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Crisis Management, LDP, and DPJ Style

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Abstract

This article asks the questions: Did the DPJ engage in crisis response and management differently than the LDP did? If so, why? If not, why not? In order to try to answer these questions systematically I use an inductive comparative method of choosing three equivalent 'cases' each under the LDP and the DPJ in which they responded to a similar type of crisis. The crises selected were Okinawa bases issues in 1995 (LDP) and 2009 (DPJ), Senkaku Islands under the LDP (2008) and DPJ (2010), and the Hanshin quake in 1995 (LDP) and Fukushima in 2011 (DPJ). This gave me a nice mix of intense, short-term cases to compare; one domestic (disaster-related), and two foreign (Okinawa bases with US; Senkaku/Daiyou conflict with China); coalition governments under LDP and DPJ (2009) of different kinds vs. single-party (other DPJ). A very brief description of each crisis will be followed by some generalizations comparing the two parties' responses. I find that both parties had similar problems with information management, but that there were characteristic and predictable trade-offs of their different party decisionmaking structures and relations with the national bureaucracy. Finally, I mention some of the inherent structural problems of Japanese politics and policymaking that inhibit effective response regardless of the party in power.

The introduction by Alexandra Sakaki and Kerstin Lukner categorizes the four phases of a crisis. This article will focus on the third stage only, the phase of 'assessing the situation, prioritizing, considering trade-offs, managing lines of communication and command, and coordinating the response to minimize damage'. I will also touch on the consequences of the response phase, including 'recovery and learning'. Although this approach has its limitations – omitting some of the crucial prior conditions and their causes that led to the crisis and the response – it has the advantage in the short space allotted of focusing our attention on the crucial ways in which governments deal with major, intense challenges at the time they appear.

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As they also indicate, the management of crises, even in just the response phase, is directly related to some of the most basic theoretical issues and debates in the study of Japanese politics and governance. For decades, political scientists have argued over state–society relations and the model of governance in Japan, including which major actor(s) have had the most influence on policy. Concepts of 'iron triangles' applied to Japan with the LDP, bureaucracy, and big business (or other interest groups) have periodically been suggested (e.g. Yanaga, 1968; Sakakibara, 2004). In the 1980s, the idea that the bureaucracy trumped politicians in managing society became the dominant conception (e.g., Johnson, 1982) only to be overturned by 'rational choice' models of politician dominance and electoral determinism (Ramseyer and Rosenbluth, 1993; cf. Krauss and Pekkanen, 2010).

Even within the bureaucracy dominant model there were variations with some (Johnson, 1982) seeing government officials as the key actors within their own jurisdictions but with others (e.g., van Wolferen, 1990) focusing more on the segmented ("tatewari gyōsei') nature of bureaucratic rivalry and inability of government to gain consensus or coordination.

What few of these conceptual approaches to Japanese politics and governance have ever done, however, is to distinguish between routine policymaking and decisionmaking under crisis conditions. How, and how well, does the Japanese political and governing process function and manage problems, not in 'normal' times, but when (however much they should have been anticipated) challenges are sudden, decisions must be made quickly, pressure is intense, and the stakes are very high? Do any of these models apply in crisis conditions? Do particular models apply with particular parties? Or are there other insights we can gain about governance in Japan from studying crisis decisionmaking across parties?

Further, because of LDP near-total control of government for 53 of the 54 years between 1955 and 2009, there previously was never the opportunity to compare how different political parties dealt with and managed crises during their tenure in office under these circumstances. Now, with the DPJ's historic 2009 electoral victory, we have that opportunity for the first time. Have different political party governments managed better or worse, similarly or differently, than the other? Has there been continuity or change in crisis management across different administrations and over time? These questions offer the opportunity to investigate not only into how well or how poorly crisis is managed by different parties with different policy platforms and personnel, but just as importantly whether there has been learning in crisis management across parties, time, and types of crises, or whether there are persistent and pernicious structural weaknesses in the way the Japanese government manages crises, regardless of the party in power.

A methodological problem immediately arises, however, in such a comparison. Crises are so different in type and nature how does one compare different parties' responses? Ideally, the best method would be to find and compare crises of similar types (or even the same type) that occurred under both the LDP and DPJ years in

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power. This is difficult because of how little time the DPJ has governed, and made even more so by the fact that prior to the 1994 electoral reform (and to some extent the 2001 administrative reform) politics and policymaking were quite different compared to afterwards. But it is not impossible. In considering this problem, I was able to identify three similar major issues with crises of different types that occurred under both party governments subsequent to 1994. These are displayed in the chart below:

LDP	*DPJ*
Okinawa bases 1995	Okinawa bases 2009
Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands 2008	Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands 2010
Hanshin quake 1995	Fukushima crises 2011

All were sudden and intense crises. The rape of a 12-year old schoolgirl by US military personnel instigated the Okinawa bases crisis of 1995 when it stimulated huge protests against the military bases in Okinawa for their reduction or removal; the 2009 crisis over the bases was instigated when DPJ party leader Hatoyama made statements during the election campaign and after he was elected that he wanted to change the agreement the LDP worked out after years of negotiation with the Americans to manage the first crisis. The Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands are disputed between Japan and both Taiwan and the PRC. The crisis of 2008 involved a confrontation between Taiwan fishing boats and a Japanese Coast Guard patrol vessel and the crisis of 2010 involved a similar confrontation between a Chinese fishing boat and a Japanese patrol boat. Finally, the Hanshin quake of 1995 was the worst earthquake disaster in modern times to that point with thousands of casualties testing the response capabilities of the then LDP–Socialist government coalition; the Fukushima 2011 quake was even worse as it also involved a major quake in Northeast Japan, followed by a devastating *tsunami* tidal wave and near meltdown of a major nuclear power plant and resulted in tens of thousands of deaths. Thus, we have three sets of comparisons all since 1995 allowing us to compare LDP and DPJ governments' capabilities in handling them. These comparisons also afford us the advantage of comparing these responses over similar types of issues and crises: domestic disaster situations (Hanshin and Fukushima); foreign policy clashes with Japan's important neighbors and trading partners (Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands 2008 and 2010); and military US alliance crises over the same base issue involving domestic protests (Okinawa bases 1995 and 2009). They also include coalition governments under both parties (LDP in 1995 with the Social Democratic Party or SDPJ and the Sakigake Party, and 2008 with the Clean Government Party; DPJ in 2009 with the SDPJ) versus single-party governments under the DPJ (2010 and 2011).

These sets of crises, therefore, provide a way to more systematically compare the LDP's and DPJ's crisis management capabilities and weaknesses in responding to very similar conditions and situations over a recent 16-year period. There are some limitations to this otherwise advantageous research design, however. Because some of

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the crises are so recent, there are few deep scholarly investigations of them and I will have to rely on journalistic and often articles written around the time of, or shortly after, the crises. Second, in dealing with the successes and especially the failures of responses to all these crises, we have no way of knowing for certain whether all the assertions upon which we must base our analysis are completely valid. Nonetheless, these do provide at least a view of how contemporaries at the time of the crises evaluated the government's responses. Finally, my evaluations of these crises strictly focus on the issues of management of crises, not the moral, ethical, or political issues surrounding these cases, nor with whose general policies related to these issues is better or correct. I make no judgments regarding the latter and only evaluate crisis management skills, techniques, and resource handling. Nor in any way are these cases intended to be a definitive or comprehensive analysis of the issues involved in them. Rather, they are simply 'mini-cases' focusing exclusively on the response of the various party governments to the crises.

With these caveats in mind, I first present brief summaries of each of the paired comparisons and how well or ill the government of the time seemed to have handled them. Then, I will try to come up with some tentative generalizations from these comparisons about the similarities and differences of each party's management of crises, before analyzing how the nature of the LDP and DPJ as parties and governments may have affected these responses. Lastly, I will suggest at some of the consistent structural defects that may have hindered and are hindering both party governments' crisis management capabilities and what these suggest more generally about the applicability of the various models of governance in Japan during times of crisis.

Okinawa bases crises

The LDP 1995

Okinawa Prefecture, captured in a bloody battle near the end of World War II by US forces, operated as a military colony of the US for 27 years after the war and finally returned to Japan in 1972, is home to most of US ground combat forces (most of them Marines on Okinawa) still stationed in Japan. Over half of all US military personnel in Japan are on Okinawa, three-quarters of the total land occupied by US forces lies in Okinawa, taking up about 20% of the total land of this small and densely inhabited Japanese prefecture. There have long been complaints by Okinawan residents of the human, environmental, and economic costs of this huge US military presence, but the bases have been maintained by both the US and Japanese governments on the grounds of their importance to US, Northeast Asia, and global security stability goals (Global Security.org military, n.d.b; background is found in Hashimoto *et al.*, 2005).

In September 1995, a US sailor and two Marines kidnapped and gang-raped a 12-year Japanese schoolgirl on her way home from school. Although protests against the bases by Okinawan citizens (including landowners whose land had been confiscated to build the US bases years before) had been endemic for years, they had always been

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smaller scale and manageable by the authorities. But the 1995 rape crystallized the anti-base movement that then organized huge protests involving as many as 80,000 persons on Okinawa and the Japanese mainland, and created an unprecedented wave of resistance against national Japanese government policy of the large US base presence on Okinawa (Smith, 1998: 8).

The wave of protests were large and intense, and came at a time when there were voices on both sides of the Pacific asking why such a scale of bases, or even the US–Japan alliance itself, was necessary at all after the end of the Cold War (Funabashi, 1999). The severity of the opposition to the bases in this context challenged both governments to do something quickly to manage the discontent, but also to maintain the majority of Okinawan bases to accomplish what they perceived to be the national security and alliance interests of both countries.

First the two governments discussed the 'Status of Forces Agreement' (SOFA) that governed US military personnel in Japan and which prevented US military personnel from being turned over to a Japanese prosecutor until they were indicted, hampering the gathering of evidence that could lead to an indictment. The Japanese are dissatisfied with this provision, but the US maintains the different criminal justice systems and the human rights of its soldiers require such a provision. On this issue, the US agreed it would give sympathetic treatment to Japanese requests to turn over a suspect prior to indictment in major violent crimes such as murder and rape. This action did not quell discontent over SOFA. Then, a 'Special Action Committee on Okinawa', or SACO, was set up in 1996, in further response to the discontent, to consider lowering the burden of the alliance and bases on Okinawan residents. SACO issued two reports, an interim one and a final one at the end of 1996 (Ina, 2005: 41–2). The final report provided for the movement of Futenma helicopter base in southern Okinawa in the future. The preferred site would be a sea-based facility off the East coast of Okinawa. Although the exact site was not specified in the report, it was widely assumed that it would be off the coast of Nago City where the current US base at Camp Schwab was located (Brooks, 2010: 20–1 and 10–20 on the context and politics leading up to the final report).

This, however, did not satisfy the Okinawans, nor did it their Governor, Ota Masahide, who wanted US bases on the island reduced, not just shifted around. Prime Minister Hashimoto, on the other hand, while wanting to quell the dissatisfaction of the Okinawans, also wanted to reaffirm the alliance and not worsen US–Japan relations at a time when the central government perceived a rising China, China–Taiwan relations, and a dangerous North Korea as potential threats to Japan. Central government negotiations with Okinawa were not going well, but Hashimoto continued to try to satisfy both sides by pushing Okinawa to accept the move of Futenma while promising compensation to the Okinawans. All of this was complicated by related issues, such as a renewal that was due of landowner leases for US bases, as well as northern Okinawan contractors who wanted any construction to be done only by themselves and which exerted pressure on the Okinawan government to only come to an agreement if this were included (Brooks, 2010: 12–13, 23–6).

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Things became more complicated when Governor Ota refused to sign a new land lease agreement on the bases, and residents of Nago obtained enough signatures to hold a referendum on the heliport move to their city. Ota's refusal to sign a new land lease for the bases was overcome when Prime Minister Hashimoto sued the Governor to force him to sign the leases, and both regional high courts and the Japan Supreme Court ruled in the central government's favor and the Diet passed a law omitting the Governor from the process of approval of leases in the future (Johnson, 1999a: 112–13). In December 1997, a majority of voters in the city of Nago, rejected in a referendum any construction of an offshore helicopter base near the city. Although the referendum result was in no way binding, it represented a public relations setback for the potential move. The Mayor, however, expressed his intention to accept the proposed move, and then resigned, and his elected successor did consent. Governor Ota, who would not accept the plan, was defeated in 1999 by an LDP-backed candidate who said he would, aided greatly by the LDP and central government (Ogawa, 2005: 52; Brooks, 2010: 29–34).

All was not pressure, legal suits, and support for rival candidates, however. Hashimoto, in 1997 on a visit to Okinawa on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the reversion of the islands to Japanese control, announced a 'Twenty-first Century Plan for the Okinawan Economy' with promises of measures to create a free trade zone there, expedited visa procedures for foreigners to visit, tax incentives for businesses and improvement of transportation and communications infrastructure, while partially singling out the northern region of the prefecture where the moved base would be located (Inoue *et al.*, 1997).

Further complex and difficult negotiations would drag on until 2006, when an agreement was finally reached that encompassed the return of some US facilities including Futenma, relocation of its functions to Henoko, and the removal of 8,000 Marines and their dependents from Okinawa to Guam (Brooks, 2010: 34–85). This plan has still not been implemented, but stretching the management of the problem out over a long time and leaving resolution to even further into the future had defused the 1995 crisis. In 2009, a different crisis over Futenma would erupt for the Japanese and US governments to manage, with very different stimulus and handling.

The DPJ 2009

The DPJ had supported moving the base off the island, but in its 2009 election manifesto, prior to taking power after its victory in the House of Representatives election, it had promised only to 'Move in the direction of re-examining the realignment of the US military forces in Japan and the role of US military bases in Japan' (DPJ manifesto, 2009: 28). 'Moving in the direction of re-examining' is about as vague a promise as one could get, and without any specific mention of Futenma. During the election campaign, however, DPJ leader and future Prime Minister Hatoyama specifically mentioned reopening negotiations with the US over the base agreement

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and moving Futenma completely off Okinawa (Norimatsu, n.d.). Okinawan resistance to the move of the base to the northern part of the island had never dissipated completely but had become more subdued over the years. Hatoyama's statements now reinvigorated both the anti-base movement and its hope that a DPJ administration would indeed fulfill its goal of reducing US presence on the island rather than just shuffling it around.

Additionally, after taking office the new DPJ administration embarked on a series of policies that both frightened and irritated the new Obama administration. It ended Japan's refueling of US and other nations' ships in the Indian Ocean as part of the war in Afghanistan, and pushed for an 'East Asian Community' to strengthen economic and political relations between Japan and its neighbors. Although these were long-standing DPJ positions and should not have been a surprise, combined with the new moves on Futenma they shocked Washington. Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, went to Tokyo where he had a meeting with new Foreign Minister, Katsuya Okada, that was apparently not confrontational, although Gates emphasized the existing agreement on Okinawa was the only real option, but the Japanese media interpreted it as Gates scolding his counterpart (Brooks, 2011: 29). It should be noted that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) was overridden on its opposition to alienating the US (Norimatsu, n.d).

Hatoyama was under extreme pressure from all sides to live up to his campaign promise. His coalition partner, the SDPJ, the former Socialist Party, was totally on the side of the anti-base movement and urging him on.[1] The anti-base movement was revitalized by the prospect of moving the base off the island. Environmentalists were appalled that the new base near Nago would be built over the coast that was the habitat of an endangered sea mammal.

The US and Japan entered into negotiations on the matter. Near the end of May 2010, the issue was finally settled by an agreement between the two countries that gave some face-saving gestures to Hatoyama but substantially returned to the original LDP agreement to move Futenma to northern Okinawa and not off the island (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2010). Okinawans were furious. The DPJ's coalition partner dropped out of the coalition. And this fiasco combined with scandals involving DPJ Secretary-General, Ichirō Ozawa, as well as one concerning Hatoyama himself finally led to Hatoyama's resignation in June 2010. Adding insult to injury, subsequent Wikileaks revelations made it clear that Hatoyama had communicated to the US early in the dispute that, if the US objected, the bases could stay in Okinawa, and then in a subsequent interview after his resignation revealed that the need for continuing 'deterrence', given to the public as the reason for the final agreement, was duplicitous

[1] There are various theories about why Hatoyama decided to pursue the Futenma issue so early in his administration (see, e.g., Harris, 2010). One rarely deeply investigated, however, is whether this was a price the DSPJ exacted for the coalition, a coalition (also with small the People's New Party) that allowed the DPJ to gain a larger majority in the upper House as well.

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too (Norimatsu, n.d.). Whatever Hatoyama's and the DPJ's sincere intent to support the Okinawan's objections to US base hazards, the incident from start to finish seems a total and unnecessary fiasco.

Comparing cases

Whatever one thinks of the issue of reducing the burdens of US bases on Okinawa and whether the bases need to be there, an issue on which there is great disagreement among scholars, or the ethics or legality of the Japanese government's techniques, it is difficult not to give Hashimoto some credit for his skillful handling of the 1995 crisis. Using a combination of carrots (promises of economic aid, constant negotiations, and visits by himself and emissaries) and sticks (pressure, law suits, aid in unseating opponents in elections), the crisis was gradually defused by the promise of at least gaining residents near Futenma some relief, and through years of constant negotiation over the form this would take stretching and gradually diminishing the intensity of the opposition and the memory of the horrible act that precipitated the crisis. Okinawans by and large continued their opposition to maintaining so many bases on the island at all, but the immediate crisis atmosphere was managed. The negative consequence is that it was handled but not really resolved to the satisfaction of the Okinawans or the Japanese public, and that subsequent LDP governments were not able to implement the agreement, leaving its successor DPJ governments with the problem.

Even if one sympathizes with the intent and goal of the DPJ's support for the Okinawan movement, one must conclude that Hatoyama himself blundered badly and himself created the 2009 crisis by his statements and by holding out hope once again to Okinawans that the base could be completely moved off the island without any viable evidence that this could be accomplished. However sincere in his desire to reduce the burdens of Okinawans, there seems either to have been little calculation of whether he really had any leverage with the US on the matter at all or Hatoyama knew he did not have any but duplicitously engaged in the charade anyway. Unless Hatoyama was prepared to kick the US out of Futenma, highly unlikely given its effect on the overall alliance at a time of increased perceived threat from regional neighbors, his viable options for responding to a US 'no' were non-existent, with the resulting status quo of not moving the base at all, leaving the residents near Futenma worse off than they were without the LDP agreement. That his actions would be perceived by the US as a gross abrogation of a serious agreement with an ally, negotiated with difficulty for 11 years, and might rile the relationship right at the beginning of his term and of President Obama's, also did not seem matter to him. With the released documents of his promise in advance to the US that he would relent on the base move if the US refused the proposal leaves the impression he was either naïve or deceptive in his statements to the Okinawans. Even given that the US also over-reacted and may have handled things badly does not detract from the conclusion that the 2009 crisis was unnecessarily and naïvely created by Hatoyama and the DPJ itself and woefully mismanaged.

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Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands confrontations

These islands have been a bone of contention between Japan and both the People's Republic of China and Taiwan for several years. Known to the Chinese as early as the fifteenth century, they are little more than uninhabited rocks in the Pacific that lie 120 nautical miles northeast of Taiwan, 200 nautical miles from China, and 200 nautical miles from Okinawa. The Japanese government officially claimed control over the islands in January 1895 after concluding that they had never been part of China. Because at that time, however, the two countries were locked in the Sino-Japanese War, the Chinese have always associated Japan's takeover of the islands with their humiliation at the hands of Imperial Japan, even though the islands were not part of the treaty with China (Treaty of Shimonoseki) that ended that war (Global Security.org, Military, n.d b; for more details on the history and claims, see Taira, n.d.).

After the end of World War II, the islands came under the control of the US without any protest from China or Taiwan. And the Japanese argument (not accepted by the Chinese) is that they were not part of the territory Japan ceded in the San Francisco Peace Treaty. They were, however, returned to Japan as part of the revision of Okinawa and the other Ryūkyū islands in 1971 and Japan has administrative control to this day. However, once oil resources were discovered nearby in 1969, both China and Taiwan have started claiming the islands. They claim that the islands had been under the administration of Taiwan until they were ceded to Japan after the Sino-Japanese War and that they were an integral part of Taiwan after the end of World War II (Global Security.org, Military, n.d.b). 'Perhaps the next generation will be wiser than us and find a way of actually resolving this problem', said Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping in 1978 (*The Economist*, 2010). So far the opposite has been true.

The disputes over these islands are thus very complicated – by disagreements over legalities involving interpretations of historical facts, by China's grievances over its imperialist humiliations, and by potential energy resource advantages. They also can be influenced by other irritants and conflicts in China–Japan relations and by domestic politics and nationalist pressures in both countries. For example, some consider the Chinese government's recent pressure concerning the islands to be part of its military's 'access denial' strategy, thus possibly also making the islands a geo-strategic problem between China, Japan, and the US (Waseda University Japan–US Research Institute, 2008–2010: 76). The issue of the islands is one thing both Taiwan and China agree upon, however.

The LDP/CGP 2008

In 2000 and until its defeat in 2009, the LDP had as its coalition partner the Clean Government Party (CGP), a moderate centrist party. Under this coalition government in the 2000s, the Japanese government was fairly consistent in its policies: eject any Chinese vessels who trespassed in the zone around the islands claimed by Japan, but seek to avoid any escalation of conflict with either China or Taiwan. But then on 10

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June 2008, a sport-fishing vessel from Taiwan sunk after colliding with a Japanese patrol boat in the disputed waters.

Japan released the passengers but detained the captain, claiming the boat had crashed into the Japanese vessel. They released the captain after three more days (see Singh, 2010). The Taiwan government, however, claimed that the Japanese were lying and it and the crew of the vessel asserted that the Japanese patrol ship had rammed their vessel (*Taipei Times*, 2008a). Taiwan protesters and journalists in ten boats circled the islands on 15 June and the Japanese Coast Guard monitored them and warned them off but no further incidents occurred. However, one of the crew members aboard the Taiwanese vessel had videoed the collision, which showed clearly that the Japanese Coast Guard boat, was at fault. Japan paid about $310,000 in compensation to the owners of the Taiwan vessel (*Asia Times*, 2010).

Within two weeks of the incident, Japan and the captain of the Coast Guard vessel that rammed the Taiwan boat were providing Taiwan and the captain of the fishing vessel with a written apology (*Taipei Times*, 2008b). Japan was highly embarrassed by its initial claims that the Taiwanese vessels was at fault, visual evidence having been released proving this to be false.

Some elements of this 2008 crisis were to be repeated in a far more serious one, this time with the People's Republic in 2010.

The DPJ

As we saw above, the DPJ took over the reins of government in 2009, the first electoral defeat for the LDP in 54 years. We have also seen how the DPJ attempted to reorient Japanese foreign policy after taking power, in part with the attempt to renegotiate the Futenma base issue albeit with disastrous results. The party's intentions, however, were smarter and more well-intentioned than their implementation, encompassing maintaining but re-gearing the US–Japan alliance and a different foreign policy strategy more suitable for a multi-polar international system that was witnessing the rise of China. Indeed, this included strengthening its Asian ties especially with China (Hughes, 2012).

During its first year in office, the DPJ exhibited the friendliest policy toward China in many years. Its Secretary-General, Ozawa Ichirō, led a 600-strong delegation, including over a hundred of the young new DPJ Diet representatives on a trip to China that included a meeting with President Hu Jintao that called for deepening trust and cooperation between the two countries (*China View*, 2009). Prime Minister Hatoyama in a speech in Singapore just a few months after taking power called for the building of an 'East Asian Community' as a step toward more EU-like regional integration (Government of Japan, 2009). China and Japan now seemed to be moving closer than at any time since Japan recognized the People's Republic in 1972.

On 7 September 2010, just a week after the first anniversary of the DPJ winning power, a confrontation occurred near the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands that would change everything. Once again it involved a Chinese boat, this time a fishing boat. A large

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number of Chinese fishing boats apparently moved into the area near the disputed islands following schools of fish. When a Japanese Coast Guard patrol boat moved in toward one of the boats it deemed too close to the island, the fishing boat collided with the Japanese vessel, although how was not initially revealed. The Japanese seized the vessel and crew, which they soon returned to China, but arrested the Captain and held him to be tried in Japanese courts. As could be seen by comparison to the quick release of the Captain in the case of the 2008 incident involving Taiwan, this was a somewhat unusual handling of the matter, and may have been a deviation from a 2004 secret understanding between Japan and China (there was no such agreement with Taiwan). There is some evidence that Minister for Land, Transportation, and Infrastructure (the Ministry with jurisdiction over the Coast Guard), Maehara Seiji, a young, past, and possibly future, leader of the DPJ, may have intervened to direct the unusual arrest, and that his subsequent promotion during the crisis to Foreign Minister may have intensified the crisis by angering the Chinese. Apparently, Prime Minister Hatoyama was otherwise preoccupied with the intense race for his successor (Tiberghien, 2010: 3–7).

Despite early signs that the crisis might be contained, the Chinese belief that the Japanese were violating their prior secret agreement, and the prosecutor's decision to hold the Captain of the Chinese fishing vessel for an additional ten days, further inflamed the Chinese government.[2] It seemed to engage in aggressive actions to show its displeasure at developments, including arresting four Japanese employees on business in China and a threatening speech by the Prime Minister against Japan, and there was a perception by Japan and the US that its ending of shipments of 'rare earth', a resource used in the manufacture of many high-tech products, was part of this pattern as well. This finally led the prosecutor to release the Captain, probably under pressure from the Prime Minister's Office and the Foreign Ministry. But this was not the end. China surprisingly demanded an apology also from Japan, anti-Japanese protests took place in parts of China, and verbal attacks continued (some against Maehara personally for his role), while counter-Chinese demonstrations and statements then took place in Japan (Tiberghien, 2010: 7–9).

Then in the midst of it all, the most unexpected turn of all occurred. A Coast Guard officer who was unhappy with his government's handling of the crisis unilaterally released a video on YouTube that clearly showed the Chinese vessel had intentionally rammed the Japanese patrol boat despite warnings from the Coast Guard boat to stay away (but did not show what had led up to this confrontation).[3] This was a huge embarrassment to the DPJ government that had been trying its best to downplay and resolve the crisis. It is unclear whether the Captain of the Chinese vessel was just angry

[2] This is common procedure under Japanese law: the police may hold suspects for up to 30 days without an indictment.

[3] An Al Jazeera news report with commentary that has a copy of the video can be seen at www.youtube.com/watch?v=tmMUtNBY-2Q

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and aggressive, drunk, or merely trying to keep his catch and boat from being seized. The video does not show what led up to the part where he rammed the Japanese Coast Guard boat. But the fact that the DPJ government had concealed this aspect of the confrontation from its own people in order to calm relations with China did not go over well with the public and undermined DPJ popularity (Tiberghien, 2010: 8–10).

The costs for all actors in this unintentional crisis between Asia's two economic and military superpowers were huge. It torpedoed the DPJ's moves toward China and, along with the Futenma fiasco, public support and its 'grand strategy' for a re-oriented (literally and figuratively) Japanese foreign policy. China thus lost as an ally its most cooperative Japanese government in ages. Later in a meeting with now Foreign Minister Maehara, Secretary of State Clinton overtly stated for the first time that the US–Japan Security Treaty covered the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands.[4] The DPJ had been forced back into a foreign policy posture and strategy much more similar to the previous LDP's reliance on the US than it had wanted previously (Hughes, 2012). Many governments in the Pacific also were shocked at the surprisingly aggressive stance and over-reaction of the Chinese government and began to wonder if China was now flexing its muscles and becoming uncomfortably nationalistic rather than the responsible up-and-coming power it seemed to have been trying to be previously. By the 'rare earth' controversy, some also began to doubt if China was in the long term a reliable supplier of key goods, and some businesses and governments considered diversifying their sources of supply. The only 'winner' of the confrontation and crisis was the US (Mulgan, 2010), a victory that could turn out pyrrhic if it involves the US directly into any future confrontations between Japan and China over the islands.

Comparing cases

Neither party's government handled these crises with Taiwan and the PRC well. In each case, they wisely tried both to minimize the conflicts with these important Asian trading partners but simultaneously pacify any criticism from nationalists or the public that they were not defending Japanese claims to the island. Neither party succeeded completely in either respect but interestingly failed in completely different fashions. To minimize the conflict, the LDP government released the captain of the Taiwanese sport fishing vessel relatively quickly, but publicly and falsely claimed their vessel was at fault; the DPJ government on the other hand, held the captain of the PRC fishing boat in custody for a long time (one thing that infuriated the Chinese side) but tried to minimize conflict with the other side by not revealing that the Chinese boat had intentionally rammed the Japanese Coast Guard patrol boat. And, in both cases,

[4] Although this statement seemed to be a change of policy in that the US appeared to be revising its prior policy of avoiding getting involved in the island dispute, the US–Japan Mutual Security Treaty (Article V) does state, 'Each Party recognizes that an armed attack against either Party *in the territories under the administration of Japan* would be dangerous to its own peace and safety and declares that it would act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional provisions and processes' (italics added).

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the release of visual evidence of who was actually the cause of the collisions highly embarrassed the Japanese government and undermined its credibility – in the former case with the Taiwanese and in the latter case with its own public.[5]

Disasters and their management

During the past 20 years, Japan has experienced two horrendous natural disasters, the 1995 Hanshin earthquake that devastated parts of the important port city of Kobe, and the 2011 Great Eastern Japan (GEJ) earthquake and its subsequent huge tsunami that also resulted in an intense and potentially catastrophic near-meltdown at a nuclear facility in the area (Fukushima). The former crisis occurred during the administration of a coalition cabinet of the SDPJ prime minister and a few of his colleagues from this party and the small Sakigake Party, but one dominated by the LDP. The GEJ disasters occurred under a DPJ administration and cabinet.

The LDP/SDPJ/Sakigake (1995)

On the 17 January 1995, the Hanshin earthquake struck with a magnitude of 7.2. It centered on the city of Kobe and its approximately one and a half million people – Japan's fifth most populous metropolis. The worst earthquake to devastate Japan in nearly 70 years, it resulted in over 5,000 deaths, 30,000 injured, and left 300,000 homeless, with over 100,000 buildings damaged (Fukushima, 1995).

Problems with the government's response to the disaster showed up almost immediately. The government waited five and a half hours after the quake before the National Land Agency responded (*Asahi Shimbun*, 1995a). Although a National Emergency Center (NEC) was established the same day as the quake, only 2,300 Self-Defense Force (SDF) personnel were dispatched because the NEC lacked sufficient information as to the extent of the damage and problem (*Asahi Shimbun*, 1995b). The government did begin to respond somewhat better after that. Within just a few days, Prime Minister Murayama visited the devastated area, and a local response headquarters was established in Kobe (*Asahi Shimbun*, 1995c). Part of the problem, however, was that despite Japan's vaunted procedures and systems in place to forecast and deal with such disasters, neither national nor local governments had anticipated such a large quake in this area, but rather it had always been forecast for the Tokai region near Shizuoka (Fukushima, 1995; *Asahi Shimbun*, 1995f).

Further problems, however, continued to hamper the effort. Although volunteer relief poured in, they were totally uncoordinated by the government (*Asahi Shimbun*, 1995g), and government efforts were consistently plagued by lack of coordination and communication between and among agencies; also some individual agencies and

[5] An *Asahi Shimbun* public opinion poll (Q10) published on 16 November 2010 in the morning edition of the newspaper, revealed that 79% of respondents thought that not releasing the video of the incident by the government initially was 'an inappropriate decision'. See http://mansfieldfdn.org/program/research-education-and-communication/asian-opinion-poll-database/listofpolls/2010-polls/asahi-shimbun-november-2010-emergency-public-opinion-poll-10–32/ (accessed 11 November 2012 12:28p.m.).

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functions were apparently performed better (communications) than others (traffic control) (Fukushima, 1995; Orr, 1995; *Asahi Shimbun*, 1995d). One perfect example of the lack of coordination between ministries was the refusal at first of the government to accept the offers of aid from foreign countries even though the MOFA favored it, because the Fire and Disaster Management Agency (FDMA) apparently wanted to handle it only domestically (Fukushima, 1995; *Asahi Shimbun*, 1995e).

The media and public attributed blame for these failings to personal, political, and structural factors. Personally, Prime Minister Murayama was criticized for his lack of experience in government, but also politically because some thought his and the government's slow response to using the SDF extensively was because of his and his party's long ideological opposition to the SDF's constitutional legitimacy (*Asahi Shimbun*, 1995h, i, j). The structural criticisms were legion. The inability of the Prime Minister's Office, or any other comprehensive institution, to effectively coordinate disaster response, allowing to operate the typical and well-known 'vertical administration' (*tatewari gyōsei*) of the bureaucracy's rivalry, territorial and jurisdictional jealousies, and lack of horizontal communication, came in for the most criticism (e.g., Fukushima, 1995; *Asahi Shimbun*, 1995g, k, 1998).

Less than two weeks after the quake, opinion polls showed that a majority of the public did not support the government's response to the disaster, citing lack of preparation for rescue, decisionmaking problems, and lack of effective leadership by the prime minister (*Asahi Shimbun*, 1995 l) . Administrative reforms later passed by the Diet and implemented (2001) were partly aimed at rectifying the problems that were clearly shown in the government's response to the Hanshin quake, including strengthening the prime minister and the cabinet's control and coordination over the bureaucracy and consolidating several agencies. Among these were the Construction and Transportation Ministries and the National Land Agency, the agencies most involved in responding to disasters such as the 1995 earthquake, which were combined into a single Ministry of Infrastructure.

The DPJ 2011

On 11 March 2011 at 2:46p.m. a magnitude 9 earthquake struck off the Northeast (Tōhoku) region of Japan. The magnitude of the quake was unprecedented in Japan in modern times and created an enormous tsunami wave estimated to be 15 meters (about 45 feet) high that struck along the same coastline easily surmounting any sea walls that had been constructed against such an eventuality. Approximately 15,000–20,000 persons are estimated to have been killed or missing, the overwhelming majority by the tsunami and few by the earthquake (Kaufmann and Penciakova, 2011). The tsunami also severely overwhelmed and damaged the Fukushima nuclear plant in the area that had four reactors right along the coast, causing the loss of electricity and backup generators and thus the shutdown of crucial cooling systems. Three meltdowns occurred within the first three or so days causing hydrogen explosions that released dangerous radiation

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into the surrounding area (Kingston, 2012), and, it was later discovered, into the food chain.

Given the unprecedented scale of the quake and tsunami, the immediate response of the DPJ government to both was probably relatively satisfactory, undoubtedly reflecting some of the lessons learned and improvements made to the system after the Hanshin earthquake. Earthquake preparation had been strengthened both in terms of training and in terms of infrastructure, and the early warning system installed after the Kobe disaster seemed to work – communications, especially the internet, continued to function. The Bank of Japan fed billions into the economy quickly to stabilize the markets. Unlike in the Hanshin quake, a large (100,000) contingent of SDF was quickly mobilized and responded, and foreign aid was accepted without huge delay. Probably in part because of the preparedness and training, the population also responded remarkably well (Kaufmann and Penciakova, 2011).

The nuclear disaster response by contrast, however, was another story entirely. The Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO), the company that operated the nuclear plant and one with a history of deception and cover-up of its mistakes, bears much of the responsibility for the subsequent mishandling of the crisis as it consistently failed to inform government officials, especially the prime minister and cabinet, of what was happening at the plant, downplayed dangers, did not adequately inform or misinformed the government and public about developments, and then tried to shift all the blame onto the prime minister rather than admit its epic mismanagement of the crisis.[6]

Nevertheless, the government as well for its part did not perform well, above and beyond the lack of information and misinformation given it by TEPCO. The government did not announce the release of radiation due to the hydrogen explosion until five hours after it occurred (*AERA*, 2011a). Its instructions to citizens concerning how wide an evacuation zone was in effect constantly changed in the first few days, and its information to the public about the radiation dangers was often wrong or inaccurate (*AERA*, 2011b). Indeed, it appears that some of the evacuation centers established were actually in higher radiation areas than those that citizens had been instructed to evacuate from! Later investigation showed that the prime minister had been told by the Chair of the Nuclear Safety Commission that the System for Prediction of Environmental Emergency Dose Information (SPEEDI) that determines the location of radiation dispersal was not available, when it actually was, and when he was finally accurately informed it could be used it was already 11 days after the hydrogen explosion that released radiation into the atmosphere. The Minister for Economics, Trade and Industry, in whose jurisdiction the nuclear industry resides, admitted later he had never heard of the system before the Fukushima meltdowns (Kingston, 2012).

[6] (Kingston, 2012) provides a damning report on TEPCO's intentional and unintentional failings before, during, and after the disaster.

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The major opposition party rather than rallying to show unity in the time of such an unprecedented calamity for the nation proved to be only an obstacle. The LDP's leader refused a request by Prime Minister Kan to join the cabinet and take on a role in the reconstruction of the devastated areas, and then failure to get other parties to agree to join the reconstruction headquarters delayed the submission and passage of the Basic Reconstruction Law. It therefore did not pass the Diet until over three months after the quake (*Jiji Press*, 2011). There has also been much criticism that the government's efforts at reconstruction after the quake have been too slow.

There is much blame to go around concerning the crisis and its handling: the LDP helped create the problem by its many years in power when it did not regulate the nuclear industry properly, and TEPCO clearly was responsible for many of the problems during the crisis. Nevertheless, the *ad hoc*, uncoordinated, non-transparent handling of the crisis, the government's inability to control and manage TEPCO, and the failure to communicate timely and accurate information to the public when it needed it have all resulted in the DPJ government becoming the target to much of the public's criticism. Six months after the disasters, polls showed that 67% do not support the government response to the earthquake and that 78% do not support the government response to the nuclear plant incident (*Asahi Shimbun*, 2011).

Comparing cases

To some extent, the sheer magnitude and triple nature of the GEJ disasters makes comparison to any other crisis difficult, even to the devastation caused by the Hanshin quake. It is also clear that the DPJ government, thanks to lessons learned from Hanshin 16 years earlier, responded better to the GEJ earthquake and tsunami than the LDP government had done. Neither probably was handled as poorly as the Katrina disaster in New Orleans in the US. Yet the incompetence, miscommunication, lack of transparency and coordination, and failures in command, control, and communicate with TEPCO, bureaucrats, local officials, opposition parties, and most of all with the public shown by the DPJ government in the 2011 nuclear disaster have to be evaluated highly negatively as a response to crisis. Most disconcerting of all perhaps is that some of these failings, most especially in coordination and communication among bureaucratic agencies and with the public and the failure of the governments to have the necessary knowledge to have strategies and plans in place to deal with the problems, were similar to the shortcomings seen during the Hanshin disaster.

Some tentative conclusions and comparisons

Six cases, three from each party government, of course do not provide sufficient material for a definitive comparison of how each party handled crises in the 1990s to the 2010s. No sample would; but by choosing very similar types of cases, we can begin to see the outlines of crisis management for each party government sufficient to make some preliminary comparisons and generalizations.

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It is clear from even our brief summaries above that none of the six crises was handled particularly well, and most poorly, by whichever party was in control of government. Arguably, the 1995 Okinawa base crisis might qualify in a very limited sense as having been handled best, not because the crisis was quickly and effectively solved by the LDP government of the time but because at least it managed to defuse the rage of the public and use the resources that the LDP had by virtue of its long tenure in power to dampen its intensity. This gained it the margin it needed to enter into long-term negotiations with the US over the movement of the bases. That it took over a decade more to even gain an acceptable agreement, however, indicates, that the LDP central government did not have enough influence or power over local governments to force an agreement any sooner, and was as lacking in skill and resources as the subsequent DPJ government to bring about a solution that was at least minimally satisfactory to Okinawans.

These crises indicate almost predictable trade-offs about the kind of disadvantages or advantages the LDP and DPJ governments have in facing a crisis. Because of the LDP's nearly 54 year hold on power, the close connections and communication it developed with the bureaucracy, the 'policy tribe' representatives with expertise in policy areas and connections to interest groups and officials, its leverage with local governments, and its ability to deploy financial resources derived from a long period of economic growth without huge budget deficits, the LDP governments had an advantage they could use, for example in the 1995 Okinawa bases crisis and even in the 2008 Senkaku/Diaoyu crisis with Taiwan.

However, these very advantages also created major weaknesses that helped produce crises or limited the ability of government to manage them. Dependence on and close connections to the bureaucracy and interest groups meant a lack of arms-length regulation that helped produce the GEJ nuclear problem. It also meant dependence on such officials for information and judgment, judgment for example that might prove woefully wrong as in the case of the Ministry of Defense's false conclusions as to who was at fault in the 2008 Senkaku/Diaoyu crisis or its lack of preparedness for the Hanshin quake. Integration with the bureaucracy also means the cabinet and government is as subject to, and may not be able to transcend or coordinate, the rivalries and lack of communication and cooperation across policy areas such as in the bureaucracy. For most of the LDP's time in power, it also meant a relatively weak prime minister – exactly the role that should have command and control during a crisis.

DPJ governments have exactly the reverse advantages and disadvantages. Their newness to power means they can approach policy with fresh eyes and new innovative policies (such as Hatoyama tried to do with the Okinawa bases issue and the security relationship with the US). The DPJ's total distrust of the bureaucracy and its centralization of power in the prime minister and cabinet, however, also meant that it had no real expertise to depend upon to help it handle the crises (2009 Okinawa bases, 2010 Senkaku/Diaoyu, GEJ) it faced, no experience in governance, and a naïve, inexperienced, and a 'loose cannon' prime minister who first helped to create the

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crisis and then mis-managed it almost single handedly (2009 Okinawa bases). When failures occur as well, the DPJ government has no 'political cover' on which to blame the mishaps on the bureaucracy and will become the lightning rod for public or bureaucratic discontent (as Kan did in 2011 GEJ nuclear disaster). To a large extent, Japan in the 1990s–2010s is paying the price for its one-party dominant rule for so many years, no matter who comes to power, just in different ways.

Three consistencies stand out, nevertheless, across party governments. The first is that having the SDPJ (Socialist) as a coalition partner helps create more problems than it solves in a crisis. In both the crises in which it was in government (Hanshin and 2009 Okinawa bases), it either was ineffective because of its lack of experience in government or an actual impediment to managing the crisis because of its ideological predispositions (slow response to bringing the SDF in during Hanshin; limiting Hatoyama's options and mobilizing pressure on him during the 2009 Okinawa bases crisis).

The second is that *both* party governments and leaders have had tremendous problems managing and communicating with their national bureaucracies, public agencies, and the public in crisis, no matter who is in power, and whether those agencies are civilian (Hanshin, GEJ, 1995 and 2009 Okinawa bases) or military (2008 and 2010 Senkaku/Diaoyu), national or local. The 'vertical administration' of Japan's bureaucracy impedes communication across responsible agencies, as some models of Japanese policymaking have suggested. But even *within* them, the national government has difficulties in times of crisis in commanding and controlling and in communication, both to and from them. In too many of the crises, the government communicated falsehoods or insufficient information to its own public, generating mistrust and undermining support (Senkaku/Diaoyu 2008 and 2010; Okinawa bases 2009; Hanshin and GEJ disasters).

Finally, the obverse and source of these problems was the apparent lack of institutionalized, authoritative, coordinating organizations and mechanisms to handle relationships across and between governments and between them and the public. Despite the strengthening of the prime minister's and cabinet's roles and functions with electoral and administrative reform in the 1990s, they still appear relatively weak in a crisis and unable to effectively communicate and authoritatively command, whoever is in power. Instead, other than Hatoyama's partial use of the courts after the 1995 Okinawa rape incident, to a surprising extent the government still seems to rely on *informal* and *ad hoc* measures, relationships, and organizations to coordinate, communicate, and persuade other actors involved in the crisis. This of course is then subject to the individual personalities, self-interests, and capabilities of the individuals involved.

One would expect in any democracy in times of major domestic or foreign policy crises that power would *temporarily* become more centralized, so that authoritative orders and commands within the government could be issued and obeyed, and that the public and media would rally around the government, foregoing partisan politics and opposition for the time being. This also means that those who are clearly in charge during the crisis can be held accountable for its management after it is over. Instead,

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Japan seems to have none of these attributes during a crisis. Rather, as in Sakaki's and Lukner's citing of Richard J. Samuels in the introduction, a view buttressed by our cases, each of the major actors involved in crises continue to pursue, protect, and defend their own self-interests (Samuels, 2012), perhaps even more so. This generalization seems particularly to apply to Japan in the crises considered here.

In not one of the crises we considered was there a single clear authority throughout government that operated effectively and whom the media, public, and opposition parties rallied around. The examples of this abound: the broken communication and decisions within parts of the central government or between center and local governments in both Hanshin and GEJ disasters; TEPCO's misinformation and ignoring of government's wishes during the latter; the embarrassing lies of the Coast Guard during the 2008 Senkaku/Diaoyu crisis or the insubordinate release of the videotape during the 2010 crisis; the resistance of local governments in the 1995 base crisis; or the mobilization of protests against moving Futenma to another part of Japan other than Okinawa. The central government seems to lack official authority to get things done even in a crisis and instead must rely on (often mismanaged) informal communication, persuasion, and coordination among rival and often uncooperative bureaucratic, political, and public actors.

This may seem particularly surprising considering Japan's image that grew up around the world in the 1980s and early 1990s during Japan's economic growth bubble and industrial policy era of an effective, unified, centralized, and authoritative democratic government with nationwide support that could get things done right. Although the bureaucracy was important in all our cases, it was anything but in control, or effective. Involvement in does not control make, as in the bureaucratic dominance theory. In for example the GEJ triple disaster case, certainly the cozy relationship between business in the form of TEPCO and the nuclear power industry, the bureaucracy and the political parties (LDP) and the 'iron triangle' it formed had much to do with the creation of the nuclear disaster at Fukushima. However, during the crisis itself each of the actors in the triad were anything but cooperative and collusive – it was every actor for himself to defend and protect individual interests. And politicians, particularly in the form of the prime minister, were anything but 'in charge' during any of our cases, just the opposite, Thus none of the usual theoretical models of Japan we mentioned in the beginning of this article seems to fit these crisis situations exactly.

It was John O. Haley, however, who saw beyond the supposedly effective outcomes of Japan's golden age of the 1980s, to the reality of how such seemingly cohesive effectiveness then was accomplished. He argues that such outcomes came about through informal guidance, persuasion, and relationships, and that the reason the government had to rely on the latter was because it lacked formal, legal, authority to command. The government's (mis-)handling of these crises seems to support this insight. Without recognized and effective formal authority, responses to crises depend on the vagaries of the personalities and informal networks involved at the time, and any previously cooperative relationships seem to break down under the pressure of crisis management.

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If such informal relationships worked in routine policymaking of the 1980s, our cases indicate that after the changes and reforms of the 1990s, such relationships tend to fall apart under stress, and the lack of formal, legal, authority to command has not worked particularly well for Japan to manage crises.

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