



With Health Restored, Can Shinzo Abe Be Prime Minister a 3rd Time?

“A bolt out of the blue” refers to the unexpected shock of a thunderbolt followed by a piercing flash of lightning and hail falling from a clear blue sky. This phrase has been used in the world of politics through the ages.

Back in the Showa era, then-Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka stepped down from his post because of a bribery scandal, which was followed by a tumultuous, veritably chaotic period over who should be chosen as his successor. Etsusaburo Shiina, one of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) elders at that time and coordinator of the factious elements within the party, recommended Takeo Miki for prime minister, with “the feeling of praying to the gods.”

Miki was the head of a minor faction with a reputation for political cleanliness, and the first words he uttered after accepting the recommendation were just that: “A bolt out of the blue.”

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s resignation announcement on August 28 was, unmistakably, a bolt out of the blue. Evidence of this could be seen in the way the benchmark 225-issue Nikkei Stock Average plummeted more than ¥600 JPY at one point as the news made headlines around the world. It was honestly surprising as well that, while explaining his health problems in detail in the press conference announcing his resignation, Mr. Abe used no teleprompter, the contemporary version of a cheat sheet.

Prime Minister Abe also movingly conveyed to viewers his “gut-wrenching feelings” about leaving unfinished the job of resolving the issue of Japanese citizens abducted by North Korea.

The job of leading the government is an unrewarding one, with prime ministers rarely garnering praise for their efforts. Trivialities such as “cherry blossom-viewing” parties are taken up by newspapers, TV, and other media and blown into scandals, with opposition party lawmakers lambasting the prime minister in parliament day after day. It would cause stress and exhaustion in anyone.

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In particular, there is no doubt that Prime Minister Abe's night-and-day efforts to address a crisis that no one had foreseen — the new coronavirus pandemic from Wuhan — was the major factor behind the re-emergence of his chronic health problem. Textbooks in the future will likely record that, after continuing for seven years and eight months, the second Abe administration “was brought to an end by the COVID-19 pandemic.”

Mr. Abe should forget about politics for a while, while taking time to rest and recuperate. And one more thing, he should visit Yasukuni Shrine, since he visited there only once while in office as prime minister.

It goes without saying that Mr. Abe is only 65 years old. Once his health is restored, it will indeed be within the realm of possibility for him to take on the post of prime minister for a third time, as did his predecessor Mr. Taro Katsura (1848-1913), a politician who was from Mr. Abe's hometown.

Source: **With Health Restored, Can Shinzo Abe Be Prime Minister a 3rd Time?**

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健康が回復すれば、安倍首相は3度目もある

急に雷が激しく鳴ることを霹靂（へきれき）といい、「青天の霹靂」とは、まったく予想外の出来事を意味する。政界は、今も昔もこの言葉が大好きだ。

昭和の昔、当時の田中角栄首相が金脈問題で辞任し、後任選びは混迷を極めた。調整役を務めた自民党長老の椎名悦三郎が、「神に祈る気持ち」で、弱小派閥の長ながら「クリーン」を売り物にしていた三木武夫を指名、彼が開口一番発した言葉がこれだった。

安倍晋三首相の辞任も「青天の霹靂」であったのは、間違いない。世界中に速報が駆け巡り、日経平均株価が、一時600円以上下げたのが何よりの証拠だ。現代版カンニングペーパーであるプロンプターを使わなかった辞任会見で、正直に病状を明かしたのも驚いた。北朝鮮による日本人拉致事件を解決できなかったことを「痛恨の極み」と語った無念の思いも画面からひしひしと伝わってきた。

国家の舵（かじ）取りを担う首相という職業は因果な商売で、褒められることは滅多にない。「桜を見る会」をめぐる今となっては、どうでもいようなスキャンダルでも新聞やテレビで連日とりあげられ、国会で叩（たた）かれれば、誰だってストレスがたまる。

ことに誰もが想像し得なかった中国・武漢発の新型コロナウイルス禍への昼夜をわかたぬ対応が、持病を再発させた主因であるのは間違いない。後世の教科書は、「コロナ禍によって7年8カ月続いた第2次安倍政権は終焉（しゅうえん）した」と記すだろう。

これからは、いつか政治を忘れ、ゆっくり静養していただきたい。もう一つ。在任中一度しか参拝されなかった靖国神社を詣でていただきたい。まあ、書かずもがなだが、まだ65歳。健康さえ回復すれば、郷里の大先輩、桂太郎の如（ごと）く3度目もある。

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