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*Rie Aomita**You will see**him next**week**ADD 16/1*

VISIT OF THE JAPANESE FOREIGN MINISTER: 21 JANUARY:

MR ABE'S POLITICAL PROSPECTS

SUMMARY

1. FOREIGN MINISTER ABE IS A LEADING CONTENDER TO SUCCEED PRIME MINISTER NAKASONE IN NOVEMBER. HE HOPES THAT HIS MINISTERIAL EXPERIENCE AND GOOD CONTACTS WITH FOREIGN LEADERS WILL COMPENSATE FOR THE NUMERICAL WEAKNESS OF HIS SUPPORTERS IN THE PARTY.

DETAIL

2. ABE IS THE ACTING HEAD OF THE 72-MEMBER FUKUDA FACTION, THE THIRD LARGEST FACTION IN THE LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY. FORMER PRIME MINISTER FUKUDA (ABE'S FATHER-IN-LAW) STILL KEEPS A TIGHT REIN ON THE FACTION BUT HE HAS FORMALLY NOMINATED ABE AS HIS SUCCESSOR AND THE FACTION'S PRIME MINISTERIAL CANDIDATE. WHEREAS FINANCE MINISTER TAKESHITA CAN ONLY COUNT ON THE SUPPORT OF PART OF THE ALBEIT LARGER TANAKA FACTION, ABE HAS THE SOLID SUPPORT OF ALL HIS FACTION.

3. ABE STOOD AGAINST NAKASONE IN 1982 FOR THE PRESIDENCY OF THE PARTY BUT CAME A POOR THIRD IN THE FIRST ROUND VOTE AND BOWED OUT OF THE CONTEST. HE HAS HINTED AT HIS INTENTION TO STAND AGAIN THIS AUTUMN, WHILE STRESSING BOTH THAT HE WILL CONTINUE TO WORK CLOSELY WITH NAKASONE UNTIL AT LEAST AFTER THE SUMMIT AND THAT HE DOES NOT BELIEVE NAKASONE HIMSELF WILL STAND FOR A THIRD TERM. HE WOULD PREFER THE PARTY LEADER TO BE CHOSEN BY CONSENSUS BUT IS, LIKE TAKESHITA, PREPARED TO FIGHT AN ELECTION IF NEED BE.

4. HIS EXPERIENCE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS AND HIS CLOSE LINKS WITH THE US ADMINISTRATION (IN PARTICULAR WITH SHULTZ) WILL WEIGH IN HIS FAVOUR IF THE NEW LEADER IS CHOSEN BY INTER-FACTION NEGOTIATION. HIS MINISTERIAL EXPERIENCE IS LONGER THAN THAT OF TAKESHITA BUT LESS BROAD THAN THAT OF MIYAZAWA, THE CHAIRMAN OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL OF THE LDP, AND THE OTHER MAIN CONTENDER. ABE MUST HOPE THAT THE ELDERS OF THE LDP AND THE PARTY'S BACKERS IN THE BUSINESS WORLD WILL CONCLUDE THAT HE IS THE MAN BEST QUALIFIED TO TACKLE JAPAN'S CONTINUING PROBLEMS WITH HER TRADING PARTNERS, ESPECIALLY THE AMERICANS.

5. THE CURRENT OPINION POLLS IDENTIFY ABE BY A TWO TO ONE MARGIN OVER HIS RIVALS AS THE MOST POPULAR CHOICE TO SUCCEED NAKASONE. HIS LONG MINISTERIAL SERVICE AND MANY VISITS ABROAD HAVE GIVEN HIM A HIGH PROFILE. ABE PRIDES HIMSELF AS THE ARCHITECT OF A NEW "CREATIVE"

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"CREATIVE" JAPANESE FOREIGN POLICY. BUT HE HAS HAD TO COMPETE WITH NAKASONE FOR THE CENTRE OF THE FOREIGN POLICY STAGE. WHILE NAKASONE HAS TAKEN THE LEAD ON US/JAPAN AND EAST/WEST RELATIONS, ABE HAS HAD TO CONTENT HIMSELF WITH AREAS SUCH AS THE MIDDLE EAST AND AFRICA WHERE HIS EFFORTS HAVE LESS POPULAR APPEAL.

6. PUBLIC POPULARITY IS HOWEVER NO GUARANTEE OF SUCCESS IN JAPANESE POLITICS. TO WIN THE LEADERSHIP, ABE WILL NEED TO EXPLOIT HIS EXPERIENCE AND POPULARITY IN THE INTRA-PARTY BARGAINING PROCESS. IF THE LEADER IS CHOSEN BY CONSENSUS, ABE'S HOPES APPEAR TO REST EITHER ON THE CLOSE COLLABORATION BETWEEN FUKUDA, AND FORMER PRIME MINISTER SUZUKI, THE MENTOR OF MIYAZAWA, OR ON HIS OWN PERSONAL LINKS WITH TAKESHITA, WHICH ARE STRONG DESPITE THEIR POLITICAL RIVALRY. THE SENIOR FACTION LEADERS CONTINUE TO EXERCISE CONSIDERABLE INFLUENCE. A FUKUDA/SUZUKI AXIS PROBABLY HOLDS OUT THE GREATER PROSPECT OF SUCCESS. BUT ABE CAN ONLY ENJOY THE JOINT PATRONAGE OF FUKUDA AND SUZUKI IF THE LATTER AGREES NOT TO PRESS MIYAZAWA'S CLAIMS.

7. IF THE LEADERSHIP IS DECIDED BY A VOTE OF ALL LDP MEMBERS OF THE DIET, ABE'S CHANCES WILL DEPEND ON HOW WELL HE DOES ON THE FIRST BALLOT. HE IS UNLIKELY TO COME TOP BUT NONE OF THE CONTENDERS IS LIKELY TO WIN THE REQUIRED SIMPLE MAJORITY FIRST TIME ROUND. PROVIDED ABE IS SECOND, HE MIGHT BE ABLE TO STRIKE A BARGAIN WITH THE THIRD PLACED CANDIDATE AND THEREBY SECURE THE LEADERSHIP ON A SECOND OR SUBSEQUENT VOTE. FOR THIS REASON, IN THE MONTHS TO COME ABE WILL BE UNWILLING TO BACK POLICIES WHICH MAY AGGRAVATE HIS RELATIONS WITH OTHER FACTION LEADERS ON WHOSE SUPPORT HE MAY NEED TO RELY. THIS HAS ALREADY HAPPENED, FOR EXAMPLE, OVER SQUID FISHING IN THE FALKLANDS WHERE ABE'S RELUCTANCE TO ACCEPT OUR CALL FOR SELF-RESTRAINT MAY BE PARTIALLY INFLUENCED BY HIS DESIRE NOT TO CROSS FORMER PRIME MINISTER SUZUKI, THE LEADER OF THE FISHING LOBBY.

8. PLEASE SEE MIFT.

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