

Center for Strategic and International Studies

TRANSCRIPT  
Telephone Briefing

**“Previewing Japan’s Leadership Election and Implications  
for U.S.-Japan Relations”**

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Paige Montfort Thank you very much, Operator. Colleagues, supporters of CSIS, members of the press, and visiting fellows of the Japan Chair at CSIS, welcome. To those of you joining us from here in the U.S., good morning. And to those of you joining us from Asia, good evening. As our operator has stated, my name is Paige Montfort. I'm in external relations here at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Thank you very much for joining us for this timely briefing call today, during which we will hear from various CSIS experts previewing the leadership election of Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party. This is scheduled for tomorrow, the 29th of September. Our experts will discuss the candidates and key issues in the race, as well as the implications for Japanese politics and U.S.-Japan relations. Following their statements, we will move into a question-and-answer session, which will be prompted by instructions from our operator.

So, without further ado I will introduce our brilliant experts. We have with us Dr. Mike Green, who is the CSIS senior vice president for Asia and our Japan Chair. He will begin with a brief introduction. And then Yuko Nakano, the associate director of the U.S.-Japan Strategic Program here at CSIS, will follow with a description of the election process. And then we will hear from Nick Szechenyi, deputy director of the Japan Chair as well as senior fellow. And then we will turn it back over to Dr. Green for his analysis of the implications of this election for U.S.-Japan relations. Finally, we're going to open up our call to questions from you all, our attendees.

And with that, I am going to turn it back over to Dr. Green to start us off today.

Michael J. Green Thank you very much, Paige. Thank you all for joining us. We have journalists from Japan, from the U.S., and Europe. We have corporate sponsors of CSIS. Thank you all for your interest and support.

We will go to bed tonight in Washington. And while we sleep, 766 members of the LDP will decide the next leader of the party, and therefore the leader of Japan, and in many ways the leader of the liberal order in Asia. The Lowy Institute in Australia, when it did its recent survey of power in the region, concluded by saying that Japan is now the leader in Asia and in the Indo-Pacific for advancing neoliberal norms. Championing trade through CPTPP, the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership, through free and open Indo-Pacific infrastructure financing, the Quad.

This is an extremely important race in the sense that the United States depends on a strong and vibrant Japan, as do Australia, India, much of Europe. And many people looking at this race wonder, why does it not get the same attention as the election in Germany? Well, part of the reason is because in Germany we really are talking about the end of the Merkel era. But in the race in Japan, it's more of a question of who will continue the Abe era. Prime Minister Abe Shinzo really set the trajectory for Japan's role in the world, and in many respects, I would argue, brought Japan out of the postwar Yoshida

Shigeru vision, the so-called Yoshida Doctrine, into a new era that's more focused on advancing democratic values, partnering with coalitions such as the Quad, and strengthening the U.S.-Japan alliance and leading on the deepening of universal values and international institutions and norms in Asia; more proactive, more of a risk taker.

And none of the candidates, the four candidates, is talking about a dramatically different trajectory for Japan. And that's partly why there's not as much interest in the U.S. as there is in the German election. But there is interest. And the U.S. government and experts on the region are watching this debate because there are some important variations among the candidates how they would continue the strategy that Abe put in place.

So we'll begin with Yuko Nakano, who is a consummate Nagatachō insider, and can tell you about the mechanics and some scenarios for the race. Nick Szechenyi is going to talk about some of the defense, security, foreign-policy issues that will be important to the U.S. And then I'll come back again and wrap up our initial discussion with some observations on how the U.S. government, U.S. experts are looking at the race, some of the hopes, expectations, and concerns. And then I'll take your questions.

So, with that, I'll turn it over to Yuko.

Yuko Nakano

Thank you, Dr. Green.

Let me briefly go over the logistics of the LDP leadership election and the political calendar going forward, then a couple of notes to conclude.

LDP presidential election has two components – 382 votes by members of both chambers of the parliament, obviously called the Diet in Japan, and equal 382 votes allocated to the rank and file of the party across 47 prefectures.

There are about 1.1 million party members registered with the LDP who are eligible to vote in this race, and their votes will be allocated according to a proportional-representation system. And the Diet members will vote on September 29th, which is tomorrow, while the voting by the grassroots party members are already under way, actually completed by now. And both results will be announced together tomorrow.

As you know, there are four candidates: Mr. Taro Kono, who served as foreign and defense minister in the Abe administration and currently leading the COVID vaccination program in the Suga government; and former Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida, who has headed the policy research in the party during the Abe administration. Then Ms. Sanae Takaichi is the former internal affairs minister, and she also headed the party's Policy Research Council and other Cabinet posts. And finally, we have Ms. Seiko Noda, currently serving as the party's acting secretary general and Nick and Dr. Green will discuss their policies and profiles in more detail later.

So, if no one wins the majority, they will hold a runoff on the same day. For a runoff, the rules will change. Three hundred eighty-two lawmakers will cast their ballot again. For the rank-and-file part, the portion will be reduced to 47 votes, which is one vote allocated to each 47 local party chapter. It is also important to note that the rank and file are not going to hold the second voting, but their vote will be counted based on who got the most votes in the first round.

So, by this time tomorrow we will know who the winner will be. Then all eyes will be on the looming lower-house election. So let me quickly go over the political calendar going forward. It has been announced that both chambers of the Diet will be convened on October 4th to formally select the new prime minister. After appointing his or her Cabinet members and forming a government, the new prime minister is expected to make a policy speech in the Diet, likely on October 8<sup>th</sup>, and take questions from representatives of each party the following week. Then the new prime minister can either dissolve the lower house and call for a general election or wait until the current term of the lower house ends, which is October 21<sup>st</sup>, and set a date for a general election.

In theory, the voting can take place in October, which many argue is not very likely realistic at this point, and the latest possible voting date will be November 30<sup>th</sup>. Whichever route the new prime minister will decide to take, it is widely accepted now that the most likely date for the lower house election will be either November 7<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> with 12 days of campaign period.

Now, a couple of points to note regarding the LDP's leadership selection. First, this is a more inclusive selection process than the last year's leadership selection, which was triggered by the sudden resignation by then Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Back then, the proportion allocated to the rank and file was smaller and the campaign period was much shorter.

So, the party hopes that holding the more inclusive selection process will ensure different voices to be heard and reflected in the outcome and that for candidates engaging in policy debate during the campaign will showcase the depth and varieties that the party can offer.

The second is almost stating the obvious. But what is on everyone's mind is the forthcoming general election for the lower house, whose term will end in three weeks. Therefore, some members, especially younger members who are facing tough races in the general election, prefer to have a party leader who is a household name and popular among the public, someone who can connect with the voters. Others put more emphasis on different topics of governance, including consensus-building skills and working with the bureaucracy so that they can move government programs forward effectively.

So, this fault line, so to speak, which is a part generational, part interest-based, also appears in the debate over the party reform. I think the need for the party

to evolve is widely recognized so that it can adapt to the changing society and become more appealing, especially to independent voters, who make up about 30 percent of the electorate, according to some polls.

So, now, while there is a general consensus that how the party conducts its business needs to change, there are different opinions on how drastic those changes should be, and the result of tomorrow's leadership selection will indicate the degree and speed at which those changes will be carried out.

I will end here and hand it over to Nick.

Nicholas  
Szechenyi

Thank you very much.

So, the current prime minister, Yoshihide Suga, was criticized for failing to manage the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and recent public opinion polls show that COVID and economic policy are on the minds of the voters, and the four candidates have discussed those issues in debates over the last week.

But it's really interesting that Japan's defense policy has also featured prominently in the debates, and I'm just going to spend a few minutes talking about that. I think it's prominent in part because of the threat Japan faces from Chinese coercion and also North Korean provocations, which we also witnessed today, but also in electoral context the need not only to be popular with the voters, as Yuko pointed out, but also to curry favor with LDP members who have been debating defense policy more intently in recent months.

So just a quick overview of the issues that have come up. All four candidates have talked about the need to increase defense spending. There's pretty much consensus on that, given the complex security environment around Japan. There's been some discussion of whether Japan should acquire strike capability to strike enemy bases for self-defense. Candidate Takaichi and Mr. Kishida have been most forward leaning in that regard. Kishida's platform also focuses on missile defense and strengthening those capabilities in response to the North Korean threat. There's also been lively discussion about whether Japan should deploy U.S. mid-range missiles. Takaichi, who's the most hawkish of the candidates, has been very forward leaning on this question, the other candidates less so. But again, speaking to the grave nature of the regional security environment around Japan.

And it's also interesting that the recent AUKUS announcement, the decision by the United States and the U.K. to help Australia develop nuclear-powered submarines, is also featuring in the debate. Mr. Kono and Takaichi have also expressed support for that notion. You know, that and these other issues will be debated over the coming weeks. But the AUKUS debate is very interesting, because I think it shows that Japan is very interested in enhancing

interoperability with the U.S. and other partners in the region. So that's a space to watch going forward.

Where is this defense policy debate going to head after the lower house election, assuming the LDP prevails? The LDP is in a ruling coalition with a party known as the Komeito, which has more pacifist instincts. So, there could be a lot of negotiations involved. So, it's not entirely clear that Japan will move forward on all of these issues. Back in 2014 and 2015, when the Abe government was introducing a range of defense policy reforms to allow Japan to reinterpret the constitution and exercise collective self-defense, the Komeito was actively involved in those negotiations. So if there is a coalition government with the Komeito moving forward, these issues will be discussed and debated before any final decisions are made.

But I think the direction is clear. And this debate, once the election is over, could result in a new defense strategy for Japan, which will update Japan's interest in acquiring new capabilities. But, as Mike pointed out, I think it's fair to assume will also continue the strategic trajectory outlined by former Prime Minister Abe, centered on strengthening the U.S.-Japan alliance and networking with other likeminded partners through the Quad and other mechanisms. Once the LDP race ends and the lower house campaign starts, it's possible that other issues, such as COVID and the economy, will feature more prominently. But this LDP debate on defense is very critical, not only to Japan's future investments in its own capabilities, but the way it's going to coordinate strategic imperatives with the U.S. and other countries. So, it's an important space to watch going forward.

Let me turn it back to Mike for some concluding thoughts.

Dr. Green

Thank you, Nick. Thanks, Yuko.

So as Nick said, there's going to be far more continuity than change with the new leader of the LDP and presumed prime minister of Japan. I have not heard in my discussions with the administration, with members of Congress, different parts of the administration – White House, State, Defense and so forth – I've not heard anyone express a favorite candidate in Japan, even privately. And I've not heard anyone express serious reservations or alarm about any of the candidates. To the extent there's worry about this election in the United States, it's not about individual candidates. It's about whether or not we are entering a period in Japanese politics of instability and short-term prime ministerships.

In part, this is because of a pattern we have seen before. After we've had strong prime ministers who strengthened the U.S.-Japan alliance like Nakasone in the '80s or Koizumi in the 2000s, the pattern has been for the succeeding prime ministers to struggle to establish a *chokiseiken*, a long-term rule, like their predecessors. So, after Koizumi we had six prime ministers

before Abe came to power in 2012 and established a long-term, predictable government.

And the reason that matters so much for Japan's economy, Japan's presence in the world, and the U.S.-Japan alliance is because leaders at the G-7 or the G-20 or in bilateral alliances are human beings or people, and they develop trust, and it takes some time. It doesn't always happen in the first summit. Sometimes it takes two or three summits.

So, one problem – and this really plagued U.S.-Japan relations in the DPJ years – one problem is the president of the United States has to meet a new prime minister every year if this happens. It makes it very hard to move forward on an agenda where so much of the coordination ultimately depends on the two leaders' relationship. So, the leaders' relationship's a big factor.

And often, when you have this political turnover as we had after Koizumi or in the '90s, the bureaucracy in Japan becomes much more risk-averse, much more cautious, not sure whether their policies will still be supported by the next prime minister. And so anyone in the U.S. government will tell you that, you know, when there's a period of political fluidity like this, it's hard to get things done.

The big things that were done under Abe – free and open Indo-Pacific, the Quad, the revised U.S.-Japan defense guidelines – those required major efforts by Prime Minister Abe in the Diet over the course of well over a year. It took him some momentum from 2012 until 2015 to get that done.

So that's what people are mostly looking at: Will there be another rapid turnover of Japanese prime ministers and all the viscosity and uncertainty that creates in implementing policy, even though we strongly agree with Japan perhaps more than any other country in the world on our strategy? We could not find another country that is more closely aligned with the U.S. on competition with China; perhaps Australia. But Japan is in every area of competition with China that the United States cares about: technology, defense, democracy, diplomacy, institution building. And so it's about the execution – not the alignment, but the execution of strategy.

So what does that mean in terms of this race? Well, as I said, I have not heard anyone in the U.S. government say that any one candidate is good or bad, but there are some differences.

So right now it's too close to call. The betting is Kishida has the strongest position. Kishida is the inside man. He has got support from party leaders. He's safe. He's predictable. He consults. That is also the source of his weakness, because he's an – he's an inside man and he's not as popular on the outside with the broad non-Diet-member LDP voters in this leadership race or the public. He's not as popular as Kono, but he is much more reliable in the eyes of the party leaders. His challenge will be not maintaining support within the

LDP and among the leadership and in the Cabinet. His challenge will be: Is he attuned to the public mood? Can he read the public mood? Or will he look like he's too easily swayed by power politics within the LDP and not decisive? The Japanese public wants decisive leaders. So that's Kishida's strength, but also his weakness, the inside man.

Kono is the opposite, of course. He's the outside man. The party leaders on the whole, even many of whom like him, admire his policy expertise and charisma, they are not sure he's reliable. He's developed a reputation as a maverick. You know, he canceled the Aegis Ashore deployment based on a cellphone call with Prime Minister Abe without consulting with the Cabinet. He's decisive. He worked – when he was a Georgetown grad he worked in the office of Congressman Richard Shelby of Alabama and learned the American way of politics, which is a little more brash and individualistic. And he's used that political style to great effect at a time when Japanese voters want decisive leaders who speak the truth. That's his outside game. He's very, very good at it. He's – you know, I said no American officials have a favorite, but there's no doubt where I teach at Georgetown University that Kono would get 100 percent of the vote because when he's come to campus and given speeches, they're very funny, they're very interesting. He knows how to play that outside game.

If he wins his strength will be that. He can read the public mood. He will lead the international mood. He would be a very dynamic leader at the G-7 and the G-20 and attract international press attention. But his vulnerability will be the inside game. Will he keep powerful party leaders on his side, or will he be undone within the LDP, within Nagatachō? Koizumi Junichiro was an outside man. He played the populist card. But he also kept himself very carefully connected with people like Koga in the upper house and relied on people like Fukuda Yasuo. So he played the outside game but he was carefully anchored within the LDP with some key powerbrokers. Kono doesn't have that style. I think if he becomes prime minister, his challenge will be, can he develop that kind of alliance within the LDP with some powerful people who will keep him safe within the party as he builds his policies?

Takaichi is less known. She actually worked – I first met her myself in 1989 when I was working in the Japanese Diet and she was working in the U.S. Congress for Representative Pat Schroeder of Colorado, which is ironic because in those days, in the '80s, Pat Schroeder of Colorado was one of the most liberal members of the Congress, and of course, Takaichi is by far the most conservative candidate in the race in the LDP, with support from Abe, with a pledge to increase defense spending by 2 percent, a pledge to visit Yasukuni as prime minister, and so forth. You know, the U.S. view generally, certainly within the administration, is Japan needs to increase its defense spending, and all the candidates other than Noda have promised that. Takaichi has promised 2 percent. Whether or not she can achieve that, this resonates with U.S. officials who think Japan has to do more for its defense. Japan ranks below Barbados and Bermuda in per capita spending on defense. And so that

aspect's appealing. On the other hand, you know, Takaichi's position on issues like Yasukuni will make some U.S. officials a little bit nervous as the U.S. hopes that Japan and Korea with new leaders in both countries might begin to improve relations.

Kono is a former defense and foreign minister, knows the issues in the alliance extremely well, would align with the U.S. on defense issues, but he's more skeptical of democracy promotion, so might be some dissonance with President Biden's democracy summit. Kishida, on the other hand, is very outspoken about democracy and Taiwan and Hong Kong and would probably align very well with Biden on the democracy question. Kishida's noted for – his roots in Hiroshima and his commitment to nuclear disarmament. Some people worry about that with the U.S. I don't worry too much because, after all, he was foreign minister for Prime Minister Abe at a time when the U.S. and Japan strengthened our dialogue on extended deterrence.

So all of these are small things that people are noticing, some of them encouraging on defense, some thoughts on economic policy, some of them aspects that make some parts of the bureaucracy in the U.S. and Japan nervous. But on the whole, I am very confident that President Biden is going to embrace the winner of this election very quickly because his administration and the United States and the world need strong Japanese leadership. This is the most pro-Japan administration in history, arguably – perhaps the Reagan administration. You know, in the Bush administration I was in we were very focused on Japan. But there is a measure of, if not desperation, about the U.S.-Japan alliance because of the way China under Xi Jinping has become so aggressive, so ambitious, and so coercive. So there's an urgency to this alliance, and there will be an urgency to President Biden reaching out quickly to develop a strong partnership with whoever wins this race. And from everything we've heard in the debate in Japan, the winner's going to want to do the same with Biden, which should be reassuring.

So I'll stop there, Paige, and we look forward to questions.

Ms. Montfort Thank you very much, Dr. Green. And thank you to all three of our experts for sharing your expertise and your analysis. At this time, we're going to open it up to questions from our attendees. And if you could just identify your name and your organization that would be very much appreciated as we create our transcript, which will be sent out to all of you and also posted on the website following this briefing. So with that, I'm going to turn it back over to our operator to share the queuing instructions.

Operator Thank you.

(Gives queuing instructions.)

One moment, please, for our first question. We'll go to the line of Ken Moriyasu with Nikkei. Go ahead, please.

Question

Hello. Thank you very much for this opportunity.

I want to ask, this past week – or, the past few weeks have seen the rise of AUKUS and the first Quad summit between the leaders. Did you feel that Japan's presence was quite lacking because of the political situation, and if a strong leader like Abe was leading Japan the outcome would have been different perhaps with AUKUS? And also, a second question is, like, looking at the defense negotiations between Japan and the U.S. going forward – in terms of roles, missions, and capabilities – can you explain why it's an important period for the U.S.-Japan relationship from now and the coming weeks? Thank you.

Dr. Green

I'll start. AUKUS is a very significant development in the security architecture of the Indo-Pacific for two reasons. One is, the United States has not shared this kind of nuclear propulsion technology with any country other than Britain, and that was back in the 1950s. And so we, with the British, are giving to Australia the ability to produce eight or more nuclear-powered submarines that can go on extended patrols far north of Australia. And it really resets – it resets the military balance over the long run. It makes it much more difficult for the PLA, for the Chinese side, to continue extending its own blue water navy and its own projection and threats into the waters that are approaches to Australia, to the South China Sea, to the Indian Ocean. And very critical in terms of the long-term military balance of power.

And then geopolitically, what it shows you is China, because of its aggressive stance, has lost Britain and Australia. It wasn't too long ago that the Simon – Cameron government, with Chancellor of the Exchequer David (sic; George) Osborne, was wooing China to Britain with nuclear power deals, 5G, and a promise London would be the renminbi capital of Europe. And British diplomacy was diverging from the United States and Japan in those days. China lost Britain with its treatment of Hong Kong, with its technology policies. And the Johnson government is really all-in with the U.S., Australia and, by implication, Japan, in competition with China. That's what this signals.

And it signals China lost Australia. China's relations with Australia when Kevin Rudd was prime minister were quite positive. But the Chinese embargos and boycotts against Australia, and general militarization of the South China Sea and of Australia's own neighborhood in the Pacific, and it's just changed the debate in Australia. So this has implications for Japan. And, you know, one of the candidates, Kono, said that perhaps Japan could acquire nuclear-powered submarines someday. And there's a certain logic to that.

I expect you will see efforts by the U.S., Australia, and Britain to strengthen technology and defense industrial cooperation with Japan. Supply-chain security, rare-earth and critical mineral security defense production, these are all themes in the Quad, of course, with India and Japan, and they're themes that are important in the U.S.-Japan alliance. And when I've talked to British

and Australian diplomats about AUKUS, they always talk about Japan and the implications, which are obvious when you look at it: More security cooperation with Japan. So I think it's a good thing.

You know, Prime Minister Suga was a lame duck when he went to the Quad. He did a good job. The government, the Foreign Ministry did a good job. This Quad summit was not as important as the first one because the big deliverables were set up in that first one. This was more about implementation and next steps. So I think the fact that the prime minister was a lame duck didn't matter too much, but going forward I am certain the other Quad countries are going to want, you know, a strong Japanese prime minister who has support at home and in the LDP to deliver on promises to the international community.

You know, you ask a great question, Ken, about roles, missions, capabilities. The defense guidelines, the new interpretation of the constitution to allow collective self-defense – shudanteki jieiken – that all happened in 2015. It was a huge step forward in the alliance. Now we're looking at the next mountaintop, the next big task, and I think that is to make the alliance ready for contingencies. And there are some big questions that take political leadership.

Defense spending I mentioned.

Another one is how to modernize our command and control. Japan's command and control is out of date. If there is a crisis, Japan probably needs not the chief of the Joint Staff office, not the chairman, but under the chairman a Joint Operations Command. One is more political and bureaucratic. The other actually is in command of the troops in a crisis. And the U.S. has to rely on its command-and-control structure with Japan.

We need to broaden exercises so that we're doing campaign exercises, large-scale exercises like we do with Korea, NATO, and Australia.

So there are some big issues on the defense side.

And then, of course, standoff strike. How will we develop the technology? What kind of standoff strike – LRASMs, Tomahawks? And what will the command-and-control relationship be? What will the joint concept of operations be as Japan starts to have more not just shield, but spear in their roles and missions?

So these are big issues. They're not – they're coming. They're going to take some political leadership. So those are some of the things I'm sure people at the State Department and the Pentagon are thinking about as the tasks for the next prime minister on the defense side.

I don't know, Nick, if you have other points you want to add, but over to you.

Mr. Szechenyi      Yeah, thank you. I would just add briefly, I mean, the imperative for any new leader of Japan to underscore the importance of strengthening the U.S.-Japan alliance because it's fundamental to Japan's security. And the two governments are going to try to take new steps through roles, missions, and capabilities in the so-called 2+2 meeting, perhaps by the end of this year. So strategically critical for the new government in Japan but also important for the Biden administration, which is developing a narrative to demonstrate its commitment to Asia.

And recently we had the AUKUS announcement, another successful Quad meeting. And I think a next step is demonstrating more coordination on next steps for U.S.-Japan defense cooperation. So the next several weeks are critical for both the U.S. and Japanese governments.

Operator            (Gives queuing instructions.)

Ms. Montfort      Thank you very much. And while we wait for any additional questions, I have one question that was submitted prior to the discussion about kind of the speculation whether Japan is entering another period of political instability marked by these short-term governments that kind of Dr. Green discussed earlier. Do you all think this is likely? How might this affect U.S. strategy in the region? I know, Dr. Green, you touched on kind of the relationship between the U.S. president and the new leader, but are there any other kind of issues it might affect?

Dr. Green          Well, we have a series at CSIS at the Japan Chair called "Debating Japan" where we get prominent experts to debate two sides of a proposition, and the issue this week – I think it's coming out today – is whether or not Japan is entering a period of political, if not instability, rapid turnover of prime ministers.

And we asked Tobias Harris, who's a blogger and expert at Center for American Progress on Japanese politics, and Len Schoppa, who is a longtime social scientist and expert on Japanese politics at the University of Virginia.

Len Schoppa, in his piece for us, argued that Japan is probably entering such a period, not just because of history but because some of the issues that Abe did not address, ranging from immigration to consumption tax and other economic policies, are going to require decisions that will be unpopular with part of the electorate and will create a situation that makes it hard for prime ministers to make policy without putting their own government at risk.

The other side – Len Schoppa argued that – the other side, Tobias Harris, he said, well, there's not a huge debate about the direction of the country. It's more almost tactical questions about inflation targeting or, you know, how much to spend on defense. And so there's broad consensus, and the Japanese public, therefore, doesn't expect a huge difference from their leaders and, more importantly, perhaps, polls show the public really doesn't want to enter

that kind of unstable era with rapid turnover of prime ministers. They experienced that in the DPJ years and before that with three Japanese prime ministers from the LDP. They don't want to do it again, and that's Tobias' counter argument.

I think – and Yuko, you should weigh in – I think, on balance, Tobias is probably right, that because the Japanese public doesn't want a new prime minister every year and the general trajectory of the country is set, they will give the next prime minister a lot of running room.

Of course, the first task will be the lower house election in late October or early November, and we'll see how that goes for the new prime minister. But the internal polling the LDP does, some of which has leaked out, is starting to improve. The LDP will lose seats but not the 60 seats they thought they would lose at one point a month ago.

And so if the prime minister gets through that election successfully, that's three years. And so, on balance, I think that Tobias is right. But Len Schoppa – you should read our piece – he points out a lot of landmines that the next prime minister will have to get through without destroying his own government.

So I'm an optimist. I think we're probably not entering a period of instability. But, Nick, Yuko, what do you think?

Mr. Szechenyi Thank you. I'll just comment briefly and – oh, go ahead, Yuko. Do you want to go?

Ms. Nakano No. Please go ahead.

Mr. Szechenyi All right. This is Nick.

Yeah. I think, you know, fundamentally, the first test is going to be public health and the COVID response, and that or another issue could test the mettle of the next prime minister and determine how long the tenure of the next leader will be.

It's also possible that there could be a foreign policy test, another North Korean provocation or increased coercion from China, that will be a test of leadership. And then there's another parliamentary hurdle, which is an Upper House election next year. So there are multiple factors that could affect the tenure of the next leader.

But as we pointed out earlier in this discussion, you know, the difference, I think, now compared to previous periods of leadership turnover is the fact that there's a strategic framework in place that I think the LDP is generally aligned on. And so even if leaders might change, fundamentally, Japan's foreign policy strategy is not and I think that's a source of reassurance.

Ms. Nakano Hi. So I might not be the best person to comment on the subject as a year ago I thought that Japan would be a steady hand under Mr. Suga beyond his initial term, and it turned out to be not the case. And I have not much more to add to what Dr. Green and Nick have already said, and I add just also, like, highlight the Japan Chair's "Debating Japan" piece, which is worth reading for more insight.

Dr. Green One other thing we should mention before if we have another question is the Rikkentō, the Japan Constitutional Party, has low single-digit support in the polls and is going into the election cooperating with the Communist Party. And that is not an electoral strategy designed to win a majority in the Japanese Diet. It's a survival strategy. So that could change over several election cycles. But the threat to LDP rule, at least for the near term, is not serious. And that also will mean that whoever is the next prime minister will have a little more running room and support within the party.

But as I mentioned with Kono and Kishida in particular, each of them has political strengths and political weaknesses. And what I'll be watching is if Kono wins, does he build alliances within the LDP leadership; and if Kishida wins, can he demonstrate the kind of decisiveness to the public that they're looking for? Both are capable of it, but that will be key.

Operator (Gives queueing instructions.)

Ms. Montfort And Mike, Yuko, and Nick, it looks like we've reached the end of our question queue. So if you all have any closing statements, additional food for thought before we close, I welcome you to provide those statements now.

Dr. Green Well, I would just say thank you. Look, I think today it's coming out for "Debating Japan," which had that interesting exchange between Professor Len Schoppa and Tobias Harris. We will do a Critical Questions tomorrow after the election with our interpretation of what happened. And then we'll do something after the lower-house election where we invite some prominent Japan scholars to look at what the election tells us in the larger context of Japan's postwar politics and foreign policy and U.S.-Japan alliance.

So it's an interesting time to be working in Japan politics, and a really, really important time for the United States because we are pivoting to the Indo-Pacific. And that – the success of that pivot hinges very heavily on Japan itself.

So thank you all very, very much for joining us.

Ms. Montfort Yes. And I would just like to reiterate once again colleagues, supporters of CSIS, members of the press, thank you all very much for being here with us today. We will have a transcript of today's briefing ready within just a couple of hours, and I'll be sharing it with all of those of you in attendance, those of you who RSVP'd. It will also be posted to CSIS.org. And on that website you

can, of course, find the work that Mike and Nick and Yuko have described today.

For those of you whose questions, you know, you weren't able to ask today, also please do not hesitate to reach out to me, Paige Montfort, or to CSIS's chief communications officer, Andrew Schwartz. We are always more than happy to set up a conversation with any of our experts, including those here with us today.

So thank you all one last time for joining us, and a special thank you to our experts for your time and your analysis. Have a wonderful day or night, everyone.

(END)