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Japan's Premier Will Quit as Approval Plummetts

By **MARTIN FACKLER**

SEOUL, South Korea — Prime Minister **Yukio Hatoyama** of Japan, who swept into power last year with bold promises to revamp the country, then faltered over broken campaign pledges to remove an American base from Okinawa, announced Wednesday that he would step down.

Mr. Hatoyama faced growing pressure to quit, eight months after taking office, amid criticism that he had squandered an electoral mandate to change Japan's sclerotic postwar political order.

Since taking office in September, he had come to be seen as an indecisive leader. This image was reinforced by his wavering and eventual [backtracking on the base issue](#), which set off huge demonstrations on Okinawa and drove his approval ratings below 25 percent.

Calls had been rising within his Democratic Party for him to step aside before elections on July 11 that are seen as a referendum on the party's first year in power.

"Unfortunately, the politics of the ruling party did not find reflection in the hearts of the people," Mr. Hatoyama told an emergency meeting of Democratic lawmakers, broadcast live on television. "It is regrettable that the people were gradually unwilling to listen to us."

Mr. Hatoyama is the [fourth Japanese prime minister to resign in four years](#), which is likely to renew soul-searching about Japan's inability to produce an effective leader and to feed concerns that political paralysis is preventing Japan from reversing a nearly two-decade-long economic decline. Mr. Hatoyama, who was teary-eyed as he announced his departure, was also following the common Japanese practice of leaders' resigning to take responsibility for failure.

His resignation will not force a change in government, because the Democrats still hold a commanding majority in Parliament's Lower House, which chooses the prime minister. But it will be a damaging blow to a party that had taken power in a landslide election victory that

ended more than a half-century of nearly unbroken one-party control.

Mr. Hatoyama took power with vows to challenge the bureaucracy's grip on postwar governing and revive Japan's economy. Instead, his inexperienced government appeared to become consumed by the issue of the Okinawa base and a series of investigations into the political financing of Mr. Hatoyama and his backer in the party, Ichiro Ozawa.

Mr. Hatoyama said Wednesday that Mr. Ozawa, the Democratic Party's secretary general and its shadowy power broker, would also resign. Japan's public broadcaster, NHK, said the party would meet Friday to choose a new prime minister. Candidates include party veterans Naoto Kan, the finance minister, and Foreign Minister Katsuya Okada.

The contention over the American base, which dragged on for months, was emblematic of Mr. Hatoyama's inability to make up his mind, or follow through on ambitious campaign promises.

The Democrats failed to deliver on a number of pledges, from eliminating highway tolls to finding enough savings from cutting waste to finance new subsidies like cash allowances for families with children. Instead, the spending ended up raising concerns that Japan's ballooning deficit could one day lead to a Greek-style financial collapse.

Mr. Hatoyama had been expected to be a diplomatic personality who would be able to build consensus among the members of his ideologically broad party. He had appeared to be naturally suited to the job, as a political blue blood who hailed from one of Japan's most powerful families. His grandfather had been a founding member of the Liberal Democratic Party, whose long grip on power Mr. Hatoyama's Democrats ended last summer.

He was critic of American-style globalization, and talked of transforming Japan's public works-driven politics into something closer to a European-style social welfare state. During the election campaign, he had drawn attention by pledging to end Japan's postwar dependence on the United States, and to build closer ties with China and the rest of Asia. His vow to build a more equal partnership with Washington was symbolized by his pledge to move the United States Marine Air Station Futenma and its noisy helicopters off Okinawa, or out of Japan altogether.

In the end, it was the base, and a prolonged dispute with Washington, that proved Mr. Hatoyama's undoing.

Japan's public did not support altering the military alliance with the United States at a time when neighboring North Korea was testing nuclear weapons, and an increasingly assertive China was sending warships on training exercises near Japanese islands.

M. Amedeo Tumolillo contributed reporting from New York City.