



# Issue Brief

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## The Implications of Ishiba's Party-Cabinet Appointments

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## Abstract

Shigeru Ishiba, president of Japan's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), assumed office as the nation's 102nd Prime Minister on October 1 and subsequently announced key appointments for his party and Cabinet. He appointed several right-wing friendly figures to important positions within the LDP, including Hiroshi Moriyama as the secretary-general, which appears to be a strategic effort to balance moderate and hard-core conservative factions within the party. Meanwhile, Ishiba appointed many moderate conservative figures to his Cabinet, likely to establish a stable foundation for his plans and policy goals while sending a positive signal to neighboring countries. These significant appointments serve as a clue to understanding the short-term implications, providing a window into the domestic and foreign policy directions of the new administration. The Ishiba Cabinet is expected to prioritize policies aimed at improving labor-management relations, boosting real incomes, and stimulating consumption while at the same time, aiming to bolster Japan's security leadership within and outside the region, focusing on enhancing regional stability amid increasing global geopolitical uncertainties. Ishiba's Cabinet may embrace distinct ideological and policy directions compared to Kishida's administration, which followed the right-leaning Abe. However, the implications of the LDP's defeat in the House of Representatives election could ultimately blur the difference between Ishiba and Kishida.

### Keywords

Ishiba's cabinet appointments, domestic and foreign policy implications, factional politics

# The Implications of Ishiba's Party-Cabinet Appointments

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On October 1, Shigeru Ishiba, president of Japan's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), assumed office as the nation's 102nd Prime Minister. Shortly after, he announced key appointments for both his party and Cabinet. Notably, he assigned several right-leaning figures to important positions within the LDP, including Hiroshi Moriyama as the secretary-general. He also selected moderate conservative Yoshihide Suga, a former prime minister, as vice president. Unlike his predecessor Fumio Kishida, who based his personnel decisions on factional shares, the dovish Prime Minister Ishiba's party appointments appear to give little consideration to factional affiliation and share. This is evident in his decision to embrace Sanae Takaichi, a right-wing figure who competed against Ishiba in a closely contested runoff during the party presidential election, where Ishiba won by a narrow margin (215 to 194). This choice appears to reflect his consideration of the hard-core conservative forces within the party.

Regarding his Cabinet appointments, however, Ishiba leaned toward moderate conservatism by choosing Yoshimasa Hayashi, former foreign minister and chief cabinet secretary in the Kishida Cabinet, to serve as Chief Cabinet Secretary. Takeshi Iwaya, who previously served as the defense minister was named the new

foreign minister. Notably, four former defense ministers, including Ishiba himself, are part of the Cabinet, indicating that Ishiba will likely prioritize security issues. These significant appointments serve as a clue to understanding the short-term implications, providing a window into the domestic and foreign policy directions of the new administration.

### **Ishiba's Party-Cabinet Appointments**

Ishiba appointed former Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, who has no factional affiliation, as the vice president of the Liberal Democratic Party, and former Prime Minister Taro Aso as the top advisor. The promotion of moderate conservative Suga, who supported Ishiba, alongside Aso, who backed the far-right candidate Takaichi in the presidential election, reflects the current power dynamics between the two camps. The dovish Ishiba seems to be striving for balance, harmony, and integration with the right-wing old factions, despite the difficulty of this task. To achieve this, he nominated right-wing figures with relatively weak factional ties, such as Hiroshi Moriyama, Suga's ally, as the secretary-general, and Itsunori Onodera as the party's Policy Committee Chair. In addition, by naming former Minister of Justice Shunichi Suzuki, a member of the Aso faction, as the party's General Affairs Committee Chair, Ishiba demonstrated consideration for hard-core conservative groups, including the former Abe faction and Aso faction. Meanwhile, Ishiba appointed former Environment Minister Shinjiro Koizumi, who is popular but lacks factional affiliation, as Chairman of the Election Preparation Committee to lead the House of Representatives election on October 27.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi of the Kishida Cabinet, meanwhile, was retained in his position. Given that Kishida supported Ishiba in the runoff for the party presidency, it is fair to say that the dovish Kishida's influence will continue to some

extent through Hayashi for the time being. Hayashi is a key figure in the former Kishida faction, possessing legislative experience in both the House of Councilors and the House of Representatives, as well as administrative expertise in roles such as Minister of Defense, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries, and Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology. Takeshi Iwaya, who served as the defense minister in Shinzo Abe's Cabinet but was often critical of Japan's capacity to attack enemy bases, was appointed as the foreign minister. Former Defense Minister Ken Nakatani was designated as the new defense minister.

Additionally, former Minister of Health, Labor, and Welfare Katsunobu Kato was chosen as Minister of Finance, while former Vice Minister of Economy, Trade, and Industry Yoji Muto was named Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry. In total, 13 Cabinet members are first-time appointees, and 12 are categorized as non-factional, representing more than a majority. On the surface, this shift appears to be a result of reduced factional influence following the recent slush fund scandal. It is also noteworthy that the number of female Cabinet members has significantly decreased compared to the previous Kishida Cabinet, with only two women appointed: Toshiko Abe (Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology) and Junko Mihara (Minister of Child Policy).

### **Characteristics and Implications of Ishiba's Party-Cabinet Personnel Appointments**

Ishiba's personnel appointments to the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) appear to be a strategic effort to balance moderate and hard-core conservative factions within the party. He selected center-right Suga, who supported him in the presidential election, as the party's vice president, while also bringing in figures who

actively promote visiting the Yasukuni Shrine and amending the Peace Constitution. Notable appointments include Hiroshi Moriyama as the secretary-general and Itsunori Onodera as the chair of the party's policy committee.

Additionally, Taro Aso was named the party's top advisor, and Shunichi Suzuki, a member of the Aso faction, was chosen as the party's General Affairs Committee Chair. These selections indicate Ishiba's intention to strategically coordinate relationships with right-wing conservative forces such as the Aso faction. In the recent LDP presidential race, Ishiba defeated far-right candidate Sanae Takaichi by a narrow margin. However, the party remains deeply divided between moderate conservatives and supporters of far-right Takaichi, presenting a significant challenge for Ishiba, who has a weak support base. To stabilize his leadership within the party, Ishiba appointed hawkish figures to key positions, while relying on moderate Suga, who is politically aligned with him, to help manage these dynamics as the LDP vice president.

Meanwhile, Ishiba appointed many moderate conservative figures to his Cabinet, likely to establish a stable foundation for his plans and policy goals while sending a positive signal to neighboring countries. Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi, for instance, is known for his moderate conservatism and his ability to effectively drive initiatives, coordinate efforts, and communicate smoothly between the party and government, thanks to his extensive experience in both the Cabinet and Diet. Foreign Minister Takeshi Iwaya, who previously served as the defense minister in Shinzo Abe's Cabinet, has opposed enhancing Japan's capacity to strike enemy bases, arguing that it could lead to regional instability. This stance also contributes to a more favorable perception among neighboring countries. Accordingly, on October 9, during a phone call with the newly appointed Foreign Minister Iwaya, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi stated,

"I highly value Japan's new Cabinet for sending a positive signal for the development of China-Japan relations," adding, "The new Cabinet will ameliorate China-Japan relations." This exchange underscores Ishiba's intentions, as reflected in his Cabinet appointments.

Ishiba's nomination of Katsunobu Kato as the minister of finance indicates a strategic move toward addressing Japan's economic challenges, particularly to escape deflation. Kato, who has previously served as Chief Cabinet Secretary and Minister of Health, Labor, and Welfare, is known for his balanced approach to economic policy. He emphasizes the significance of macroeconomic growth while stressing the necessity of ensuring income distribution aligns with sustainable long-term growth. Ishiba has consistently pointed out the harmful effects of Abenomics, which primarily focused on fiscal expansion without adequate attention to the economic well-being of the middle class. His government aims to revitalize a healthy middle class by creating a policy that balances macro and microeconomics. In light of rising global inflation and its adverse impact on real wages for many middle-class Japanese workers, Kato's policy proposals-centered on increasing income and addressing these economic disparities-were central to his platform during the party's presidential election.

The Ishiba Cabinet is also expected to prioritize policies aimed at improving labor-management relations, boosting real incomes, and stimulating consumption. Yoji Muto, Minister of Economy, Trade, and Industry, has shown past support for Abenomics but was listed as a recommender of Taro Kono, who is viewed as a left-wing figure within the LDP, during the party's presidential election and voted for Kono in the first voting round. While faction leader Aso requested support for Takaichi in the runoff, Muto, a member of Aso's faction, did not reveal whom he voted for this time, indicating he may have backed Ishiba instead. Muto

favors Ishiba's idea of Japan's right to collective self-defense and is expected to actively cooperate with his policies to strengthen the middle class as well.

Prime Minister Ishiba's Cabinet appointments seemingly aim to bolster Japan's security leadership within and outside the region, focusing on enhancing regional stability amid increasing global geopolitical uncertainties. This is underscored by the nomination of four Cabinet members with prior experience as defense ministers including Ishiba himself, Defense Minister Nakatani, and Foreign Minister Iwaya. On the one hand, this move can be viewed as an attempt by Ishiba, who has a weak support base within the party, to utilize the political network he built through security policy-making, his area of expertise. However, the primary motivation behind these appointments appears to be the need to respond swiftly and effectively to the rapidly evolving geopolitical crises. This includes the Russia-Ukraine war, developments in North Korea-China-Russia trilateral relations, and the changing dynamics of conflict in the Middle East.

Ishiba faces various criticisms at home and abroad in relation to his ideas about an Asian NATO, nuclear sharing, and constitutional amendment. The fact that his Asian NATO proposal was not incorporated in the manifesto for the House of Representatives general election is evidence that he is taking such criticisms on board. Regarding security policy, he is likely to differentiate himself from former Prime Minister Abe by formulating realistic policies in collaboration with security experts in his Cabinet.

In conclusion, the policy orientation of Ishiba's Cabinet is likely to differ somewhat from that of his predecessor, the dovish former Prime Minister Kishida, who appropriated Abe's political legacy after receiving his support to become prime minister. In other words, Ishiba's Cabinet may pursue more liberal and



moderate policy directions at odds with Kishida's administration that followed the right-leaning Abe. Nevertheless, the LDP's defeat in the House of Representatives election could ultimately blur the difference between Ishiba and Kishida.

*The views and opinions expressed in this report are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official position of INSS.*