

Spinning the Tokyo Metro Election 都知事選のspin報道

Andrew DeWit

The election campaign for the Tokyo metropolitan government (TMG) does not begin, officially, until January 23, with the voting scheduled for February 9. But there is already an enormous amount of spin in the Japanese press and social media, as well as in the lamentably meagre coverage offered by English-language media and bloggers. I won't pretend to be objective about the election and assessing the associated reporting and commentary. Like 455 of Japan's 1789 local governments, I personally think Japan should get out of nuclear power,¹ or at the very least reform its power markets-separating generation from transmission-before undertaking any restarts. Japan's best option is green and smart growth, and it is incredible to watch a TMG campaign unfold focused on that opportunity.

That said, let us look at some of the spin and what it reveals about the stakes in the present election. There has, of course, been much social media attention to such items as seeming favoured, and Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)-backed, candidate Masuzoe Youichi. One disturbing item is the apparent spousal abuse of LDP House of Councillors member Katayama Satsuki when they were briefly married in 1986.²

But the focus of most of the spin has been the candidacy of Hosokawa Morihiro, the former governor of Kumamoto Prefecture as well as Prime Minister - briefly - from August 1993 to April 1994. His candidacy was clearly encouraged by former Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro, who last fall became increasingly

vocal in his advice to current PM and LDP head Abe Shinzo to get out of nuclear power. Koizumi's press conferences and other very visible efforts followed his fact-finding trip to Germany and Finland in early August of 2013. Albeit less vocal than Koizumi, Hosokawa also became anti-nuclear due not only to Japan's still-unfolding tragedy at Fukushima Daiichi and its environs, but also by learning, in 2005, of the UK's Sellafield nuclear reprocessing facility's leak and its consequences. Last December, the duo of Hosokawa-Koizumi was presented with the unexpected election for TMG governor, due to the December 19 resignation of disgraced former governor Inose Naoki.³



Hosokawa (left) and Koizumi

It would appear that Hosokawa and Koizumi seized the TMG election as an opportunity, among other things, to advance an antinuclear program. For those following Koizumi and Japanese energy policy last year, it was clear that he was looking for a way to disrupt the Abe cabinet's careful but persistent pressure for quick restarts of nuclear assets without meaningful deregulation of Japan's inordinately monopolized power markets. While the Abe regime was ostensibly committed to a long-range goal of reforming the market, its eagerness to do this was in question from the outset.⁴ The Abe Government is certainly committed to restarts that would provide the means for Tepco and other utilities to pay down roughly YEN 25 trillion in lending from Japan's major banks as well as a slew of IOU-style bonds from public coffers to cover compensation and other costs of Fukushima Daiichi and its fallout.⁵ In short, the Abe regime appears positioned at the locus of a powerful complex of interests in favour of maintaining as much of the status quo as possible, to provide the concentrated income streams that the monopolists consider their privilege and their lenders consider indispensable for getting their money back.

Koizumi first took office as Prime Minister in 2001. This was following a decade in which failed banks and their allies in government and the bureaucracy had cost Japan about YEN 100 trillion. Drawing on this experience, Koizumi apparently came to understand the unsustainable structure of interests at the heart of Japan's energy economy. Boiled down to its essentials, Koizumi's argument is that there is no safe disposal of nuclear waste and that the opportunity costs of staying with nuclear include sacrificing Japan's chance to lead the accelerating renewable and efficiency revolution that may constitute the next major economic revolution.⁶

If there in fact is not a renewable revolution underway, then someone needs to tell the US military and "National Defense" magazine. On January 16, the latter published an article titled "Renewable Energy Boom Underway at US Military Bases,"⁷ detailing the fascinating content of Pew Charitable Trust's January 16 study "Power Surge: How the Department of Defense Leverages Private Resources to Enhance Energy Security and Save Money on U.S. Military Bases."⁸ That the rapid rollout of renewables is not only happening but also saving money is true not just on military bases, but in Brazil, the US, Australia, Germany and elsewhere. As Tomas Kåberger, Executive Board Chair of the Japan Renewable Energy Foundation and former director-general of the Swedish Energy Agency, argues in a January 17 commentary, wind and mega-solar are already competitive with thermal and nuclear power. And renewables keep getting cheaper while the market and other costs of unsustainable power increase. So for Kåberger what is crucial, and particularly for Japan, is not more support for renewables, but rather "to give the opportunity for investors offering low cost renewable electricity to build their plants and compete with existing power producers."⁹

The above opportunity encapsulates why Koizumi and Hosokawa are so focused on energy. In a much-heralded event, Koizumi and Hosokawa met in a stage-managed January 14 meeting. It was the latter's birthday and opportunity to make a formal request for support in a run for TMG governor. Koizumi was hardly going to refuse, since the evidence suggests he got Hosokawa to run. And Koizumi is such a master of political theatrics that observers, academics as well as journalists and others, rightly refer to his gripping performances as "Koizumi gekijo" (Koizumi theatre).

In the wake of the January 14 meeting and Koizumi's public commitment to a Hosokawa campaign, the spin mill has sought to portray

the Hosokawa campaign as single issue, disorganized, and encumbered by multiple scandals and misstatements. The favourite talking point for opponents of the Hosokawa-Koizumi tag team - as it were¹⁰ - has been to emphasize that Hosokawa received a loan (apparently fully paid back) from the firm Sagawa Kyubin during his term as prime minister and must explain this. Another talking point has been Hosokawa's comment to the author and media commentator Ikegami Akira last year that Japan ought to be prioritizing dealing with its nuclear problem even if doing so means forfeiting the 2020 Olympics.¹¹

For the record, as the Japan Times newspaper details, Hosokawa insisted that "rather than winning many gold medals in the Olympics, taking care of what to do with nuclear power now in this time is much more important for Japan's future."

He also suggested that "if Japan had declined to host the Olympics even though it won the bid, (the world) would have reached the conclusion that 'Japan is an amazing country.' I wanted (Prime Minister) Abe to decide so. That's the kind of leadership a prime minister can show." Like many others in Japan as well as overseas, Hosokawa was very critical of Abe for insisting that the radiation leaks and other crises at Fukushima Daiichi were "under control" when he gave his September 7 2013 Olympic-bid presentation.¹² Even Tepco's top technology executive, Yamashita Kazuhiko, directly contradicted Abe's assertion.¹³

Delay Due to Confusion? Or Calculation?

What is indisputable is that the Hosokawa campaign has twice delayed its planned news conference for announcing its policy program. Originally, the Hosokawa campaign was to detail its policies on January 15. It delayed this to the 17th, and then announced that the press conference would not take place until after the 20th of January. The press conference is now

scheduled for January 22nd, just a day before the official start of campaigning. This delay has led to a stream of newspaper and magazine articles and blog posts insisting that the campaign itself is reeling from the shock of the spin machine's revelations.¹⁴

Of course, anything is possible. The TMG election is for the most powerful subnational office in the world's third largest economy, and its largest megacity. The election is increasingly being centered on sustainable versus unsustainable power, one of the defining issues of our era. Incredibly, two former heavyweight prime ministers are teaming up to take on a sitting PM's power policy and his foreign policy. Much of the Japanese establishment are at least unnerved, if not outright opposed, to what Hosokawa and Koizumi are doing. The stakes are incredibly high and the period of time for organizing and undertaking a campaign tightly compressed. So surely some degree of concern animates the Hosokawa camp on how to deal effectively with the hail of charges coming from the mainstream and conservative press as well as through the social media. But they are not making the mistake of repeated statements and forced retractions. They are holding their ground, and shaping events.

Thus it also seems likely that some measure, and perhaps a large measure, of the delay is due to calculation rather than campaign-office crisis. The Hosokawa-Koizumi duo know what they are doing, having decades of political experience. As noted earlier, Hosokawa and Koizumi created an inordinate amount of media and social-network coverage for their orchestrated January 14 meeting. The delay of the press conference on policies smacks of the same political skill, maximizing attention to one's message by telegraphing bits and pieces in advance but leaving room for doubt.

Against the backdrop of spin, Hosokawa and Koizumi also appear to be using the election to

define a new mainstream. So the delay in the news conference for officially announcing Hosokawa's candidacy and policy platform may also be a strategy that allows for measuring the degree to which a clear statement of, for example, getting out of nuclear is politically possible and then calibrating the message. In this respect, it is important to note that the main contender, LDP-backed Masuzoe, has obfuscated his own support for nuclear power, even of recycling nuclear waste, by claiming that he is in favour of a gradual withdrawal from nuclear.¹⁵ Hosokawa and Koizumi benefit from a delay that allows doubt about Masuzoe's position to mount while potentially increasing the palatability of their own blunt message.

Hosokawa and Koizumi are not just aiming at restructuring Japan's power economy from Tokyo. They also plan to reorganize Japan's dangerously divided and dysfunctional political opposition. As is well known, Japan's disorganized opposition was unable to prevent Prime Minister Abe from passing a draconian secrecy law.¹⁶ Abe also felt sufficiently unrestrained by anyone that he visited Yasukuni Shrine on December 26, gravely impairing relations with China and Korea in especially fraught times. Abe even earned a rare rebuke and now abiding suspicion from his closest ally, the United States.¹⁷ Hosokawa and Koizumi are evidently trying to work on this, and their audience is international.

At this point, it appears clear that on January 22 the Hosokawa-Koizumi camp will declare their opposition to nuclear restarts as well as Hosokawa's intention of visiting China. The latter prospect has outraged the Yomiuri Shimbun (and interests it speaks for), which warns of a "'dual diplomacy' that China could exploit."¹⁸ Yet there appears to be a groundswell in favour of Hosokawa and Koizumi. One of the facts downplayed or simply ignored by the tendentious coverage is that a striking flow of political support to the Hosokawa-Koizumi camp has been coming from

the LDP, the Japan Restoration party, and other vehicles of the center-right. The Hosokawa-Koizumi effort at reorganizing politics, on the pivot of power but not limited to it, is not only drawing in support from the rag-bag center-left such as the Democratic Party of Japan, the People's Livelihood Party, the Social Democratic Party of Japan, and so on. These are sources from which one would expect significant support to flow to Hosokawa and Koizumi. More strikingly, support is even coming from the Japan Restoration Party, which is led by former TMG Governor (and unrepentant revisionist) Ishihara Shintaro and "comfort women"¹⁹ Osaka Mayor Hashimoto Toru. The party is officially committed to the very right-wing candidate and historical revisionist Tamogami Toshio, but it seems that much of the membership is turning toward Hosokawa.²⁰ Masuzoe by all rights is closer on the political spectrum, yet appears to be getting bypassed. Other striking commitments to the Hosokawa-Koizumi camp include very right-wing manga author Kobayashi Yoshinori.²¹

In very turbulent times, many people here in Japan and overseas will deliberate over the details of the Hosokawa-Koizumi campaign's January 22 announcement. That is not just a measure of their skill, but also the international importance of what they are trying to do.

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- Andrew DeWit, [How Important is the Tokyo](#)

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Notes

¹ On this, see (in Japanese) "[455 Local Councils Have Passed 'Get Out of Nuclear Power' Position Statements Since \[Fukushima\] Nuclear Accident](#)," Asahi Shimbun, January 19, 2014.

² The abuse, according to Katayama herself, and in several interviews, included verbal abuse, throwing objects, and waving a survival knife in her face. Other allegations suggest that Masuzoe has fathered at least two children out of wedlock. Considering the background of domestic violence and other abuses of women in Japan, it makes for unpleasant reading. See (in Japanese) "[Masuzoe Youichi's unique appeal as a male: thrice wed and with 5 children](#)," Social News Network, January 15, 2014.

³ On TMG Governor Inose's money scandal and resignation, see "[Tokyo Gov. Inose announces resignation over money scandal](#)," Mainichi Shimbun, December 19, 2013.

⁴ Indeed, Abe's commitment to economic reform per se is in question. On this, see leading Japan specialist Aurelia George Mulgan, "[Abe puts personal interests ahead of Japan's at Yasukuni](#)," East Asia Forum, January 1, 2014.

⁵ Perhaps the best analysis of the political economy of the structure of restarts is offered (in Japanese) by Keio University's Kaneko Masaru "Nuclear Costs More than Conventional Thermal Power," Iwanami Shoten booklet, August 3, 2013.

⁶ On Koizumi's appeals, see Andrew DeWit "[Just Gas? Smart Power and Koizumi's Anti-Nuclear Challenge](#)," The Asia-Pacific Journal, Volume 11, Issue 50, No.3, December 16, 2013.

⁷ See Sandra I Erwin, "[Renewable Energy Boom Underway at US Military Bases](#)," National Defense, January 16, 2014.

⁸ See the overview article and download link at "[Power Surge: Energy Security and the Department of Defense](#)," Pew Charitable Trusts Environmental Initiatives, January 16: 2014.

⁹ See Tomas Kåberger, "[Smart alternatives for Japan](#)," Japan Renewable Energy Foundation, January 17, 2014.

¹⁰ That this is a duo's performance is clear from the Hosokawa campaign site advertising the official press conference of January 22. The site features both Hosokawa and Koizumi: [tokyo-tonosama.com](#) (the name of the site - "feudal lord" - is also a dig at one of the insults hurled at Hosokawa by the Abe cabinet's Economy Minister, an insult taken up by Jonathan Soble in "[Tokyo election race to spark nuclear debate](#)," Financial Times, January 10, 2014.

¹¹ The core of the mainstream media spin machine is the Yomiuri Shimbun, whose editor is one of the fathers of nuclear power in Japan. One example of its reliably tendentious reporting on this election is "[Is Hosokawa Serious about his call for Tokyo to decline hosting the Olympics](#)," Yomiuri Shimbun, January 18, 2014.

¹² On the scale of the crisis and criticisms, see Andrew DeWit and Christopher Hobson, "[Abe at Ground Zero: the consequences of inaction at Fukushima Daiichi](#)," The Asia-Pacific Journal, Volume 11, Issue 35, No. 1, September 2, 2013.

¹³ See Reiji Yoshida, "[Tepco tech chief disputes Abe's 'under control' assertion](#)," Japan Times, September 13, 2013.

¹⁴ On this, see (in Japanese) "[Hosokawa quickly gets into a mess: press conference put off twice, and no appearance at debate, suggesting campaign office confusion](#)," ZakZak, January 17, 2014.

¹⁵ Masuzoe makes his support for nuclear power clear (in Japanese, and from the 20:00 minute mark) in this December 11, 2013 radio

[interview](#) with Otake Makoto Golden Radio.

¹⁶ Perhaps the best analysis of the law - now passed - is Lawrence Repeta, "[A New State Secrecy Law for Japan?](#)" *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol. 11, Issue 42, No. 1, October 21, 2013.

¹⁷ A cogent summary of the challenges presented by Abe's visit and its implications is seen in East Asia Forum Editor Peter Drysdale's "[What to make of Mr Abe and his visit to Yasukuni](#)," *East Asia Forum*, December 30, 2013.

¹⁸ See "[Hosokawa's Tokyo bid could affect](#)

[Japan-China ties](#)," *The Japan News* by the Yomiuri Shimbun, January 18, 2014.

¹⁹ On Hashimoto's "self-destruction" over the comfort women issue, see Michael Cucek, "[A Rising Star's Self-Destruction](#)," *New York Times*, May 30, 2013.

²⁰ See for example, astute observer Eric Johnston's "[Ishin's Osaka wing hopes Tamogami loses in Tokyo](#)," *Japan Times*, January 18, 2014.

²¹ See (in Japanese) "Kobayashi Yoshinori announces support for the "[Hosokawa-Koizumi Coalition](#)," *Amebanyuusu*, January 15, 2014.