

No Japanese aid to Russia yet

by Kathy Wolfe

The entire cabinet of Japanese Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa went to Europe, Moscow, and Washington during Japan's "Golden Week" holiday April 29-May 5, largely to discuss Japan's position on aid to the Russian Republic. No settlement, however, was reached.

While Japanese Foreign Minister Michio Watanabe visited Moscow, Miyazawa visited Paris and Bonn, Finance Minister Tsutomu Hata and Defense Minister Sohei Miyashita visited London, Bonn, and Brussels, and Ministry of International Trade and Industry Minister Kozo Watanabe visited Washington and London.

Miyazawa stressed in meetings with French President François Mitterrand and German Chancellor Helmut Kohl that Japan will not sign a peace treaty with Russia, officially ending World War II, nor give significant aid, until Russia recognizes unconditional Japanese sovereignty over the Kurile Islands.

"There are legacies of Stalinism [in Russia] and the territorial issue with Japan is one of them," Miyazawa told a Paris press conference after his meeting with Mitterrand on April 29. "It is imperative for Russia to disown the diplomacy of the Stalin era, and carry out diplomacy based on law and justice."

"The issue is a touchstone to test whether Russia can relinquish Stalinism," Miyazawa told French Prime Minister Pierre Bérégovoy. In Bonn, Miyazawa stressed that he had compared Japan's situation in meetings with Kohl to the Russian occupation of eastern Germany. "From the standpoint that Germany has shared the same experiences as Japan, he [Kohl] understands Japan's position well," Miyazawa told a Bonn press conference April 30.

Japan is willing to compromise extensively, Miyazawa and Foreign Minister Watanabe stressed, upon which islands are returned when, and upon which nation administers them. Watanabe said in Tokyo May 1 that Japan would agree to the immediate return of only two islands, if Russia recognized that all four were Japanese territory. "The Japanese side is ready to adopt a stance that is both sufficiently flexible and based on principle," he said.

Japan's request that Moscow make a clear statement of Japanese sovereignty, however, is non-negotiable. The four "northern territories" between Japan and Russia, as the Kuriles are known in Japanese, were occupied by Stalin in the closing days of World War II. Russian President Boris Yeltsin's problem is immensely complicated by the fact that Stalin drove the Japanese population out, and the area is now inhabited entirely by Russians.

Yeltsin to remove troops, draft treaty

In meetings in Moscow with Foreign Minister Watanabe May 3-5, Yeltsin made a series of friendly overtures, but continued to reject Japan's sovereignty demand. Yeltsin told Watanabe in Moscow May 5 that Russian troops would be withdrawn from the disputed islands "very soon . . . within 1-2 years," NHK television reported that night. "Yeltsin, however, did not say when, or if at all, Russia would actually return the islands to Japan or recognize Japanese sovereignty over them," the report said.

Watanabe told Yeltsin, according to NHK, that while this was a friendly gesture, and while "Japan is flexible on the timing and the question of whether all islands are returned at once, Japanese sovereignty over all of the islands must be recognized." Yeltsin, however, "made no concrete response," NHK said.

Yeltsin, who will travel to Tokyo in September, is pressing hard for normalization of ties nonetheless, and announced that he has authorized the drafting of a Russo-Japanese peace treaty. Yeltsin's intention is that "he will be going to Japan to sign a peace treaty," Yeltsin spokeswoman Galina Ageyeva told Interfax news agency in Moscow May 5, after the Watanabe-Yeltsin meeting.

Interfax quoted Japanese government sources as viewing positively this attempt by Yeltsin to resolve the issue. "Japan views this statement as recognition of the need to take a political decision," sources said.

Yeltsin and Watanabe otherwise discussed Yeltsin's planned visit to Japan and prospects for Japanese economic and trade links with Russia's Far East and Siberia. Watanabe also held a round of talks May 5 with Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev about a separate agreement on security, apart from the peace treaty being drafted, which Yeltsin and Miyazawa want to sign in Tokyo.

The lesser pact will deal with cooperation in space projects and mutual security at sea. Japan said it was also ready to help Russia with modernization of its nuclear reactors, and with setting up research institutes to employ Russian military nuclear specialists.

Speaking after Japan's foreign minister had left Moscow, however, Japan's new ambassador to Washington, Takakazu Kuriyama, repeated Miyazawa's charges of Stalinism. "This particular territorial issue, still remains unresolved," he told the National Press Club in his first address in Washington on May 6. "We think that this is a litmus test for the newborn Russia's willingness to become engaged in the Asia-Pacific region as a constructive and peaceful partner. But as long as Russia continues to be unwilling to resolve the issue, which is simply a negative legacy of Stalinistic expansionism after World War II, then it would be rather difficult."