a sense of mission. The reason was that this disaster was a critical juncture that was memorized by not only Japanese, but also people all over the world (Hosono, pp. 7-15).

It is always very difficult to evaluate something written by politicians, in a scholarly fashion, because they might be devoted to defend themselves from their critics. On one hand, the Kan administration was criticized furiously in all its bearings, as the books under review admitted to some extent their unskillful behavior during the aftermath of the disasters, therefore many readers might be dubious of the contents. On the other hand, as Sugawara (2012) pointed out sharply, it is certain that for some time much doubtful information was reported in the press repeatedly. Hence, they just could be misled concerning the situation. In addition to the press critique, the Kan administration announced that 10 of the 15 Conferences on the Earthquake did not record the minutes of meetings (The Nikkei January 27, 2012; Cf. Fukuyama, pp. 180-184 and Hatake 2012). In this context, it looks like that there are hardly any materials to maintain and check Kantei’s standpoint.

Nevertheless, the four major reports published can be treated as an “antidote” to this controversy and the published books under review can be documents to balance future analysis. It is a rare case as well, because
Japanese politicians, especially among the incumbency of the Diet, write memories or diaries less often than foreign politicians. They all state similar things with one voice, however, it is remarkable what the books are written independently while quoting and/or contradicting the reports and some opinions published in the press. Although it is important to note that there are undoubtedly many things left undisclosed by the four, it is also very much to be desired that many people who are concerned with this disaster could get a lot of firsthand accounts, as it is natural that many people would like to try to glean and learn something more easily from these materials.

Referring to the second point, soon after the accident, one of the highlights of the decision-making processes within *Kantei* was the issue over TEPCO’s withdrawal from Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Station. The description of this part of the four is thicker and more detailed than other parts, because of the seriousness of the situation, which was described by Kan in the following words, “I felt that the atmosphere at *Kantei* was dominated by absolute depression at that time” (Kan, p. 108). According to all for authors, at the time when the condition of the units were deteriorating on March 14 to 15, the president of TEPCO Masataka Shimizu called a number of times to Kaieda thorough his secretary, Hosono, and Yukio Edano, Chief Cabinet Secretary at that time and Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry as Kaieda’s successor and attempted to consult with them about this situation. They continued to refuse any contact and in the end Kan requested him at *Kantei* and quashed firmly the proposal. Moreover, Kan decided immediately to make Kaieda and Hosono stay at TEPCO to create the central organization and integrate both decision-making organs, because he was scared that foreign governments would take the initiative. Whereas some media criticized that *Kantei* invaded TEPCO (Cf. Fukuyama, pp. 184-186 and Katayama 2011b), after this action was taken *Kantei* was finally able to take active part in disaster.
management, as the hazardous situation continued. The opinions of the five including Edano (2012, p. 20) were in accordance in general (Kan, pp. 107-116; Kaieda, pp. 58-63; Fukuyama, pp. 102-121; Hosono, pp. 81-107, 158-222).

Further examples of the peak of decision-making processes within Kantei, were the issues over the suspension of the operation of Hamaoka Nuclear Station from about April to May, and over the resumption of the operation of Genkai Nuclear Station from around June to July. The first being operated by Chubu Electric Power Company, Inc. (Chubudenryoku [Chuden]), is located in Shizuoka prefecture, which also contains Hosono’s electoral district. The second, operated by Kyushu Electric Power Company, Inc. (Kyushudenryoku [Kyuden]), is located in Saga prefecture. Kaieda, supported by Hosono, investigated the former and advised Kan to stop all units until Chuden had finished checking the safety of the stations. Because the administration was not able to command Chuden legally, Kaieda thought that the Kan administration might as well cope with this situation by using administrative guidance (Gyosei-Shido) from Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry. Kan agreed with Kaieda about the necessity of issuing the guidance, however, their ideas of making it known to the public differed. Although Kaieda wanted to hasten the shut down, Kan communicated the decision to Japanese people from the standpoint of the Prime Minister without consulting Chuden and local governments beforehand. As a result, the implementation of the guidance was disrupted, as initially Chuden grudgingly followed the guidance. Some media suspected cooperation between Kan and Kaieda was in trouble. On one hand, Kaieda said that relations between Kan and himself were best during this time. On the other hand, Kan felt that he was estranged from Kaieda. The gap had been gradually widened in this way.

The next issue was associated with the latter case. Here, the differences
between the two stemmed from coverage of organizations in charge of inspecting the station before the resumption of operation. Kaieda, being an advocate of nuclear power, said that the judgment of the Atomic Energy Commission was necessary and legally sufficient. In contrast, Kan, acting as an opponent of nuclear power, insisted that the Nuclear Safety Commission should take part in the inspection too, and furthermore, should carry out the “Stress Test” to check the durability of the units against natural disasters. According to Kaieda’s description, Kan advised him not to trust Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency which was an external bureau of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry and should have been in the forefront of the crisis. Consequently, this bureau was abolished and the functions of it were transferred to the newly created Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA), which became an external but more independent organization of Ministry of the Environment. Here, disappointedly for the public, Kyuden caused trouble by attempting to control the information given to residents through commands to their employees. Many problems overlapped exceedingly. After this, it was more difficult to resume the operation of power plants nationwide (Kan, pp. 155–158, 172–173; Kaieda, pp. 212–273; Fukuyama, pp. 198–201).

Subsequently to the summary, let us now turn our attention to discussing problems listed above. Although, over time, the core executive members of Kantei walked out of step, nevertheless their basic ideas on handling nuclear power crisis were the same. When the disaster occurred, in the sense that the part of the administration was handling emergency procedures firmly, the work of all was tough but simple. In addition, it seems that they kept in touch with each other relatively smoothly. Hence, the president of TEPCO was not able to slip in his opinion opposing Kantei’s strong policy, “Absolutely do not withdraw from the station”. Fukuyama emphasized that Kantei’s above cited policy was shaped by the fact that Kantei did not have sufficient information on
the state of crisis, because the “scenery from Kantei” could only be characterized by the very standpoint (Fukuyama, pp. 9–14). In belief, the decision-making process was limited by bounded rationality, which meant a decision-making of a goal-oriented actor depended on their cognitive limitation, as Herbert A. Simon had insisted since 1947 (See also Jones (1999)).

Thereafter change of the “scenery” began, under the unstable political conditions for the Kan administration, that is, the issue of “no-confidence motion against the cabinet” in the House of Representatives in June 2011 (Kan, pp. 162–163) and of being under majority in the House of Councillors since July 2010. In case of Hamaoka and Genkai power stations, the main actors were not Fukuyama and Hosono, but Kan and Kaieda. The former engaged in Japan-US relations, for example “Operation Tomodachi” which was the name of the relief mission of U. S. government for Japanese people and Japanese government (Fukuyama, pp. 124–140; Hosono, pp. 169–183), while Hosono was also expressly preparing for the “worst case scenario” with the special permission from Kan (Kan, pp. 19–32; Hosono, pp. 169–183). This trend indicates that Kantei tried to divide up the work, because they had to handle the multiple damages caused by the earthquake and tsunami and then revive Fukushima, Tohoku, and Japan.

Accordingly, it took a great deal of effort to make their subordinates work. When Kan’s administration decided on countermeasure policy, for instance, bureaucrats at central government should have been able to work under the authority of Kantei. For Kan, however, Kaieda and the bureaucrats under him became his opponents, because they used not the patterns of behavior Kan hoped for, but their own organization’s style, which resembled Standard Operational Procedures. That meant an actor’s peculiar behavior pattern that was oriented by an organization as Allison (1971) indicated, as if it was in time of peace. An additional example, the issue of withholding information on
radiation effects given by the System for Prediction of Environmental Emergency Dose Information (SPEEDI) was also had same roots in independent work style of above mentioned bureaucrats (Kan, p. 124; Kaieda, pp. 21-30; Fukuyama, pp. 141-155; Hosono, pp. 158-169).

In short, the difference between the way of thinking and behavior of Kan and that of Kaieda depended on the degree of trust among bureaucrats. While in the context of this essay, it was caused by the position and organizations one belonged to. When Fukuyama insisted on the “scenery from Kantei”, it was also quite possible that the other actors and organizations saw something different in the context of bounded rationality, and as such, they were unable to carry out their desired action promptly. It will be necessary to investigate to what extent their “scenery” can focus on an whole image. The four books can be read regardless of whether people endorse their views or not, if the reader is interested in the decision-making processes.

The third chapters of these books are associated with “longer-term factors contributing to the disaster (Non-Crisis)” by Kushida (2012, p. 31). Throughout three discussed cases on nuclear power units since the disaster, we were already able to grasp the fact that the issue of nuclear power in Japan ballooned in an extremely short time period. Nobody knows the end of this disaster, although the Japanese government implements procedures based on, for instance, the “Mid-and-long-Term Roadmap towards the Decommissioning of Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Units 1-4, TEPCO”.

In this situation, what did the four think about the future? A key to grasping the background is to understand the direction of nuclear policy of Kan’s administration, and in particular Kan himself. The policy was called “Denuclearization (Datsu-Genpatsu)”, which meant stopping and abolishing the use of nuclear power energy as quickly as possible. He tried to facilitate rapidly the policies including the Act on Special Measures Concerning
Procurement of Renewable Energy Sourced Electricity by Electric Utilities enacted in August 2011, according to his political belief (Kan, pp. 152-177). All the decision-makers including the DPJ, however, even if they understood Kan’s thoughts, did not always have the same opinion on how to make some policies and draw a blueprint on the revival of Fukushima, Tohoku, and Japan, as Yoshihiro Katayama (2011a), who was Minister of Internal Affairs and Communications and a non-government official, dissertated (Kaieda, pp. 257-264; Fukuyama, pp. 197-228; Hosono, pp. 242-273).

Moreover, Datsu-Genpatsu policies were different from the conventional direction that the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan (LDP) and the successive administrations had advanced with some bureaucrat related ministries and agencies on nuclear power and the Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan, and some other big businesses. Having graduated from the same schools, created a strong nurturing bond, and such exclusive human and organizational relations shaped through a similar education were called “Japan’s Nuclear Village (Genshiryoku-Mura)” by the four books, some newspapers and magazines, consequently the name was widely known by people. “The myth of safety (Anzen-Shinwa)”, the unfounded idea that no nuclear power stations had any accidents, was fostered by them (The Mainichi April 25, 2011; Iida et al. 2011; DeWit et al. 2012; Kingston 2012a, 2012b).

The politics of nuclear power was getting harder to the extent that it divided public opinion in two. Although faced with severe opposition, Kan submitted solutions on energy and environmental policies. He succeeded, but at the cost of his administration (More details will be seen by Fukuyama, pp. 197-228). Kan said that Datsu-Genpatsu was an issue of philosophy. What he wanted to say was the importance of considering the widening gap between the rapid progress of science and the inability for humans to keep a timely pace with it. He likewise said that the gap would cause loss of control over science
and technology (Kan, pp. 39-42). When the existence of this gap is assumed, *Anzen-Shinwa* recommended by *Genshiryoku-Mura* is criticized by him. The resolution of *Genshiryoku-Mura*, for this reason, was a big issue for Kan’s administration and the DPJ substantively. One of the countermeasures was that they established a new regulatory organization. As suggested above, they created the NRA (Hosono, pp. 224-238), although it was severe for them to corroborate opposition parties. However, because the change of government happened again and the second Shinzo Abe administration and the LDP took power from the Noda administration and the DPJ on December 26, 2012, it was uncertain what the future held for the NRA (*Asahi Shimbun* December 28, 2012; *The Mainichi* December 28, 2012; *The Nikkei* December 28, 2012; *Yomiuri Shimbun* December 28, 2012).

Of course, the philosophy consists not only of the discussion of the organization, but also the issue of attitude. This disaster aftermath provided us much information to reconsider about agreement and tension among politics, administration, and science and technology, as Fukuyama proposed (Fukuyama, pp. 190-196). In connection with this context, it will be important to reappraise risk communication. Information about this disaster from the administration was confusing especially in the beginning. Even if the information was accurate, if they provided it incorrectly, they were criticized by people. For example, it was too difficult for Edano as spokesperson to have many press conferences, because in many cases he had insufficient information and furthermore, several ministries and agencies had held press conferences independently (Edano, pp. 35-40). However, even though he had much information, he might have felt duress because of bounded rationality, therefore he took some additional measures and prohibited press conferences (See Hosono, pp. 209-212.). Now, especially when information is unstable, it is a critical problem for people to continue not to blindly believe in *Anzen-
Shinwa but to consider all issues with vigilance.

Time has passed since this tragedy, and we have many documents with which to evaluate what decisions Kantei made and how they made them. During the proof reading of this essay, two other Kantei's members, Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshito Sengoku and Special Advisor to the Prime Minister Sumio Mabuchi also published book on the topic (Sengoku 2013; Mabuchi 2013). Unfortunately, it was impossible to cover their memoirs in this manuscript. It is my hope in any case, that this article, in introducing these four books written of their own volition by decision-makers or core executives under the DPJ’s incumbent politicians, will act as an impetus for the reader to reassess and rethink their opinion on this disaster.

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