

Japanese-Soviet Relations — Myth And Fact

For the past 30 years a myth about Japanese-Soviet relations has reigned in the West.

The myth, simply stated, is that Japan deeply fears the Soviet Union and is still resentful about Soviet occupation of Japanese territory after World War II, specifically four small islands off the coast of northern Japan. Japan's hatred of Russia is then routinely contrasted to a supposed Japanese affinity for China, which is described as the cultural "motherland" for Japan itself.

Translated into political terms, the myth dictates a clear course for Japanese policy: an alignment with China and an unending "deep freeze" for Japanese-Soviet relations. In the early 1970s Henry Kissinger tried to shape an alliance between Japan, China, and the United States (the "Tokyo-Washington-Peking axis") against the Soviet Union based on this map of the "Japanese mind."

This view of Japan ignores certain facts. It certainly does not explain why Japan spent the 1930s pillaging its Chinese brethren while entering into a nonaggression pact with the Soviet Union until 1945. More significantly, it also ignores the postwar history of Japan's Liberal Democratic Party.

Rapprochement and Sabotage

Since 1956, when then Japanese Premier Ichiro Hatoyama first reestablished diplomatic relations between Japan and the Soviet Union, a strong group inside the ruling party, and aided by Japanese business circles, has been consistently pushed for expanded Japan-Soviet economic and political ties. First in 1972, Premier Kakuei Tanaka, and later in 1975 under Premier Miki, Japan and the Soviet Union have been on the brink of resolving their disputes over the northern islands problem, which would ensure a Japan-Soviet peace treaty and an extensive Japanese commitment to the major development of the tremendous resources of Siberia.

At each point that such an alliance was threatened, a crew of Anglophile politicians has intervened to bloc any Japanese-Soviet rapprochement. This group, led in the 1950s by Japan's first postwar Premier, Shigeru Yoshida, and today centered around the leading pro-Peking politician inside the LDP, current party Secretary General Masayoshi Ohira, has actively sabotaged both Japanese and Soviet attempts to mediate their territorial disputes through a series of compromises.

The 1956 efforts of this "Anglo-American" clique are in fact the sole reason that Japan and Russia are still talking about the northern islands issue. During

Hatoyama's initial negotiations for the treaty, the Japanese were simply asking for the return of two tiny islands, Habomai and Shikotan, off Japan's coast, which the Soviet Union in fact at that time acknowledged were Japan's. Hatoyama was warned by then U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, however, that unless Japan also insisted on the return of two islands which were in fact part of the Southern Kuriles (Kunashiri and Etorofu) and not historically clearly Japan's, then the U.S. would never return Okinawa to Japan.

Dulles was not acting on his own. It is now known that arch Anglo-American partisan Yoshida was actually the instigator of what was a direct provocative action against the Soviet Union, a provocation that was fed to the befuddled cold warrior Dulles when he was visiting London. At that time, Yoshida was threatening to wreck the newly formed Liberal Democratic Party unless his enemy Hatoyama (who came into power by engineering Yoshida's downfall) caved in to Yoshida's Soviet policy. With both Dulles and Yoshida attacking him, Hatoyama was pressured into going along.

The Wrecking of Tanaka

In 1972, Japanese Premier Kakuei Tanaka began making major overtures to the Soviet Union, centering on Tanaka's desire for joint Japanese-Soviet development of Siberia. Tanaka was the first Japanese premier since Hatoyama to openly push for the restoration of close ties with the USSR, a move which had been long encouraged by many leading Japanese businessmen. This time it was Henry Kissinger who launched a campaign to wreck Japanese-Soviet detente, and Tanaka. Kissinger virtually dictated the policy of cutting off both U.S. Export-Import Bank aid to U.S. corporations wanting to collaborate in the project. Kissinger also pressured the private U.S. banking sector to wreck any private aid for the deal. Kissinger's furious organizing (which ultimately included a Watergate-style "scandal" against Tanaka in 1974) followed a meeting between Tanaka and Brezhnev during which the Soviet leader signaled that Russia was prepared to reach some settlement on the northern islands issue undoubtedly involving a return to the original Japanese-Soviet terms first developed by Hatoyama.

The Stakes in Asia

Kissinger's activities against Tanaka were linked to the policy shared by him and the pro-Peking group around Ohira, a policy of linking Japan in an anti-Soviet alliance with China. As Kissinger, the City of London, and allied factioneers in both Peking and Washington are

agonizingly aware, a successful resolution of the northern territories dispute would open the way for massive Soviet-Japanese collaboration throughout all of Asia, and especially Indochina. A Japanese-Soviet treaty would also be the opening for the large-scale development of Siberia, something Japan's own uniquely development-oriented heavy industries sector is eager to do. In return, the Soviet Union has made it clear, Japan would receive huge reserves of Siberian oil and natural gas as well as enriched uranium from the USSR. The Soviet Union is also offering Japan access to Soviet breakthroughs in fusion power research.

Today the potentials for close Japanese-Soviet ties are even more ripe. In Southeast Asia, Japan's foreign policy is to a large degree already complementing Soviet goals in the region. This month the Japanese government in effect granted Vietnam a debt moratorium writing off the debts still owed to Japan by the old Thieu regime, which the new government refused to recognize.

Japan's Vietnam initiative feeds into the overall Japanese policy for the region, which is aimed at the peaceful integration of Indochina into the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) economic bloc structure under the more general framework of a Japanese-led push for the introduction of capital-intensive agricultural development aimed at doubling the area's output of rice production in the next 10 years. Moreover, an alliance between Japan and the Soviet-supported Vietnamese would rapidly defuse Peking's ability for mischief-making in the region. It would also wreck the World Bank's hideous "Humphrey-Hawkins" plans for Asia — the "employment" of hundreds of thousands of Asia's poor at backbreaking labor-intensive agriculture, while revenue that would have gone to real development is funneled out of Asia to pay monetarist debts.

Japanese-Soviet cooperation would have equally profound repercussions in India, whose leading industrial planners have already intensively studied both the Japanese and Soviet "models" as paths for India's own development.

The Peking Connection

Under both Tanaka and his successor, Takeo Miki, a crew of pro-Peking activists with links to Henry Kissinger and Kissinger crony James Schlesinger have tried to use the threat of a Kissinger-orchestrated Japan-China alliance to terrify the Soviet Union into simply treating Japan as a puppet of "anti-detente" circles in the U.S. and China.

In Japan today the major opponents of a Japan-Soviet compromise on the northern territories question are all avowed Schlesingerites with close ties to Kissinger. The leaders of this group center around the man who is both Peking and Kissinger's choice to be next Premier of Japan, Masayoshi Ohira. It was Ohira who won Kissinger's heart when, as Foreign Minister during Kissinger's 1973 oil crisis, he argued that Japan must follow Kissinger policy and back Israel. Ohira was overridden by Tanaka and then Ministry of International Trade and Industry head Yasuhiro Nakasone, who reoriented Japan's policy toward the Arab states, leading Kissinger to label Tanaka as "anti-Semitic."

Ohira's intellectual leader, both at that time and today, is a top former Foreign Ministry official, Shinsaku

Hogen, who once headed up the American Bureau in Japan's Foreign Ministry and who today is advocating closer military ties between Japan and China.

Peking's own networks inside Japan's major opposition parties have also actively kept the northern island dispute alive. The Chinese extensively fund a whole wing of the Japanese Socialist party, the country's biggest opposition party, and it is suspected that Peking maintains big money laundering operations into other parties.

End of the Game?

The Kissingerites' ability to continue their manipulation game in Japan is rapidly fading, however a few weeks ago Japan's Foreign Minister Sonoda visited Moscow for talks with Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko and Soviet premier Kosygin. The Western press virtually ignored the meeting, and since Sonoda insisted that the northern territory question was open to negotiation (the Soviets now officially claim that all such questions are settled), the meeting failed to produce a joint communique.

Yet certain very important things occurred in Moscow. According to Sonoda, the Soviet Union did not react with hysteria when Sonoda explained to Gromyko that Japan intended to press ahead with a peace treaty with Peking — something every Japanese businessman and politician supports *as long as* such a move doesn't box Japan into an anti-Soviet alliance with Peking. Sonoda said this again to Gromyko, and from all indications Gromyko acknowledged the point.

The Soviet refusal to react as profiled on a treaty between Japan and China — a treaty which will undoubtedly contain some vague statement opposing "hegemony," which the Chinese meant as an anti-Soviet warning and which Japan has consistently said it interprets as a restatement of vague "UN Charter"-type principles — is an important signal that behind the scenes once again the potential for a Japan-Soviet rapprochement is heating up.

Moscow's confidence on this question parallels the virtual collapse of the Ohira group inside the LDP. Ohira is now extremely unpopular with business, and even his own faction inside the party is suffering from growing factionalization. The Chinese are also refusing to accept any Japanese modification of their "anti-hegemony" peace treaty, and Japanese-Chinese negotiations for the treaty appear now to be cooling off for at least a few months.

The Soviet Union knows this. Nor has Russia ignored the growing disagreements between Japan and Washington. It is known in Japan that the Soviet Union has been waiting for a long time to play its trump card — the return of Habomai and Shikotan. In fact, the Soviet Union has avoided building any installations on Habomai and Shikotan while they developed military bases on Kunashiri and Etorofu. The problem has always been one of political timing. Once the Soviet Union fully understands that a joint development alliance with Japan is the key to defusing the negative intent of the China treaty, and once the "rabid" pro-Chinese Ohiraites are neutralized in Tokyo, that Soviet card will be played. It could be played much sooner than anyone in the West thinks.

— Kevin Coogan