



[Editor's note] Traditionally bureaucrats in Kasumigaseki have played the role of policy intellectuals in Japanese diplomacy. Under PM Hatoyama, the role of bureaucrats as policy intellectuals is coming to an end but politicians have failed to foster alternative policy intellectuals so far, argues Mr. Nakamura of Asian Forum Japan. If Japan wants to move away from bureaucrats-led policymaking to politicians-led policymaking, he continues, Japan needs to foster alternative policy intellectuals, such as think tanks, who can provide fresh new ideas. If you would like to respond to Mr. Nakamura's essay, please send your thoughts to ihan@jpi.or.kr. We will publish selected submissions.

Japanese Diplomacy and the Role of Policy Intellectuals -The Significance of the Birth of the DPJ Hatoyama Administration-

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Soon, six months will have passed since the birth of the Hatoyama Administration in September 2009. While it can certainly be said that the new government has produced some new directions, it has also led to stagnation in some areas. A symbol of such stagnation is the Hatoyama Administration's handling of the issue of Futenma Air Station relocation and the negative effect that is having on the Japan-US alliance.

January 15 of this year marked the 50th

anniversary of the renewal of the Japan-US Security Treaty. However, despite the issue of a joint statement by the foreign ministers and defense ministers of both countries, no joint statement was issued by Japan and US leaders. This is the easiest way to understand the current status of Japan-US relations. An unstable relationship between Japan and the United States will have knock-on effects on the Japan-South Korea relationship and the stability of East Asia. Why has the Hatoyama Administration chosen to bring about this state of affairs?

The answer is that while the Hatoyama Administration talks about creating a "deeper Japan-US alliance", it fails to present specific ideas to actually make the alliance "deeper".

Soon after the start of the year, both the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) and the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan (LDP) coincidentally decided to close their party-affiliated think tanks. I am sure I was not the only person who felt surprised that the DPJ, which always talks about "politician-led politics", decided to close its think tank that should be operating as the brain of the party.

In Japan, "Kasumigaseki", where central government ministries are located, has always been described as Japan's largest think tank. If the DPJ is going to talk about politician-led politics, then surely party-affiliated think tanks have a crucial role to play in moderating Kasumigaseki.

In the case of the LDP, we would expect that having lost its grip on power, it would now be more difficult for the party to use Kasumigaseki as the "brain of the party", and a think tank

would be even more meaningful as a means of thinking up ideas and strategies to win back power.

In the United States, ideas are not to be taken lightly as they produce results, as stated in Richard M. Weaver's "Ideas Have Consequences" published in 1948. There, policy intellectuals play a major role.

In contrast to public intellectuals who aim to influence the society by appealing to the wider public, policy intellectuals are only involved in actual political debates and propose policies. Since policy intellectuals have a direct and indirect effect on the policy-making process, they must take greater responsibility for their arguments.

By bringing their ideas to fruition, policy intellectuals go beyond the current reality, in other words, they help to open up and create the new reality. Producing output which has high political implications and actually influencing the political decision-making process is the mission, indeed the lifeline, of policy intellectuals.

In other words, policy intellectuals should be aware that ideas that do not go beyond the current situation will simply be treated lightly. Of course, policy intellectuals have a responsibility for working together with politicians to realize their ideas. That responsibility is also required of the politicians who have decided to take on the ideas. And then, a place where policy intellectuals gather together is what we should call a think tank, which is a focus of knowledge or a group for proposing policies.

Up until now, the role of policy intellectuals and think tanks in Japan has mainly been played by the bureaucracy in Kasumigaseki. That was the major characteristic of the Japanese approach. However, as is well known, bureaucrats lack the ability to deal with rapid changes in society.

Since they find it difficult to adapt flexibly, the result is the avoidance of responsibility. Last year, following the change of government and the announcement of a move away from bureaucrat-led politics to politician-led politics, we are seeing the role of bureaucrats as policy intellectuals coming to an end.

The problem is that while bureaucrats' roles as policy intellectuals are coming to an end, the politicians who are supposed to be leading the way are failing to foster policy intellectuals and the required ideas.

We hear that just like in the United States, South Korea also has properly functioning think tanks such as the Jeju Peace Institute (JPI). If Japan is going to claim politician-led politics, then surely we need to foster policy intellectuals who can provide new ideas and develop think tanks that will accumulate those ideas and move to put them in the action.

The birth of the Hatoyama Administration and the change of government in Japan is likely to prove to be an opportunity for a major change in Japan's policy environment.

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