



Kishida Refurbishes His Cabinet

Overview

- Prime Minister Fumio Kishida reshuffled Japan's Cabinet and party leadership on September 13. The prime minister hopes to boost his sagging approval ratings before he unveils a comprehensive economic policy package and kicks off the autumn Diet session in mid-October.
- Kishida eschewed any major changes to the foundations of power within the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) ahead of next year's party presidential election, retaining key faction leaders Toshimitsu Motegi and Taro Aso as LDP Secretary-General and Vice President, respectively. Kishida also resolidified the LDP's ties to coalition partner Komeito and retained a Komeito legislator in his Cabinet.
- The reshuffle brought 13 new faces into the Cabinet, including 5 women and 11 first-time ministers. Still, the new ministers are for the most part experienced politicians known to the public, which may boost public confidence in their abilities.

Key Moves By Kishida

1. KEY RIVAL MOTEGI REMAINS SECRETARY-GENERAL

Kishida decided to retain Secretary-General Motegi, to box him in and make it more difficult for him to mount a presidential bid next year. Motegi is regarded as one of the most potent rivals Kishida could face next year in the party election. By tradition, the party secretary-general is expected to rally party support for its standard bearer, rather than challenge him. Although he only polls in the single digits as the public's choice for next leader, Motegi is a charismatic veteran lawmaker with experience in virtually every facet of government. At times, he has not hidden his ambition to take charge, as when he unveiled the extension of a popular childcare program ahead of Kishida's own announcement.

Kishida reportedly thought hard over Motegi's retention. Although the post complicates Motegi's presidential aspirations, leaving him in the most powerful position in the party allows him to control party appointments and finances. Vice President Aso likely lobbied for Motegi to remain in the role, and Kishida needs both Aso and Motegi to continue backing him within the party.

Other parts of Kishida's "team of rivals" strategy involved the retention in his Cabinet of two other potential rivals – Digital Minister Taro Kono and Minister for Economic Security Sanae Takaichi – deterring any carping about his policies and keeping them busy until the next party election.

2. EXPERIENCED NEW MINISTERS AND RECORD NUMBER OF WOMEN

Kishida's reshuffle has ushered in 11 first-time ministers who nonetheless possess significant policy experience. Kishida chose this set of more senior officials to build confidence in his Cabinet, while reducing the inventory of "waitlisted" lawmakers within the party. Three of the most notable new arrivals were:

- **Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa:** Former Justice Minister Kamikawa replaces Yoshimasa Hayashi, becoming the first woman to serve as foreign minister since 2004. The 70-year-old Kamikawa is known for her administrative capabilities and for ordering the 2019 execution of 13 former cult members tied to a 1995 sarin gas attack in Tokyo. She studied at Harvard University and is a real expert in international affairs, working as a think tank researcher before entering the Diet only two decades ago.
- **Defense Minister Minoru Kihara:** Kihara was national security adviser to former Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga. A leading member of a Japan-Taiwan legislative council, his appointment may reflect Kishida's desire to pursue deeper ties with Taiwan. He also has useful experience as State Minister of Finance, which may help him to see that Japan's increased defense spending is appropriately allocated in his new role.
- **Health, Labor and Welfare Minister Keizo Takemi:** The 71-year-old Takemi is an erstwhile internationalist and health policy expert from the Upper House who has served previously as Vice Minister and in numerous roles in the United Nations apparatus focused on health and population policy issues. His father was a renowned president of the Japan Medical Association. Takemi's political career was dogged by numerous tough election fights (some lost) in one of Tokyo's most competitive electoral districts.

Kishida also appointed five women to the cabinet, tying the record set by the second Abe Cabinet in 2014. The ruling LDP faces perpetual criticism that Japan lags on gender equality, particularly in politics. This year, Japan placed 125th out of 146 countries in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap report, receiving its worst ever ranking due in part to women's lagging political participation.

3. KEY ABE FACTION MEMBERS RETAIN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

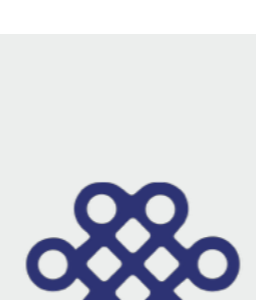
On August 31, the faction formerly run by assassinated Japanese leader Shinzo Abe – the LDP's largest such group – established a 15-member executive board as a compromise between key members who could not agree on how to name a successor to the martyred leader.

Five members of the faction's executive board – LDP Policy Chief Koichi Hagiuda, Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Yasutoshi Nishimura, Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno, Upper House Secretary-General Hiroshige Seko, and Diet Affairs Chief Tsuyoshi Takagi – are all considered potential candidates for both the faction leadership and the LDP presidency. All retained their Cabinet and party positions in the reshuffle. Kishida – and his key advisor Taro Aso – no doubt saw wisdom in maintaining a balance of power among the faction's leadership, without signaling a preference or concern for any one candidate. Without a clear and strong leader, the Abe faction may be more likely to support Kishida in the next presidential election.

Cabinet and LDP Leadership Lineup (red indicates new appointments)

 Prime Minister Fumio Kishida	 Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Masahito Moriyama
 Minister of Internal Affairs and Communications Junji Suzuki	 Minister of Health, Labor and Welfare Keizo Takemi
 Minister of Justice Ryuji Koizumi	 Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Ichiro Miyashita
 Minister for Foreign Affairs Yoko Kamikawa	 Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Yasutoshi Nishimura
 Minister of Finance Shunichi Suzuki	 Minister of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism Tetsuo Saito
 Minister of the Environment Shintaro Ito	 Chairperson of the National Child Safety Commission Yoshifumi Matsumura
 Minister of Defense Minoru Kihara	 Minister in charge of Economic Revitalization Yoshitaka Shindo
 Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno	 Minister in charge of Policies Related to Children Ayuko Kato
 Minister for Digital Transformation Taro Kono	 Minister in charge of Economic Security Sanae Takaichi
 Minister for Reconstruction Shinako Tsuchiya	 Minister of State for Regional Revitalization Hanako Jimi
 President Fumio Kishida	 Chairperson, Election Strategy Committee Yuko Obuchi
 Vice President Taro Aso	 Chairperson, Party Organization and Campaign Headquarters Yasushi Kaneko
 Secretary-General Toshimitsu Motegi	 Chairperson, Public Relations Headquarters Takuya Hirai
 Chairperson, General Council Hiroshi Moriyama	 Chairperson, Diet Affairs Committee Tsuyoshi Takagi
 Chairperson, Policy Research Council Koichi Hagiuda	 Executive Acting Secretary-General Hiroshi Kajiyama

This report was prepared by **Melanie Berry** and **Rintaro Nishimura**.



THE ASIA GROUP

Washington DC • New Delhi • Hanoi • Shanghai • Tokyo

2000 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Suite 1000, Washington DC, 20006

THEASIAGROUP.COM

