

# **Administrative and Policymaking Reforms in Japan: Comparative Pointers for the Philippines**

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*This article describes and analyzes postwar changes in the Japanese state leading up to the 2000-2001 reforms in central policymaking and administrative structure. These reforms would assert the primacy of politicians in Japan's bureaucrat-dominated policymaking and Diet processes, and would streamline and reduce, through mergers, the number of national ministries from 22 to 13. Despite basic cultural and material differences between the two countries, the Japanese experience should inspire the Philippines to seek to strengthen its own bureaucracy and state as a development strategy. The issues involved in this strategy are briefly identified.*

As the first Asian postwar “economic miracle,” Japan attracted the attention of other countries looking for models to emulate. This was partly because its government played a key role in its development and also because it has periodically reformed itself to face new challenges at home and abroad. Its reform efforts have kept the state “small but influential and effective,” and they have succeeded even in unexpected circumstances (Muramatsu and Krauss 1996: 214-6, 239). However, considerable problems were encountered along the way, attributed mainly to the bureaucracy (Ito 1997: 69-70), which otherwise has been the major source of strength of the Japanese state. Thus, after posting successes in the 1980s, the reform movement foundered. Critical events toward the 1990s then generated more radical reform proposals. Yet some observers declared: “The 1993 reform movement is history” (Jun and Muto 1998: 200).

Apparently, however, history has not ended for reform, given the “epochal” changes that have been legislated for 2001 and earlier. These reforms

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would consolidate ministries and agencies and reduce their number from 22 to just a baker's dozen, reduce the government workforce by 25 percent over ten years, and strengthen the role of the cabinet and the prime minister in policymaking and coordination. Moreover, "Diet reforms" have been inaugurated to show that it is the politicians, not the bureaucrats, who are in control of government. Important parts of the broad reform agenda have been delayed or set back, but the administrative and policymaking changes put into place reflect the problems and dynamics of the relations between bureaucrats and politicians that can fuel further reforms. In the following sections, we will briefly address these problems, describe and interpret the reforms, and identify some of the issues raised, particularly in terms of "lessons" that may be instructive for the Philippines.

### **Political Control of a Bureaucratic State**

"Administrative reform" is a broadly conceived phrase that embraces many areas, including privatization and deregulation (Kume 1995: 222). It has been directed not only at making the state lean yet effective, but also at grappling with some of the classic issues involved in the relationships between politics and administration, between politicians and bureaucrats. In the prevailing model-in-use, "traditional public administration" – the point of departure of most contemporary alternative models of reform and governance (Peters 1996) – politics is ideally separated from administration through such institutional devices as the separation of legislative and executive powers in presidential governments and neutral civil service systems. Politics is concerned with ends and administration with means, and bureaucrats are supposed to be nonpartisan but obedient to any party that gains the power to govern.

That is the ideal, normative view. In reality, many scholars have contended, politics and administration have interpenetrated, and policymaking is an area which has been shared by politicians and bureaucrats (Peters 1996: 5-6; Manzer 1987). This is perhaps truer in parliamentary systems which formally unite the legislative and executive branches and give senior civil servants the role of policy advisers as well as administrators. Recent reforms in the West, even among parliamentary governments, however, have sought to distinguish politics and policymaking from administration even more finely, confining bureaucrats to management roles farther away from policymaking. A notable effort with this thrust has been "agencification" in New Zealand and the UK – a decentralization or disaggregation scheme by which independent "executive agencies" are created out of operating units in the regular ministries and departments (Peters 1996: 31-2; Christoph 1994: 852-4).

Japan, which has been open to foreign models since the modernizing Meiji period, has been inspired by British reforms, among other influences

(Muramatsu and Krauss 1996: 219). The central issue before it has been how to place a seemingly over-powerful bureaucracy under political control. Japan has been a "developmental state" largely because it has been a "bureaucratic state," where the politicians reign but the bureaucrats rule, as an American scholar has aptly put it (Johnson 1995: 68). To stress this point, politicians are sometimes depicted as rubber-stamping bills prepared "bottom-up" and advanced by "proactive" bureaucrats. Along with the government of the day, the bureaucrats have ample resources to exercise and project power and "pick winners" in private industry and business. These include a "second budget," powers to issue ordinances and regulations, extra-statutory "administrative guidance," and *amakudari* (descent from heaven) retirement into public firms, private businesses, and other sinecures that also serve as outposts for the sending ministries (Johnson 1975: 10, 12, 23; Kim 1988: 4; Koike 1994: 433-5; Tsurutani 1998: 181-3, 189).

The World Bank attributes Japan's postwar economic success to the insulation of its bureaucracy from politics, giving it the freedom to design and implement appropriate policies with minimal political interference (World Bank 1993: 168-70). Before the war, such protection was supplied by imperial appointment of senior officials, and afterwards by examination and other merit requirements to draw the best talents into the civil service (Muramatsu and Pempel 1995: 175-9). Starting with the idle samurai warriors of the Tokugawa period, the bureaucracy has from the outset enjoyed the reputation of being a competent and honest elite, and the modern public service has been the most prestigious career in Japanese society. Civil servants have been viewed by the people as the guardians of the public interest, whereas politicians are often seen as promoters of special interests (Stockwin 1991: 14; Tsurutani 1994: 379; Pempel and Muramatsu 1995: 25; Johnson 1995: 228). Surveys in 1999 showed that most people still regarded bureaucrats as more influential than politicians (only 20 percent believed otherwise) and viewed public service as an attractive career ("Poll," DY 5/31/99).

Some scholars, however, have argued that bureaucratic dominance in Japan has been more apparent than real. Although it may have enjoyed some periods of pre-eminence, the bureaucracy and the administrative process have been politicized and democratized through prewar measures making the civil service more accessible and open to political appointments, through postwar constitutional provisions shifting the allegiance of the civil service from the emperor to the people, and through other ways. The long period (1955-1993) of one-party rule by the conservative Liberal Democratic Party ensured a stable and predictable relationship with the bureaucracy. Thus, while it might not always be manifest, the politicians did in fact rule, delegating most of the policymaking to the bureaucrats, while the latter followed their lead or anticipated their preferences (Pempel and Muramatsu 1995: 40; Ito 1995: 237; Muramatsu 1997: 17-8; Ramseyer and Rosenbluth 1997: Ch. 7).

Moreover, even if the bureaucrats were ahead in policy expertise, the politicians have caught up as a result of long tenure in the Diet, experience in the cabinet and the LDP's policy research council, and immersion in "tribal" or *zoku* policy communities (Nakamura 1990: 226-7; Tsurutani 1994: 375-6; Muramatsu and Pempel 1995: 184-5). The dominance of politicians has been shown in pushing administrative reforms despite strong bureaucratic resistance. Reform has been successful because "politics took up reform" (Muramatsu and Krauss 1996:237) through strong political leadership and appropriate strategies that considered bureaucratic incentives as well as political imperatives. As the political situation dictated, prime ministers imposed reforms on a top-down basis, while others reverted to a bottom-up process or took away the initiative from independent bodies (Ito 1995: 245; Muramatsu and Krauss 1996: 236; Carlile 1999: 83-7).

Yet the issue of bureaucratic power remained on the reform agenda up to the 1990s. Long after his successful reform efforts and extended tenure as prime minister in the mid-1980s, Yasuhiro Nakasone (1995, 1998) echoed the problem that the German sociologist, Max Weber, had addressed in 1917. To Weber, bureaucracy was the most efficient, rational, and indispensable form of organization for capitalist development. But like other European thinkers, he worried about the dangers of a powerful state bureaucracy, particularly if it assumed the top administrative positions in government that he viewed as properly belonging to politicians. Since bureaucrats are not suited by training and organizational experience to deal with questions of ends, their assumption of top administrative posts would lead to "irresponsibility." Such posts should be filled through the open rigors of political selection, not the "behind-the-scenes" processes of bureaucratic promotion that allowed big capitalists to have undue influence in state affairs. Weber said that political control of the bureaucracy also required a truly powerful and "working" parliament that would closely supervise and "share" the work of bureaucrats (Wright 1974-75; Kamenka and Krygier 1979).

Similarly, in 1995, Nakasone called for strong political leadership and measures to rein in the Japanese bureaucracy. During his unusually long term as Prime Minister, he showed how "executive" or "presidential" behavior could make bureaucrats more obedient. He now deplored what he saw as the decline in the quality of younger postwar politicians, the bureaucrat-like behavior of Diet members and the opaque processes by which policies were made and leaders selected. According to him, too many recent prime ministers were chosen by *dango* - "backroom agreements by party bosses" - leading to the rapid turnover among PMs reminiscent of the instability in pre-de Gaulle France. He therefore proposed basic changes, including more open decisionmaking, centralization of key personnel appointments now made by ministries, and the opening of more senior career posts to political appointment from business and academia as well as the world of politics (Nakasone 1995, 1998).

Similar moves to politicize the civil service had been made before. In the 1960s, politician and ex-bureaucrat factions in the LDP struggled over the attempt of the politicians to bring the bureaucracy under party control. The effort was revived after the critical events of the early 1990s, when the economic "bubble" burst; bureaucrats were mired with politicians and businessmen in corruption scandals, and the LDP lost its hold on government, re-couping and taking it only later in coalition with other parties. Reform became a popular platform for all parties including the LDP (Carlile 1998: 93-95; Stockwin 1999: 8). One proposal made by a breakaway party leader, the "Ozawa Plan," was to cut the number of bureaucrats answering questions in the Diet for ministers, upgrade parliamentary vice-ministers (PVMs) to deputy ministers, and add 100 to 160 "political counselors" to the bureaus. This plan was opposed by the bureaucrats, and the author was suspected of having less than noble motives for proposing it, but it seemed to offer a solution to what was said to be Japan's basic problem: "the need to democratize the bureaucracy in order to democratize policymaking" (Johnson 1995: 226-31, quoting Yamaguchi 1993).

While the question of "who governs Japan" may persist, there seems to be a consensus that the state has undergone a sea change and is ripe for fundamental change. The economy has become more diverse, complex, and more open to foreign trade and investment—though not open enough for foreign deregulators but it has been hard put to recover from recession. Politics has shifted from questions of "who gets what, when and how" from the benefits of growth, to "who loses what and how" from economic decline (Nakamura 1990: 226)—in effect, from "picking winners" to choosing losers, or perhaps more appropriately for Japan, saving losers (Ito 1995: 256). The overall structure of power has also been seen to go from the tight triangles suggested by "Japan, Inc." and "corporatism without labor" and by models of bureaucratic dominance or semi-autonomy, to the more pluralist structures of bureaucratic sectionalism, party factions, and "tribal" or *zoku* policy communities, with new groups and concerns emerging and asserting their interests and voices (Nakamura 1990: 220-3; Ito 1997: 63; Muramatsu and Krauss 1996: 225-6. For a critique of the concept of "corporatism without labor," see Kume 1995).

Previous formal reform efforts have helped in the softening-up process, though less formal, more incremental change incidents might have delivered the more effective catalytic blows (Johnson 1994, 1995). Let us briefly review these reforms before going on to the late 1990s.

### Postwar Administrative Reforms

Since the end of World War II, several advisory commissions have been formed to develop reform proposals. The First Provisional Administrative Reform Council was organized in 1961. This was followed two decades later by

the Second Provisional Administrative Reform Council (Rincho), at whose recommendation the first of three reform promotion councils were subsequently created. The Administrative Reform Council, formed by Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto after the election in 1996, formulated the proposals that were initially approved in December 1997. These were enacted into laws by the Diet in 1999 at the recommendation of Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi and his cabinet (Ito 1995 and 1997; Kaneko 1999: 77).

One outstanding achievement of the earlier efforts was the restraints placed on the size of the national government so that it has been the smallest among OECD countries (at 7.9 percent of total employment in 1990) (Muramatsu 1997: 21). Downsizing started in 1948 and in 1949 to fight inflation, reduce the deficit and balance the budget, resulting in the removal of 200,000 employees and 30 percent of the government bureaus. Caps were placed on the total number of personnel by laws passed in 1949 and 1969, and cutbacks were also made in 1951, 1955, and later years. One law abolished a bureau in each ministry, i.e. 18 out of a total of 120. A "scrap and build system" was thus started, whereby a new bureau could be created only if an existing one of "diminished need or relevance" was abolished (Ito 1995: 239-41; Muramatsu and Krauss 1996: 221 cite different cutback figures in 1949: 30 percent of employees laid off, and later, 30 bureaus and 300,000 employees "eliminated").

Although the reductions in 1949 resulted from the U.S.-imposed "Dodge Line," size restraint suited the conservative ideology that prevailed and underpinned the LDP's creation in 1955 and was imbibed by much of the bureaucracy itself. Small government was viewed as helping rapid growth by minimizing the "drag" from high taxes and public spending. To eliminate the deficit, budget increments were reduced to zero in the 1980s. Opposition parties favored the restraints as they minimized the advantage that the LDP already had in its hold on the government (Muramatsu and Krauss 1996: 221-2). Thus, downsizing met little resistance. Prudent reform strategies also counted. The scrap-and-build method gave the bureaucrats the choice of which bureaus to build or chop off, and the caps on personnel were applied uniformly across ministries and allowed inter-agency pooling and reallocation of surplus personnel. Moreover, the reductions were offset by new ministries and cabinet-level agencies created after the war along with new policies and programs (e.g. Environment Agency in 1971, National Land Agency in 1974) (Ito 1995: 241-2). A net reduction of only 50,000 employees was reported for 1967-1998, leaving a total of 849,000 (minus Self-Defense Forces personnel) (MCA 1998: 9).

The reform commissions were useful in many ways. They have been described as a hybrid of American-style independent presidential commissions and British royal commissions – the latter because they actually served as

“stalking horses” of prime ministers. Rincho, headed by a respected *Keidanren* chairman, took its independence seriously, actively initiated proposals, and even publicly gave the government reform “assignments” that proved politically risky for the prime minister to ignore. The reform movement started by Rincho in the 1980s was partly sustained by the successor promotional bodies, the first of which it recommended (Carlile 1998; Ito 1995: 244-7).

Strong leadership by such prime ministers as Nakasone in the 1980s and Hashimoto in the 1990s was crucial for reform success. Like PM Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom, they gave reform activities their personal attention, headed off bureaucratic resistance by resorting to top-down decisionmaking or preventing bureaucrats or ex-bureaucrats from participating in council or committee work, and stacking the reform bodies with supportive people. PM Nakasone sometimes resorted to strong-arm tactics, e.g. reassigning upper-echelon personnel at Japan National Railways (JNR) who opposed its privatization (Ito 1995: 251). Despite their forceful leadership and public commitment to reform, however, there were changes that they wanted but were opposed successfully by bureaucrats and other threatened interests. And there were points where they retreated for political expediency (Carlile 1998; Ito 1995: 257-8).

The accomplishments of the 1980s reforms included the privatization of the JNR, Nippon Telegraph and Telephone (NTT), and Japan Tobacco, the revision of the medical insurance and pension programs, and the reduction of the number of personnel by five percent as well as of budget increments to zero. Privatization was achieved partly because there were pro-reform bureaucrats in the NTT and, in the case of JNR and NTT, the ministries concerned (Ministry of Transport and Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications) were persuaded that, through the privatization of the entities involved, they could regain the policymaking authority they had lost (Ito 1995: 250-4). Like the ministries, which were typically divided between the coordinating ministries (pro-reform) and the line ministries (Ito 1997: 73), the unions were generally divided, the public sector ones usually opposing reforms and the private sector unions being more amenable. But their particular positions also depended on whether they stood to gain or lose from particular reforms (Kume 1995: 225; Carlile 1998: 81-2; Ito 1995: 253). The bureaucrats sometimes accepted policy changes in exchange for organizational reforms (Ito 1997: 63).

Rincho reforms fell short of their goals in the areas of deregulation, decentralization and certain central organizational changes. The number of permits and authorizations required by government agencies increased instead of declining as intended. Car inspection (*shaken*) rules, instead of being relaxed, even got stiffer, thanks to pressure from the Automobile Inspection Association

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\* Japan Federation of Economic Organizations.

and "certain LDP members." Decentralization proposals were watered down due to strong reaction from central bureaucrats and the same fate befell a Rincho proposal to abolish "special legal entities" that were landing spots for *amakudari* (Ito 1995: 248; Carlile 1998: 83).

Proposals to strengthen central coordination and policymaking were only partly achieved in the 1980s. A new Management and Coordination Agency was created to merge the old Administrative Management Agency and several bureaus in the Prime Minister's Office. But a proposal to integrate the Economic Planning Agency, National Land Agency, and the Hokkaido and Okinawa development agencies was frustrated by ex-bureaucrats from these agencies. Most significant was the powerful MOF's opposition to a move to strengthen the cabinet's budget-making function. MOF (Ministry of Finance) was one of the "pillars" of the informal reform coalition in the 1980s. But it refused to yield this vital function, which it otherwise used to keep other ministries in line in support of other reforms, especially spending restraints (Ito 1995: 248-9; Ito 1997: 69; Carlile 1998: 2).

The reform movement after Rincho eventually flagged during the latter 1980s. It regained momentum after the crucial events of the 1990s, becoming a rallying cry in 1996 as "administrative reform election year." But other electoral issues diverted public and politicians' attention. A "private sector vitality" (*minkatsu*) scheme became a program for big-ticket pork barrel projects and resulted in more rather than less regulation of private participants (Carlile 1998: 86-7). Prime Minister Hashimoto's minority government was handicapped and his Administrative Reform Council came out in 1997 with a much "safer" report than it had originally intended (Carlile 1998: 98-102).

Nonetheless, reform remained a popular platform, with that not-so-hidden agenda of "curtailing the power of the bureaucracy" (Yoshihide, LJ 1/97: 17). Liberal Party leader Ichiro Ozawa insisted on his reform plan as a condition for his party joining the LDP in January 1999. The leader of *Minshuto* (Democratic Party) likewise claimed that his party had been advocating similar reforms (Hani, "Reform of Diet" DY 5/10/99; Iitake, "Diet Reform" AN 7/15/99). As for the 1997 ARC report, a former United States ambassador described it as:

an ambitious plan for streamlining the state bureaucracy, restructuring the budgetary process, deregulating the financial sector, and promoting wide-ranging changes, *inter alia*, in the social security and education systems. A 'big bang' financial system reform bill passed the Diet in 1997, and its implementation will commence in April 1998 (Armacost 1998: ix).

In 1998, the Diet enacted a "Framework Law" prescribing the principles for administrative reform. A reform "headquarters" was then setup composed of the prime minister and state ministers, to prepare the necessary bills. When Obuchi took over as prime minister, he promised to implement the reforms



according to schedule, and appointed "a young and aggressive" Lower House member as reform minister. In July 1999, the Diet approved 17 reorganization bills (and reportedly another package of 475 bills for decentralization) submitted by the Obuchi cabinet and prepared by the reform headquarters during ten months' work. The reorganization plans are to take effect on 1 January 2001, and ministries and agencies meanwhile started preparing budget requests, internal organization plans, and related matters (Kaneko 1999: 77-8; Kaneko, however, did not mention the "475" decentralization bills in this reorganization plan).

### **The Reform Plan for 2001**

While the 1980s reforms were described as the sweeping and successful third stage since the Dodge Line in 1949 and the 1960s reforms (Muramatsu and Krauss 1996: 237), the 2001 reform package was touted by Prime Minister Obuchi as the "epochal" third wave since the Meiji era and the U.S. Occupation (Shibasaki, DY 7/9/99). It would overhaul an organization that had grown too big and rigid into a "streamlined, efficient and transparent government," preparing Japan for the 21<sup>st</sup> century as a "free and fair" society composed of "autonomous individuals" and as an independent participant in the world community (ARC 1997).

The most visible part of the current plan is the unprecedented compression of the 22 existing ministries and agencies<sup>1</sup> into just 13, resulting from the merger of 14 ministries into just five (see charts and diagrams). The number of ministers will be reduced from 20 to between 14 and 17, with some to have special responsibilities (e.g. for area development). The number of bureaus will be cut from 128 to 96, and divisions from 1,200 to 1,000, with further reductions over five years after January 2001. The full-time workforce will be reduced by ten percent over ten years – 25 percent counting employees to be hived off with independent "executive agencies" (Kaneko 1999: 80).

The integration of the administrative machinery is designed to overcome the problem of inter-ministry sectionalism and improve coordination. This had been a "political taboo" untouched by previous reforms (Kaneko 1999: 77). The resulting larger units may also reflect Japanese preference for broad jurisdictions designed to intensify allied activities or to force policy coherence within ministries (Muramatsu 1997: 20; Haley 1995: 86-7). While the power of the bureaucracies thus merged may be diluted, however, the bigger ministries may seem more daunting from outside. The Ministry of National Land and Transport, which will absorb the former Construction Ministry, may now be a bigger purveyor of pork barrel projects for which local officials and other groups troop to Tokyo every year (Ogawa, AEN 8/1/99).

Not all ministries, though, will undergo consolidation. The most powerful postwar ministry, the Ministry of Finance (MOF), will shed its eighth-century name *Okurasho* for *Zaimusho* or "Treasury." Moreover, it will now share its budget-making functions and powers with the cabinet and its financial policy-planning role with a separate financial agency which will absorb the MOF's financial planning bureau ("Finance reshuffle," DY 6/29/99). MOF bureaucrats had sometimes challenged top political leaders on major policy issues. For example, they once persuaded other political leaders to keep a one percent limit on spending increases against the wishes of then Prime Minister Nakasone to expand defense spending (Kim 1988: 119-22, 127). Thus, while they might be usually "passive" on substantive policies (cf. Muramatsu 1997: 32), they could be aggressive and more conservative on fiscal policy than the "hawkish" PM.

In the 1990s, the MOF's reputation for competence and probity was tainted by its share of blame for the "bubble economy" and its aftermath, and by the involvement of its personnel in the scandals of the late 1980s and the 1990s. An administrative vice-minister (the top career official in ministries) and 112 other officials were forced to resign in mid-1999 for "excessive wining and dining from financial institutions" ("Usui aims" JT 7/8/99). For both ethical and technical lapses, a Budget Bureau head was retired instead of succeeding as AVM, a break in a 25-year tradition ("Finance reshuffle," DY 6/29/99). In some cases, MOF officials have been suspected not only of looking the other way but also suggesting ways to "window dress" bad loans. These loans then piled up and bankrupted many financial firms, which later absorbed massive amounts of public funds in bailouts.

Due to growing distrust of the MOF, a Financial Supervision Agency and a Financial Reconstruction Commission were created in 1998 to take over the supervision and rescue of ailing banks and other financial firms. Since their key personnel were drawn from the MOF, fears were expressed that the FSA and FRC would remain loyal to the MOF, but at least the FSA seems to have done a good job of flushing out cases of financial corruption. To avert a complete transfer of its financial function to the new FSA in 2001, the MOF and the coalition partners negotiated the compromise of sharing the policy-planning function on grounds that bailouts involve public funds and fiscal policy and should therefore remain partly under MOF jurisdiction ("Finance Ministry," JT 4/17/99). A new FSA, which will absorb the existing FSA and FRC and be an extra ministerial commission in the Cabinet Office, will be created in July 2000 ahead of the 2001 reforms ("Finance Ministry," DY 8/27/99).

Another feature of the 2001 reorganization plan which departs from the integration thrust of the reform plan is the spinning off of 90 institutions as "independent administrative corporations" or "executive agencies." These will include the MOF's minting and printing operations, national universities, public hospitals, research centers, and other agencies whose main function is viewed as

service delivery. As Kaneko says, "The executive agency system in the United Kingdom gave a hint in inventing this new system in Japan" (Kaneko 1999: 79; also Carlile 1998: 101). This scheme will transform these institutions into more self-supporting as well as more autonomous corporate bodies. A general law for the purpose was approved in July 1999 ("Executive agencies," DT 8/28/99). Although the personnel downsizing part has been approved, important details of the agencification scheme are apparently still being worked out.

But already, agencification has raised important questions, at least in the case of the national universities. One is whether it is just a convenient downsizing scheme without regard for educational missions. Another is the ambiguity of employees remaining government employees even when they start working in the independent agencies. Conflicting reports have likewise been made about who will choose university presidents – the education ministry or the universities themselves. Concerns have been raised as well about whether the setting of numerical targets for universities that agencification calls for will be compatible with their educational and research activities ("Executive agencies," DY 8/28/99). Another observer suggests that unless a clean break is made by them, the universities cannot escape the downsizing ax and attain the "heightened" and "expanded" autonomy and self-reliance that the scheme was expected to provide (Royama, LJ 1/2000: 22).

### **Political Leadership and Policymaking**

Important parts of the overall structure proposed or undertaken under the 2001 reform plan support its primary concern: to strengthen cabinet functions and the leadership role of the prime minister in policymaking and administration. To achieve this goal, the plan would enable the cabinet to "conduct substantial policy discussions" and serve as the main vehicle for "a top-down approach" to policy formation and execution, and it urges the cabinet to consider making decisions on the basis of majority rule (ARC 1997). These proposals imply a dissatisfaction with the prevailing bottom-up and consensual decisionmaking approach. Although this approach may be admired abroad as more participatory and democratic, in Japan it has had its share of critical comment.

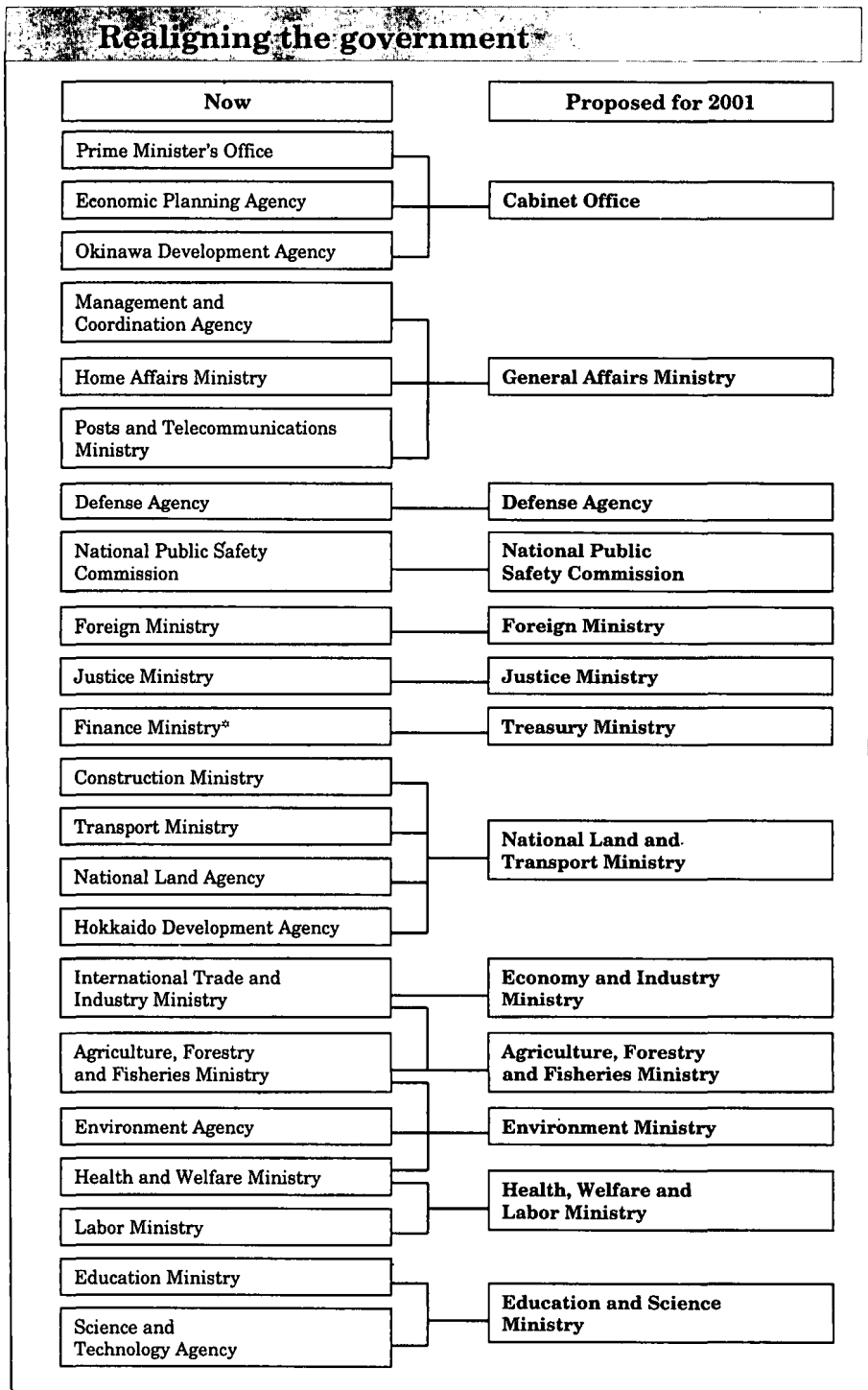
The bottom-up process is indicative of politicians' dependence on bureaucrats and of the danger that radical reform proposals could be waylaid or delayed by bureaucrats. This was why the 1980s reformers, learning from the mistake of the 1960s, switched to a top-down process. Consensus-seeking ensures wide agreement and smooth implementation, but aside from being time-consuming, it allows a minority to veto a majority's preferences. To its credit, such a unanimity rule gave equal voice to junior as well as senior members in the LDP's policy research council (Nakamura 1990: 228-9). On the other hand,

consensus-seeking can also inhibit dissent by placing a premium on securing agreement, and it is open to "bureaucratic leverage" and capture by interest groups bent on maintaining tranquility in their policy communities (Koike 1994: 444). The consensus method has also been associated with *dango* or the backroom deals that Nakasone denounced. According to critics of the 1997 plan, reform decisions were made by *dango*, particularly between MOF and MITI "to divvy up the spoils of reform" at the expense of a third ministry (Bevacqua 1997).

Japanese scholars, however, have also viewed bottom-up, consensual decisionmaking in a more positive light. Muramatsu explains it in terms of a theory of the way Japanese ministries are organized by centralizing personnel powers while decentralizing information (Americans do the opposite). Hence, MITI "is sometimes described as the organization of *gekokujo* (insubordination)" where junior officials are involved in policymaking and exercise discretion in implementation (Muramatsu 1997: 27-8, citing Aoki 1990). Likewise, Tsurutani says that in Japanese culture, "Brilliance and imagination are qualities valued in subordinates, not the leader." Japanese leaders "value originality and creativity most in their subordinates," while Americans value respectfulness and obedience (Tsurutani 1998: 191, citing Austin 1975: 135).

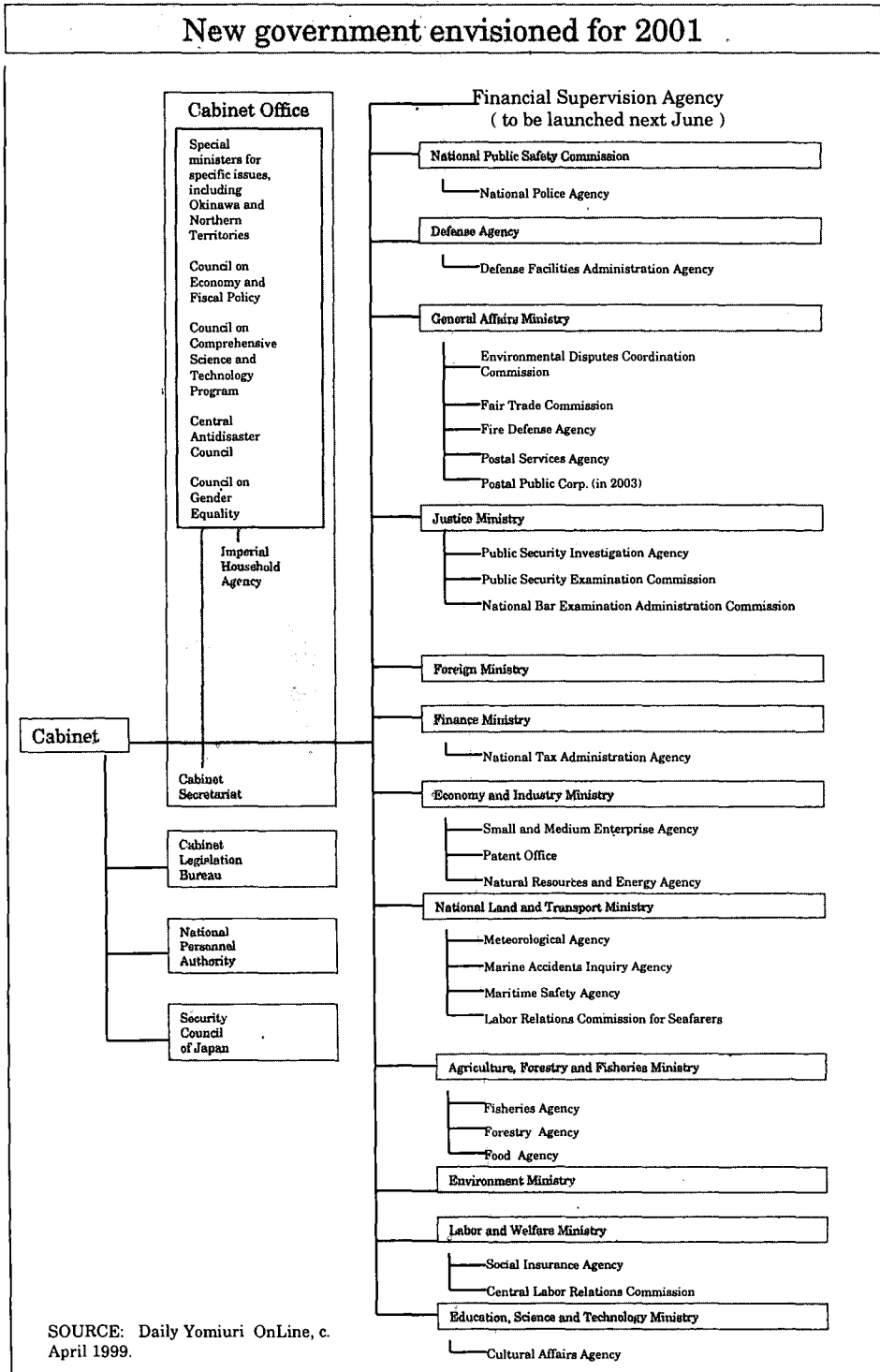
Formal-legal and organizational constraints on the prime minister's office as well as the cabinet are addressed by the 2001 reform plan. It will enhance the PM's position by specifying his authority to propose basic policies and by more flexibly interpreting his powers of supervision and control of the ministries. Under existing laws, the PM can hire and fire his ministers but "cannot force them to adopt a specific policy. All government decisions must be made by the cabinet" (Mera 1998: 192). According to one newspaper, "... the new system will enable the prime minister and the cabinet to exercise leadership. That will mean heavier responsibilities for politicians" ("Step forward" (edit.) DY 7/9/99).

Staff support for the PM and the cabinet will be reinforced (Diagrams 1 and 2). A Cabinet Secretariat, composed of "political appointees" from outside as well as inside the civil service, will help the PM in coordinating, planning, and drafting basic policies (foreign affairs and national security, administrative and fiscal management, macroeconomic policies, budget policies, organization and personnel). A new Cabinet Office will absorb and transform the existing Prime Minister's Office, Economic Planning Agency, and other agencies, and will be responsible for inter-ministerial planning and coordination of all sectoral and special concerns.



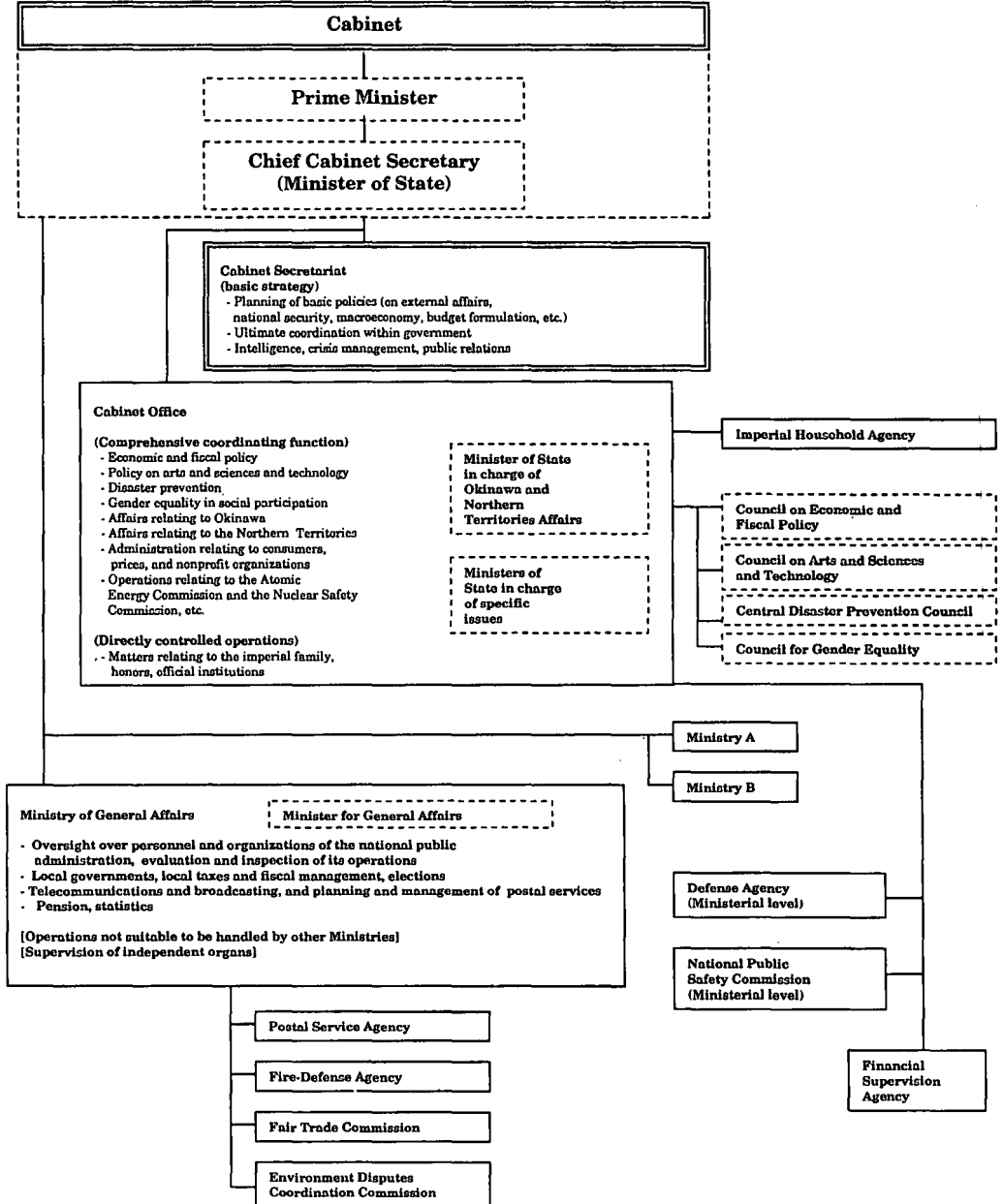
\*Some powers of the Finance Ministry would be transferred to a financial agency under the Cabinet Office.

SOURCE: Japan Times, April 17, 1999.



(For Reference only)  
(Tentative Translation)

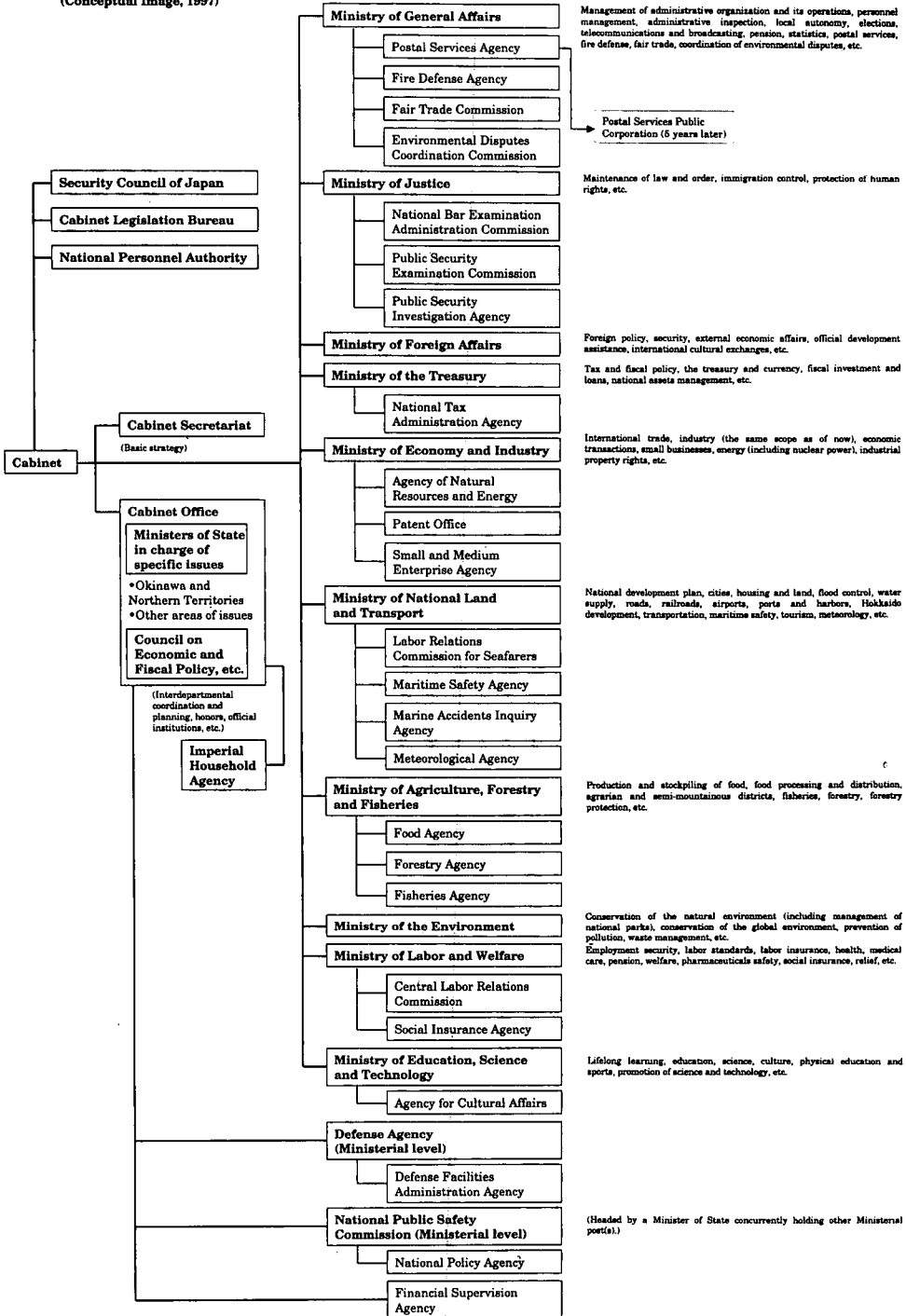
**Diagram 1**  
**Structure of Assisting and Supporting**  
**the Cabinet and the Prime Minister Conceptual Image, 1**



SOURCE Administrative Reform Council "Final Report of the Administrative Reform Council (Executive Summary)," December 3, 1997.

**Diagram 2**  
**Proposed National Government in 2001**  
 (Conceptual Image, 1997)

(For Reference Only)  
 (Tentative Translation)



\*The order of arranging Ministries and Agencies in this diagram is tentative.

Source: Administrative Reform Council (ARC), "Final Report of the Administrative Reform Council (Executive Summary)," December 3, 1997.



More significantly, political leadership and supervision of the bureaucracy and horizontal links with the Diet will be strengthened. The cabinet's authority over appointments will be extended to senior career posts, such as those of the administrative vice-ministers, directors-general, and others (ARC 1997). In effect, these posts, which are now protected by civil service laws and rules, will be "politicized" further (the cabinet can influence career movements at present; Muramatsu 1997: 16-7). Moreover, up to three deputy ministers will replace the parliamentary vice-ministers (PVMs) in the Cabinet Office and in each ministry, and will be placed above the AVMs, acting for the ministers and taking "substantial responsibilities." Political aides to ministers will also be appointed to participate in policymaking and planning and to deal with political affairs (Kaneko 1999: 79).

Definite steps have already been taken by the Obuchi government to reinforce political leadership over the bureaucracy. These consist of (1) the appointment of more parliamentary vice-ministers, (2) the replacement of bureaucrats by PVMs in answering questions in Diet deliberations, and (3) the institution of Diet debates instead of routine question-and-answer periods. Due to their emphasis on the Diet, these changes have been known as "Diet reforms."

### Steps Already Taken: "Diet Reforms"

In July 1999, the Diet enacted a law barring bureaucrats from Diet sessions unless called to answer "highly technical" questions. Instead, PVMs drawn from among the lawmakers themselves would answer questions for their ministers, assist the latter in policymaking and planning, and make policy decisions themselves as directed by their ministers. The law would thus do away with probably the most glaring showcase of politicians' dependence on bureaucrats. It would also revitalize Diet deliberations through debates that would include the prime minister and opposition leaders, and give the PVMs more important roles to play in the ministries. The PVMs are eventually to be replaced by 22 deputy ministers (*fuku daijin*) and 26 "state affairs officers" (*seimukan*) who will be appointed as cabinet members (Shibasaki, DY 12/7/99).

Under the existing, century-old scheme (*seifu-iin*), the cabinet appointed senior bureaucrats to answer questions in the Diet for their ministers. This was despite the presence of one or two PVMs in each ministry, who however had such minor roles that they were called "appendix" (*mochō*) (Shibasaki, DY 12/7/99). Not being cabinet members, they were invited to few decisionmaking meetings in both the ministries and the Diet. While they had their own inter-ministry conference, that of the administrative vice ministers (AVMs) was more regularly consulted by the Chief Cabinet Secretary on important proposals for submission to the cabinet (Stockwin 1999: 104). Under the new law, a party leader said, the PVMs would serve more as "large intestine" (*daicho*).

The fact that bureaucrats did most of the answering for ministers had become a public joke. An oft-told episode was when in 1980, in response to a question in the Diet, the chief of the Defense Agency replied: "That is an 'important' issue, so I will have a *seifu-iin* member answer your question." For this and other blunders, he eventually had to resign. With this story once again going the rounds, all concerned prepared for the new format of the Diet sessions in 1999 (Shibasaki, DY 12/7/99).

In the latter part of 1999, the government increased the number of PVMs from 24 in the previous Obuchi cabinet to 34. Departing from convention, the PM handpicked the PVMs. In October, after being reelected LDP president and PM, and adding a second coalition partner (New *Komeito*) to *Jiyuto*, Mr. Obuchi also reshuffled his cabinet ministers. Cabinet reshuffling is customary, but this time he brought in more veteran politicians known as experts in certain policy areas (Nishioka, DY 9/25/99; Shibasaki, DY 12/7/99). Some observers praised his choices for bringing competence and continuity, while others said that they were "recycled" politicians or were selected to appease party factions. Obuchi made some "balancing" concessions, but insisted on his preferences, especially against the recommendees of his LDP rivals ("New Cabinet," DY 10/6/99; Iitake, "Obuchi, Cabinet" AN 10/6/99; "32 vice ministers," DY 10/6/99; "Familiar features," JT 10/6/99; Hani, "Obuchi's picks" 10/5/99).

The new cabinet members and PVMs were selected also with an eye to good performance in the Diet debates. The first test-run of the new format was made in November 1999. The debaters did not do well. The PM read prepared documents on nuclear power policy, a "hot" issue just after the worst-ever nuclear accident in Tokaimura. When he was asked which agency supervised nuclear facilities, an aide had to slip him a note for the answer. The opposition leaders themselves were criticized for lacking debating skills. The second trial soon followed, and the first full-scale debates took place on 23 February 2000. They continued to get mixed reviews, with some observers noting that the debaters did better, while to others, the debates were still too bland to excite public interest, except when the PM and the socialist party leader confronted each other from their podiums (Struck, IHT 11/11/99; Hisada and Iitake, AN 11/12/99; Shibasaki, DY 12/7/99; "Sparks fly," DY 2/24/00, Ikuma, DY 2/25/00).

As the first in 109 years, though, and as a departure from the ways of a non-confrontational society, the Diet debates were watched closely by the press, debating clubs, and academics. Comparisons were made with the intendedly "rowdy" British parliamentary debates and the legislative process in the U.S. Congress. The British ministers (including the PM) were on their own once the debate started, but their departments also had teams to help prepare answers to pre-submitted questions from MPs. In the U.S., administration officials have no right to participate except when invited to public hearings. As political appointees, however, their selection goes through the rigors of the congressional

consent hearings to ensure fitness for their jobs (Murphy, DY 12/7/99; Osuka, DY 12/7/99).

While the U.S. Congress had 16,000 staff members and a 750-member Congressional Research Service to help lawmakers in policy research and formation, the Japanese Diet had only about two staff members per lawmaker or one-eighth of the U.S. Congress staff a decade earlier (Osuka, DY 12/7/99; Tsurutani 1998: 184, citing a 1989 source). Although the Diet debates were now more of the politicians' show, the bureaucrats became more rather than less busy preparing notes and rehearsing their ministers and PVMs for the Diet deliberations. "While there are new puppets, the same people are pulling the strings" (Shibasaki, DY 12/7/99, quoting a political science professor, Norihiko Narita, from Surugadai University).

A more open and presumably more democratic process, the Diet debate format in Japan was spoiled by an opposition boycott that left the PM delivering an important speech before empty rows of chairs in the middle of the chamber. Boycotts had occurred before when the ruling majority ignored opposition demands for further deliberation before a bill was approved. This one served as a kind of negative postscript on the use of majority rule. The boycott occurred because the coalition majority, now enlarged to 70 percent of the Diet after New Komeito joined up, forced through a bill to reduce the number of Diet seats filled by proportional representation (PR) – a move threatening to the parties that won more seats through PR than through single-constituency elections.

The reorganization plan for 2001 also received mixed comments. Some critics expected that its impact would be less than sweeping unless the budget and public works systems were reformed. It gave the impression "that the ministries will only be rejiggered without reviewing their tasks and jurisdictions for greater efficiency." The new Land and Transport Ministry "will create a huge ministry" of 68,800 officials that would attract the *zoku giin*, "tribal politicians who speak for specific interests." While making the bureaucracy even more powerful, the reforms did not deal with the problems due to vertical division of jurisdictions between ministries over urban and rural sewage systems and over nursery and kindergarten schools. These jurisdictional problems, the critics said, were never discussed in Diet deliberations (Daimon, JT 6/11/99).

The decentralization part of the reform package also raised some serious doubts. As before, it was "watered down" due to strong resistance from within the national government. Among the "catches" seen were the powers given to cabinet members (1) to order governors and mayors to rescind their own decisions that are deemed inconsistent with national laws and ordinances, and (2) to "subrogate" local chief executives to carry out national programs like nursing care even against their own wishes. With a bigger General Affairs Ministry that combines jurisdictions over local government and "huge postal savings," the

central bureaucrats' grip over subsidies was unlikely to loosen. Mayors could now decide to reduce school class sizes, but central funds could be withheld from them if this was deemed inconsistent with national policy ("Autonomy," AS 7/9/99; Ogawa, "Big catches," AEN, 9/2/99; Ogawa, "Experts fear" AEN, 9/1/99).

Other newspapers were more supportive of the reform plan. The *Yomiuri Shimbun* editorialized that it was a big step forward, and that criticisms and suggestions for amendments would have delayed the transformation proposed ("Rethink," DY 6/12/99; "Step forward," 7/9/99). Although other important items on the reform agenda have experienced slow progress at best (e.g. the local taxation part of decentralization), the central changes in Japan's state machinery have been set in motion and may serve as reforms to spur further reforms. The actual results of the 2001 plan, of course, await implementation and a more thorough evaluation than I could do in this study.

### Conclusion

Is Japan a good model of reform and government to emulate for a country like the Philippines? Given the limitations of this study, I can only hazard a list of possible lessons and issues to pursue. This essay, based mostly on secondary materials available in English, has left some empirical and conceptual points to be ascertained or clarified. And it has not said anything on the Philippines. This country may be "too different" from Japan. The Philippines has a presidential system, a weak if "bloated" bureaucracy, indeed a "soft state," and it has a smaller but faster-growing and younger population, is more ethnically diverse, and is behind in terms of infrastructure, technology, and economy.

One may argue, though, that while some differences may serve as constraints, others may be the reason for reform and emulation. Fortunately, Japan itself, like the Philippines, has copied freely from foreign models – albeit selectively, combining "imitation with innovation" to give Western institutions Japanese characteristics (e.g. a welfare state minus the "advanced country disease" of big government) (Muramatsu and Krauss 1996: 219; Ito 1997: 66; Sakakibara 1993/1998).

On the reform process, the movement in Japan seems to have had a basic persistence, continuity, and consistency worth following, although it has had its bumps and byways as well. In the Philippines, reform has been somewhat discrete and discontinuous, the latest program having been suspended in favor of an arrested constitutional revision project. Some important changes may have been taking place within our government departments, however, more than we can see through the political turmoil.

Strong political leadership and other factors are essential to push reforms, especially in the face of centrifugal forces such as we have in the Philippines. Some scholars suggest that Japan did not need a crisis to succeed in the 1980s, but the critical events of the 1990s seem to have helped catapult reforms on the public agenda. We hope that we will not have to have a wrenching crisis to undertake and pursue meaningful and effective reforms in the Philippines.

Institutional mechanisms for reform seem also to be necessary. Truly independent commissions like Rincho, its successor promotional commissions, and supporting technical staff and routines seem also to be very useful to sustain reform programs and "movements." These include the "headquarters" established to prepare reform bills and otherwise carry the ball, and the system of regular administrative inspections carried out by the Management and Coordination Agency. The recourse to "private" advisory commissions, however, while perhaps useful in Japan, may be more suspect in the Philippines.

As for reform goals, I can only mention some basic ones. "Small but influential and effective government" is perhaps an ideal echoed in our own desire for a "lean, mean (effective), and honest" government. We wonder, however, whether or to what extent our million-strong national bureaucracy is really "bloated," and whether it may be better to give it more and better-distributed workload than downsize it in the draconian manner of private-sector "restructuring" (Tabadda *et al.* 1999). Moreover, how far can the size of government be reduced without reducing its effective role and scope as well?<sup>2</sup>

The combination of organizational consolidation and agencification as well as privatization, deregulation, and decentralization are attractive options. The Philippines has had some experience with the latter three, an accordion-kind of cycle with departmental structures, and no experience with full-scale agencification. The impact or implication of consolidation on policy and administration as well as bureaucratic power should be more fully assessed. Agencification, which revives an old dichotomy into multi-faceted trichotomies, calls for complementary institutional refinements (e.g. corporatization, contracting, accountability, and evaluation systems), and it requires a greater faith in market processes within as well as outside government than we (and perhaps the Japanese) may be ready to have (Schick 1998). It may run counter to what we basically need to do with the Philippine bureaucracy, i.e. strengthen it.

On more fundamental structural relations, political control of the bureaucracy is perhaps relevant in any democratic context, especially when cast in terms of improving policymaking and administration rather than just bureaucracy-bashing. Top-down, majority-rule decision-making is better approached as a complement to the bottom-up, consensual method, to promote

policy coherence as well as elicit democratic and efficient inputs. But we probably need more of the bottom-up approach, though the prevailing patterns and relationships in Philippine policymaking should be ascertained, especially the role of bureaucrats.<sup>3</sup>

The more basic question in the Philippines is how to strengthen the bureaucracy – and indeed the whole state. Some critics argue that both the political and administrative organs of the state have been flawed by the dominance of oligarchies, who have plundered state resources for their selfish ends (Hutchcroft 1998). Thus, while there is no question about the subordination of the bureaucracy to the political executives and legislators (Cariño 1992, 1994), weak leadership, poor coordinative mechanisms, and political interference rather than policy-based control (among other adverse conditions) have probably deprived our bureaucrats of their potential for rational administration and policymaking.

Otherwise, Filipino bureaucrats may have a great deal to build on in the form of education, training, a merit-based career service system, and other assets. The need to “develop state capacity” in the Philippines should be more fully articulated, but it may well begin by enhancing rather than downsizing the resources and authority of the bureaucracy. I believe that “the bureaucracy is a part, and a highly important part of the collective brain that somehow thinks and emotes a government policy” (Long 1996: 149). We should take the risk that Japan’s bureaucracy has suggested: “The things that make an organization superior tend also to make it toughly independent and difficult to change...” (Kaufman 1996: ii).

This position is, of course, without prejudice to dealing with the problem of corruption as well as competence, about which we have not been wanting in reminders from sponsors like the World Bank. On this we can also learn a great deal from Japan in terms of the difficult socio-cultural issues involved and the potential remedies and enforcement strategies.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>For brevity, the word “ministries” will include the cabinet-level “agencies” unless we need to specify the latter’s names.

<sup>2</sup>In Japan, size reduction may have been deceptive. Privatization has sometimes been complemented by more stringent regulations, and the central government has delegated a lot of its workload to local governments (Flynn 1998: 12).

<sup>3</sup>Related empirical issues in Japan: Does the “policy expertise” that politicians have gained include technical training and practice in policy analysis? While bureaucrats’ social and educational backgrounds have been profiled in some books (Dimock 1968; Kubota 1969; Kim 1988), the politicians seem comparatively nondescript, from what I have been able to read. Who are the politicians as a

group? Moreover, have political bodies improved their technical staff support? Other issues on the Japanese bureaucracy: One is the concern expressed by some scholars that generalists lead the bureaucracy: How can they stay on top of increasingly technical, complex and global challenges? (Kim 1988: 126). Maybe the mostly-law graduates of Todai (Tokyo University) are really quick studies, learning economics, etc. on the wing. But it seems much more complicated than just a good mix of talent and OJT. Merit seems emphasized at entry, then seniority takes over, but also with pressure-cooker "competition for good jobs" to rise on an up-or-out career ladder (Muramatsu 1997: 28). One critic notes that high-flyers' career movements at the MOF are so fast that they can't possibly deepen their expertise on each job and they become averse to risk-taking and innovation. Moreover, entry from private business is not permitted, so that recruits from fresh college graduates have to learn mostly from experience on the job (Brown 1999). Finally, what happens to the specialists who do not get on the fast management track; how are their talents harnessed?

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#### Acronyms Frequently Used

AN	-	<i>Asahi News</i>
AEN	-	<i>Asahi Evening News</i>
ARC	-	Administrative Reform Council
AVM	-	Administrative Vice-Minister
DY	-	<i>Daily Yomiuri</i>
JNR	-	Japan National Railways
JT	-	<i>Japan Times</i>
LDP	-	Liberal Democratic Party
LJ	-	<i>Look Japan</i>
MOF	-	Ministry of Finance
MOT	-	Ministry of Transport
MPT	-	Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications
NTT	-	Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Public Corporation
OECD	-	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PM	-	Prime Minister
PVM	-	Parliamentary Vice-Minister
U.S.	-	United States
UK	-	United Kingdom