

## **By Thomas French**

Shakespeare said that 'some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them'. The Japanese PM Yukio Hatoyama, despite being heir to a political dynasty, clearly falls into the final bracket, having assumed the leadership of the Democratic Party (DPJ) after the implosion of the political career of the former DPJ leader, Ichiro Ozawa, amid corruption allegations.

The weak and vacillating conduct of Hatoyama in office has seen his party's approval ratings plummet from a post-election peak of 70% to 20% in less than 9 months. This unwillingness or inability to tackle Japan's milieu of problems is no more evident than in Hatoyama's approach to the issue of US bases on Okinawa.

Hatoyama made the relocation of the Futenma US marine base either out of a major urban area or out of the prefecture entirely, a major election campaign promise. After the DPJ's landslide victory in August 2009 moves to honour this promise, which reneged on a deal made by the previous government, descended into Shakespearian farce.

Hatoyama, unable to juggle the demands of the diverse factions in his party, the cold response of the Obama administration and the calls for action by the Japanese and Okinawa people, has seemingly resorted to burying his head in the sand and hoping the problem will go away.

Unable to force the Americans to move the base out of Okinawa, Hatoyama is confronted with a lose-lose choice of relocating the base within the prefecture or leaving it where it is, both of which are opposed by an increasingly vocal Okinawan public. Either choice would further weaken the authority and public image of the already moribund Prime Minister.

Caught between a rock and a hard place, Hatoyama has apparently decided that the best choice was not choosing. This is clearly shown by his recent abandonment of a self imposed 31 May deadline to resolve the issue. It could be the case that the PM is playing for time, putting off making a decision until after the upcoming upper house elections but his inertia and indecision may have already cost him his premiership. The fact that senior DPJ figures have already begun distancing themselves from him, and that rumours of his imminent resignation have begun to circulate, seems to indicate the final curtain has begun to descend on Hatoyama's premiership.

About the author:

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