Fumio Kishida Formed the New Government of Japan

On October 4, during an extraordinary joint session of both houses of the Japanese parliament, 64-year-old Fumio Kishida was elected as the new Prime Minister. On the same day, the inauguration ceremony of him personally, as well as the composition of the new Cabinet of Ministers presented by him (also approved by parliament) provided for by the current constitution took place in the Imperial Palace.

All this “two-stage” procedure was formal (that is, it did not imply any other personal outcome), after on September 29, Kishida was elected (in a competitive struggle with three contenders) president of the right-wing conservative Liberal Democratic Party. Recall that the LDP has been leading the country almost continuously (with two short exceptions) since the mid-1950s. In the current composition of the parliament, the LDP (together with the “minority” represented by the Komeito party) also has the required majority.

The very need to carry out this procedure arose after the previous party leader Yoshihide Suga submitted his resignation from the post of LDP president on September 3 (according to the reasons previously discussed by the New Eastern Outlook). This was automatically followed by his subsequent resignation from the post of Prime Minister after a one-year term in it.
Recall that the short stay of a Japanese politician in the office of prime minister is rather the rule for the entire recent (150-year) history of the country since the Meiji restoration. In this regard, one of the rare exceptions was the period of Shinzo Abe’s tenure in his post. Incidentally, it was in Abe’s government where Fumio Kishida served as Minister of Foreign Affairs for five years (from 2012 to 2017).

Of 20 members of the new cabinet, 13 entered ministerial posts for the first time. But the key ministries (foreign affairs and defense) were headed by experienced politicians, who, as well as Kishida, are closely related to Abe. This, according to an editorial by the Kyodo News agency, indicates the intention of the new Prime Minister to preserve the more or less established in the last decade foreign policy of the country.

The post of Minister of Defense is retained by Nobuo Kishi (a younger brother of Shinzo Abe), who has held it since the fall of 2020 in the government of Yoshihide Suga. Toshimitsu Motegi remains the Minister of Foreign Affairs. He has been in this post since September 2019, that is, in the last composition of the government of Abe and then in the Cabinet of Ministers of Suga.

Kishida is considered part of the “moderate” wing of the generally, to reiterate, right-wing conservative ruling LDP in Japan. But what “moderate” really means in relation to the political appearance of the new prime minister is not very clear.

In particular, it is difficult to call “moderate” the political course of Kishida’s cabinet taking shape in the relations with China, that is, in the key and most problematic direction of Japan’s foreign policy in recent years. Apparently, Beijing does not expect anything more from the new prime minister of a country that is one of the main foreign policy opponents of the PRC, except to keep bilateral relations at least from further sliding into the negative side.

Of course, the author would like to join such wishes, but unfortunately, there are few hopes for their fulfillment (if the Kyodo News forecast mentioned above is true). Of the most recent negative foreign policy trends in Japan, attention should once again be drawn to the initiative of Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi, which appeared immediately after his appointment to this post in September 2020, on the need for the “Japan Self-Defense Forces” to acquire a conceptual and technical base for preemptive strikes against targets in the territory of neighbors from where an attack on Japan could be predicted (for example, by intelligence).

At the same time, the “North Korean regime” - a go-to whipping boy for the entire region - has been publicly suspected of such intentions. But the mentioned conceptual and technical potential, if acquired by Japan, will become nothing more than an instrument in the hands of its government. An instrument that can be used against anyone, if circumstances demand so.

Admittedly, Japan has the right to possess armed forces with all the “specifics” of their use for national purposes, which is present in the policies of all other states. Japan has its own foreign policy problems (including territorial ones) in relations with its neighbors and it can acquire the right (through appropriate constitutional changes) to become a “normal” state in this regard (in our increasingly crazy world).

That is, the author in no way intends to place the entire burden of responsibility for the aggravation of the situation in the Northeast Asia subregion (and in the Indo-Pacific region as a whole) solely on Japan (or only on the United States). With regret, the author only has to state that the mentioned initiative of Nobuo Kishi supported in September this year during a televised debate with party opponents by his current boss Kishida fits into the general trend of deterioration of the situation in the IPR.

It is unlikely that the new Prime Minister’s words about Japan’s concern about the “Taiwan security problem” and the situation in the Taiwan Strait will contribute to its positive changes. Nor will Tokyo’s support for Taipei’s recent initiative to join the regional Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), of which Japan is the informal leader.

This initiative has already been followed by a negative reaction from Beijing, which, however, is not absolute in nature and rather reflects the negative attitude of the Chinese leadership to the “separatist” political forces currently ruling on the island.

The general “mood” of the new government’s political course in the Chinese direction is evidenced, in particular, in the motivation to establish a new ministry, which will be responsible for the problems of ensuring “economic security.” From the comments it follows that in this case, the task of “preventing theft” of advanced Japanese technologies by China is implied.
The very first press conference of the new Prime Minister was kept in cautiously negative tones in the part concerning Japanese-Chinese relations. In particular, Kishida was “skeptical” about the prospect of China joining the same CPTPP association. Recall that three weeks earlier, Beijing made an official request on this topic.

The leaders of all the leading world powers, including China and Russia, sent congratulations to Kishida on the occasion of his election to the highest state post of Japan, which is another evidence of its belonging today to a narrow pool consisting of the powers mentioned above.

It is quite expected that Kishida attaches special importance to strengthening the military-political alliance with the United States. It is significant that the very next day after his appointment to the post of Prime Minister, his first phone conversation was with US President Joe Biden. During the conversation, in addition to referring to Article 5 of the bilateral “Security Treaty,” Kishida once again stated Tokyo’s readiness to support Washington’s policy in the IPR in general and, in particular, in order to “ensure freedom of navigation” in various zones of the region.

During the conversation that took place on the same day, Kishida and his Australian colleague Scott Morrison stressed the need to expand the membership of the current format of the QUAD. Earlier, Japan had expressed its approval for the creation of AUKUS, a military-political configuration of three Anglo-Saxon countries (USA, United Kingdom and Australia).

As for Russia, it could be expected that the diplomatic activity characteristic of the first half of the premiership of Shinzo Abe, in whose government Fumio Kishida (again, for almost five years) held the post of Foreign Minister, will be resumed.

However, the upcoming (critically important) regular general elections to the lower house of parliament, finally scheduled for October 31, stand in the way of the implementation of the above and other forward-looking assessments of the foreign policy of the new government of Japan. On October 14, the current cabinet will be dissolved, and the stage of the official pre-election inter-party struggle will commence on October 19.

So far, public opinion polls have painted a picture of the electorate’s mood that is quite favorable for the LDP. Such moods, however, are notoriously prone to changing. And the author will closely follow the real electoral process in the country, whose importance in the modern “Big World Game” is continuously increasing.

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