

Turn in Japan-Soviet relations

Richard Katz on how the Reagan victory may shape Japanese policy toward the U.S.S.R.

The change in American Presidents sets the stage for a turning point in Japan-Soviet relations with potential strategic significance for the entire Asian region. Under Carter, Japan-Soviet relations hit their sourest level in years. One factor was Japan's solitary adherence to Carter's post-Afghanistan economic sanctions. Far more important in the long run, beginning in early 1979 Japan fully participated in the formation of a de facto U.S.-China-Japan alliance against the U.S.S.R., and began to rearm in that context.

It remains to be seen whether the advent of President Reagan leads to an easing of Japan-Soviet tensions, or simply signals a shift in the kind of tensions. The latter would tend to occur if the Reagan administration abandons the centrality of the "China card" in U.S. Asia strategy, but combines a reduced China card tactic with a strong push for a rearmed Japan playing a NATO-type role in the Pacific, and if Japan accepts that role.

So far during the interregnum two clear tendencies have emerged. On the economic front, Japan is steadily abandoning its economic sanctions. By the Jan. 20 inaugural, the sanctions are likely to have totally disappeared. On the diplomatic-military front, tensions continue as Japan accelerates its rearmament and cooperation with NATO. This trend is being denounced virtually every day in the Soviet press.

In classic Japanese fashion, the abandonment of the sanctions against the Soviet Union came not with a loud proclamation, but in quiet incremental steps virtually unnoticed in the Western press. For weeks there had been small trade deals, an October series of trips to Moscow by the presidents of Japan's giant trading companies, and other such moves. Then, on Nov. 14, the government leaked to the Japanese press that the Export-Import Bank would resume suppliers' credits on project deals with the Soviet Union, up to a limit of \$100 million per deal. Observers expect that even that ceiling will be lifted shortly. During October, the Soviets offered Japan a package of projects totaling \$2-\$3 billion, warning that they would take their offers to Europe should Japan turn them down as it had earlier in the year. When one Japanese banker was asked whether Japan would accept the deals, he told *EIR*, "Of course, of course. The sanc-

tions are over."

For months Japanese businessmen had been urging the government to lift the sanctions. Because Japan, alone among U.S. allies, adhered to Carter's diktat, Japanese business lost an estimated \$4-\$5 billion in trade deals to France and West Germany. Despite this pressure, Foreign Minister Masayoshi Ito pledged continued Japanese support during his September visit to Washington, going so far as to criticize France and West Germany during a joint press conference with Secretary of State Edmund Muskie.

The election of Ronald Reagan changed the situation. Both before and after the election Reagan and his advisers were sounded out during lengthy visits to the United States by Susumu Nikkaido, a top official of the ruling Liberal-Democratic Party. Susumu, one of the few top Japanese politicians to forecast Reagan's sweeping victory, no doubt explored Reagan staffers' attitude toward a resumption of Japanese trade with the Soviet Union and got the impression that it would not cause big problems. The Kyodo news dispatch reporting the resumption of Export-Import Bank credits quotes government sources as saying that the smoothness of easing of the sanctions "depends on the policy to be taken toward the Soviet Union by the new U.S. regime," and reports that further sounding out will occur.

A vigorous resumption of Japan-Soviet project cooperation, yielding Japan new sources of oil, coal, natural gas, lumber and export markets, is now likely.

On the diplomatic-military front, the picture is neither so advantageous nor so clearcut. The election of Reagan sparked the revival of debate in Japan on its proper security role. One faction in the debate is headquartered in the new cabinet of Zenko Suzuki and includes the current leadership of the Defense Agency as well as sections of business. This group proposes to accelerate the trend begun by the late Prime Minister Masayoshi Ohira of rearming Japan to the level of a regional military power and of participating in a *triangular* alliance with China and the U.S.

The other faction is represented in parts of the ruling LDP, sections of the Foreign and Trade Ministries, and in portions of the business community. This group wants

to revert to something like the traditional policy known as "omnidirectional diplomacy": limiting Japan's military buildup to self-defense rather than regional deployment. It also means maintaining close *bilateral* security arrangements with the U.S. and general adherence to the Western camp, but maintaining friendly ties to the Soviet Union as well as China and other countries, and avoiding participation in diplomatic-military blocs aimed directly against the U.S.S.R. The latter group includes many of the business leaders involved in promoting long-term economic cooperation with the Soviet Union, such as Toshio Doko, former chief of Japan's top business federation, Keidanren.

The Suzuki administration has clearly continued the momentum of increasing Japan's arms spending. While the rest of the budget was limited to only a 7.5 percent increase, defense was allotted a 9.7 percent increase this year. Political obstacles in Japan prevented the arms buildup from being as rapid as desired by certain strategists in the U.S. Thus, Suzuki reaffirmed that the defense budget would not go beyond the limit set in 1976 of 1 percent of Gross National Product (GNP).

More important than the military spending per se is Japan's taking on the role of a strategically deployed quasi member of NATO. For the first time ever, Japan attended NATO deliberations held in Brussels Nov. 20-21 as an "observer with a voice." Its delegation of parliamentarians was led by former Defense Agency director Asao Mihara and Michita Sakata. Sakata is a leader of the Japanese followers of the limited nuclear war doctrine of former U.S. Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger. Another former Defense chief, Shin Kanemaru, led Japan's delegation to a meeting in Paris Nov. 19-21 on "Moscow's war for resources," attended by delegations from the NATO countries, Japan, South Africa and Brazil.

Within Japan itself, Foreign Minister Ito is leading a campaign over the "threat from the North," including a doubling of the budget to carry on an internal propaganda campaign about the "Northern Islands" issue. This refers to Japan's claim to four islands in the Kurile chain taken by the Soviet Union after World War II.

The new Japanese deployment includes exchanging military delegations with China and supplying China with defense-applicable electronics equipment; giving aid to the Khmer Rouge of Pol Pot; disproportionately increasing economic aid to nations designated as key allies of the Brzezinski Indian Ocean strategy such as Pakistan, Kenya, Oman and Somalia; and accepting responsibility for sea lane protection in East Asia.

Career bureaucrats in the foreign ministry as well as businessmen have given leaks to the press criticizing the behavior of Ito and the Defense Agency. Their criticisms have so far produced no visible effect on policy.

The U.S.S.R. has responded to the debate in Japan with what might be called a "carrot and sledgehammer" approach. On the one hand, the Soviets are intensifying their offers of economic cooperation. The Soviet press picked up on the Nov. 14 decision to ease the sanctions as evidence of "realistic" forces in Japan pressuring the government.

A slow, steady rise in Japan's defense spending of the traditional self-defense type would most likely be regarded in Moscow as inevitable, and set off few alarm bells. As Japan itself admits, the U.S.S.R. could destroy Japan in about four minutes. One *Pravda* commentator pointed out Oct. 17 that Japan's rearmament is seen as dangerous primarily because it occurs in the context of the U.S. "limited nuclear warfare" doctrine and of the "China card." The latter type of NATOized arms buildup would mean Japan-Soviet tensions will increase, economic cooperation notwithstanding.

As the Soviets see it

The following is excerpted from an Oct. 17 Pravda commentary by Vitaly Kornilov:

It has been announced in Tokyo that "Japan's possession of nuclear weapons" would not contradict the Japanese Constitution. . . . Tokyo's line is obviously directly linked to Washington's turnabout in disrupting détente. surely there could be no nuclear ambitions in Japan were it not for the Washington doctrine of "limited nuclear war," or the provocative incitements of the Peking hegemonists.

The following is excerpted from a speech by Soviet Merchant Marine Timofey Guzhenko to a Japan-Soviet conference held in Moscow Nov. 18.

There has been a change in Soviet-Japanese relations, and in no way for the better. . . . It is not the Soviet Union, but it is official Japanese circles, which had made steps at limiting contacts between the two countries, at impeding the development of mutually beneficial trade and economic contacts. . . . Isn't the myth about a "Soviet threat" used in Japan as a smokescreen for concealing the trend towards building up Japan's military capability, which is done not without prodding from Washington and Peking? These steps are being made as Japan is joining ever more closely in the policy pursued by Washington and Peking which are steering a course toward wrecking détente and working up international tensions.