

Japan makes breakthroughs in defense, economy, AIDS

by Mary McCourt

With Japan's sole enemy, the Soviet Union, rapidly building its forces in both the North and South Pacific, the government of Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone is moving aggressively to fill the vacuum left by the economic and military rout of its Western allies, led by the United States, in the Pacific. In December, the Nakasone government decided to go through with several policy breakthroughs that had been under consideration for some time.

The Japanese are fighting on a number of fronts. They are expanding their national defense commitment; putting funds and political leadership into their "strategic economic assistance" program in Southeast Asia and the South Pacific; and are funding research against the humanity-threatening AIDS epidemic, even though the spread of the disease is still limited in Japan. And, in what could become the focus for scientific and economic progress for the next generation, the Japanese announced in December that both public and private sector would massively fund a "Human Frontiers Science Program," which Prime Minister Nakasone wants to put before the industrialized nations at the next summit, likely to be held in Venice in June this year.

That Japan has decided it is time to break some taboos, is shown by the government's decision Dec. 30 to break the ceiling imposed on defense expenditures by the Miki government in 1976, which has held defense spending to 1% of the GNP. Defense spending for fiscal 1987 will be increased by 5.2% to 3.52 trillion yen (\$21.9 billion), to buy more military aircraft and expand military personnel. The current equipment of the Japanese defense forces is obsolete. Cries that this is a "rash act" from the leaders of both the opposition

Socialist and Communist Parties will likely have little effect. The LDP-dominated Diet is expected to approve the budget before the fiscal year begins April 1. Although the actual percentage increase is tiny—from 0.993% of GNP last year to 1.004% this year—the increase breaks the 1% psychological barrier.

Since the end of World War II, Japan has followed a "straight and narrow" path on defense, dictated by the threat of isolation from the world community if it were to once more become a military "rogue" power, as Prof. Masamichi Inoki, president of the Research Institute for Peace and Security, and former superintendent of the National Defense Academy, wrote in a recent policy statement published in the *Japan Times* on Dec. 14. But clearly, recognition of the real threat to the Pacific—the Soviets—is finally laying to rest the spectre of the threat from Japan.

Inoki wrote: "If this country does not take on a greater defense burden, it will become a Free World orphan." Japan has one military enemy, the Soviet Union, and, geopolitically: "Japan is a thorn in Moscow's flesh," Inoki wrote. But Japanese economic strength has changed its strategic relationship to the debt-ridden United States. Japan must increase its "defense related budget" Inoki wrote, but it "must have a definite future say in deciding policy matters of mutual defense concern." Japan must also strengthen "its relationships with China and all other neighboring countries, which face the military threat from the Soviet Union, and promote the exchange of military intelligence as well as technology transfers." And it must support the Strategic Defense Initiative. "The government is advised to adopt an entirely new ap-

proach . . . by shifting emphasis from its present conventional arms procurement program to the development of non-nuclear 'high tech' weapons systems of revolutionary design," Inoki concluded.

Other spokesmen are equally direct on the Soviet threat. Ruling LDP party Deputy Motoharu Arima, who speaks on defense affairs from the heart of the LDP, French daily *Le Figaro* reported from Tokyo Dec. 29, stated: "The U.S.S.R. is setting up bases in the region. I expect nothing from this [Pacific] denuclearization treaty. . . . It is absolutely necessary that we realize the objectives of our defense program and reinforce our economic-strategic aid to the nations of the South Pacific."

Arima called Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution—the article that prohibits Japan from waging war—an outdated habit. "We have made efforts for disarmament. But peace is not free of charge. If, unfortunately, tensions reach a point of no return between East and West, we would be then obliged to amend our Constitution," he told *Le Figaro*.

The Soviets do not like the change. The Soviet military daily *Krasnaya Zvezda* Dec. 14 said that Japan is playing an extremely "dangerous role" in response to a Kyodo press release that said that U.S. strategists decided to make Japan responsible for backing up combat operations in the Far East, South Asia, and the Persian Gulf. The Japanese Navy will escort U.S. carriers, seal international straits, and take part in anti-submarine warfare in the Sea of Japan and Sea of Okhotsk.

Strategic economic aid

The retreat of the United States is causing Japan to break some other post-World War II taboos. For the first time since 1945, it will move into the South Pacific, this time economically. The fiscal 1987 budget will increase only by .02%—the smallest increase in 32 years—public works spending inside Japan will fall by 2.3%, and "only defense, overseas development aid and domestic provisions for investment by government and local authorities" will get substantial increases in the new budget for fiscal 1987, the London *Times* reported on Dec. 30.

Japanese Foreign Minister Tadashi Kuranari will visit the South Pacific, where he will announce a "Kuranari doctrine" for the area in a speech on Jan. 15 in Fiji. It is likely that Japan's Official Development Assistance (ODA) would more than double, and include new features such as formulating economic development plans for the nations. Meanwhile, Foreign Ministry officials said on Dec. 13 that the United States is not expected to increase its foreign aid due to Gramm-Rudman budget balancing, and France, Britain and Australia are all cutting aid.

Kuranari will deliberately visit those island nations targeted by the Soviets: Vanuatu, which is negotiating an agreement giving landing rights to the Soviet fishing fleet and

which established diplomatic relations with Libya and Syria last year; Fiji; and Papua New Guinea. He will begin his tour by attending a meeting in Canberra of Japanese and Australian cabinet ministers Jan. 8-9, and then visit New Zealand.

Japan will also extend an official government invitation to 20 labor leaders from these countries to visit Tokyo early in 1987, government sources said on Dec. 25. The Japanese Foreign Ministry believes that the Soviets are gaining a foothold in the South Pacific through the social-democratic-dominated unions in the region, led by the Pacific Trade Union Community, which held a general meeting in New Zealand in May this year.

In Southeast Asia, Japanese investment in Thailand between January and September 1986 rose to 950 million baht, up from only 430 million baht last year. Thailand is now the fourth biggest investment point for Japan, after China, Korea and Taiwan.

Japan announced Dec. 24 a \$200 billion fund, subscribed by the government and banks and financial institutions, to go to the World Bank over the next three years to provide loans to developing sector countries at well below the prevailing World Bank interest rate of 8.23%. One insurance company official told the *Financial Times* Dec. 24 that he thought the funds would go primarily to Latin American countries with strong growth potential, but burdened by heavy debts.

Nakasone in Europe

Prime Minister Nakasone will use his January travels—the first official trip by a Japanese prime minister to Eastern Europe, including Finland, Poland, East Germany, and Yugoslavia—to deliver a policy speech on Japan's stand on East-West relations.

Nakasone hopes the speech will serve as a guidepost for Japan's future diplomacy in Eastern Europe, a high-level Foreign Ministry official told the *Japan Times* of Dec. 18. The prime minister will be accompanied by nine senior LDP Diet members—twice the size of the usual delegation. This Eastern European tour was hastily arranged after the Soviets announced in Moscow—without previously informing the Japanese government—that Mikhail Gorbachov would not be able to visit Tokyo in January. This Soviet diplomatic slap very likely was their response to the fact that Japan, as Radio Moscow noted nastily on Dec. 17, had recently expanded to 175 the list of products restricted for export to the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. Radio Moscow said that the new list of restricted exports under the COCOM agreement of NATO and Japan were mostly "high technology" products. But Poland, indebted to Japan by some \$1 billion, is welcoming the visit with hopes of new investment deals.

'Human frontiers'

Beyond these diplomatic and economic offensives, the Japanese government is making one that, if carried through,

could change the entire international retreat in the face of the deadly AIDS epidemic. Not only have the Japanese announced research projects on the causes and prevention of AIDS, but in December Prime Minister Nakasone gave the go-ahead to a project, the "Human Frontier Science Program," which has been mooted for some time. Nakasone called the program, which he told Shozo Makino, head of the Mitsubishi Research Institute, Dec. 9 that he will put before the next industrialized nations' summit in June, a biological Strategic Defense Initiative.

The Japanese government Council for Science and Technology decided Dec. 11 to launch research on AIDS. The council said that research was urgently needed for measuring the quantity of the AIDS virus, to evaluate the effects of anti-AIDS drugs, and measure the disease's progress.

Then, on Dec. 17, the Japanese Health and Welfare Ministry established the AIDS Countermeasure Experts Conference, which in its first meeting in Tokyo set up a surveillance committee to diagnose AIDS patients and keep surveillance over AIDS virus carriers in cooperation with 2,000 hospitals and clinics in Japan. But the overall purpose of the Conference, which will hold an international symposium in February and invite experts from around the world, is to find a comprehensive remedy and preventive measures for the disease. It has set up four research groups to develop medicinal treatment for AIDS and study transmission of the virus.

'Wisdom of the Creator'

Although such programs are only a small start against the AIDS threat, a far greater science program is being proposed by Japan. Details on the methods and aims of the "Human Frontier" project are not yet available, but Katsuhiko Umehara, deputy head of the program of the Industrial Science and Technology Agency of MITI said of the project: "We aim to discover and learn little known secrets of organic functions—the wisdom of the Creator." Umehara said the project center should be jointly run by participating countries. The program should cost about \$6.25 billion, with more than half put up by the Japanese government and private sector, he said. The government plans to have an outline of the project by March.

A panel created to outline research topics for the program met already in Tokyo Dec. 18, to set up two working groups. The 18 scientists on the panel include Michio Okamoto of the Science Council of Japan, and Masao Ito, dean of the University of Tokyo's Medical School, who will poll several hundred scientists on the project. One group will examine "information conversion," research on the ability of living bodies to visually and aurally collect information and have it acknowledged by the brain. Research is expected to help develop intelligent robots and artificial intelligence systems. The second group will study "substance-energy conversion," or how the body consumes and digests food and converts it into energy, which could lead to the development of new energy conversion systems.

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