

Suzuki's U.S. visit involved more than armaments talks

by Richard Katz

When Japanese Prime Minister Zenko Suzuki met with President Reagan and Secretaries Haig and Weinberger on May 7-8 in Washington, most of the attention focused on U.S. pressures on Japan to undertake a bigger and more rapid defense buildup than the internal political situation in Japan permits. Just as important, though little noticed, was Suzuki's pressure on a reticent Ronald Reagan to continue Jimmy Carter's China Card policy.

During the question-and-answer session at a May 9 appearance at Washington's National Press Club, Suzuki declared, "To see that China remains moderate and cooperative will be instrumental to peace and stability in Asia and therefore of the world. China, I believe, must be kept as a *member of the Western alliance* [emphasis added]."

Observers were struck by Suzuki's characterization of China as an ally, not just a friendly country, since President Reagan, unlike Haig, has not accepted that concept and is reluctant, for example, to build up China's military capacity. Japanese sources report that in their 90-minute private meeting, Suzuki urged Reagan to continue "close ties" to China.

The China question highlights the two opposed concepts of Japan's defense role now circulating in Washington (see page 46). One view regards Japan's increased military role as an element of the China Card in a Washington-Peking-Tokyo triangle. The Haig-Weinberger group in the administration holds this view. Suzuki, say Japanese sources, referred to "alliance" with China because he agrees with this concept, though he is reluctant to see China be built into really significant military power.

The alternate concept regards Japan's growing defense posture as partly a natural outcome of its growth as a political-military power, partly as a response to diversion of U.S. Pacific forces to the Indian Ocean/Persian Gulf region, and conceives of it primarily in bilateral U.S.-Japan terms. It is viewed as an alternate U.S. strategy to the China Card. Washington sources say Reagan takes this point of view.

A foot in the door for the Washington-Tokyo-Peking approach to Japanese rearmament is the effort to move Japan from its constitutionally mandated self-defense-

only posture to one of regional military responsibilities. Weinberger has openly pushed Japan to make this shift, proposing that Japan take responsibility for sealane defense for the entire Northwest Pacific extending as far as the Philippines and Guam.

Despite Foreign Minister Masayoshi Ito's warning to Weinberger during their March meeting that a "regional defense" policy was politically impossible at present in Japan, Weinberger publicly repeated the demand. In an April 28 speech a week before Suzuki's arrival, Weinberger declared, "The increasing threat to Japan, and to freedom everywhere, clearly requires significantly greater self-defense efforts in the *Northwest Pacific* area. . . . We necessarily are concerned that Japan's capability for self-defense at this point remains short of what is clearly required [emphasis added]." Weinberger's rationale is that Japan must fill the vacuum caused by diversion of U.S. forces.

Suzuki has hesitated to agree to Weinberger's demands in public. He stresses that if his administration pushes the regional defense role faster than a "consensus" for the policy can be built among Japan's pacifist population, then the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) will lose to the Japan Socialist Party, an opponent of rearmament. Taking note of Suzuki's arguments, Reagan told Suzuki, "it will not be our policy to pressure Japan" on this issue.

Japanese sources point out that in private Suzuki agrees with the Weinberger proposal. Indeed, at the National Press Club appearance, Suzuki agreed in principle to the "filling in the vacuum" principle in expanding Japan's naval role. However, he did not include other countries like Guam or the Philippines.

At home, Suzuki is moving to rearm faster than indicated by his public comments and trying to build the prodefense consensus. The LDP has appointed a committee to consider revising Japan's "no-war" constitution. According to Japanese sources, Suzuki urged Reagan to endorse Japan's demand that the U.S.S.R. return four small islands taken after World War II, a demand aired in government-funded Japanese TV commercials to help build up the rearmament mood.

Despite Suzuki's ostentatious protest over Reagan's lifting of the grain embargo and his warning that he might not be able to resist business pressure to end Japan's own post-Afghanistan embargo against the U.S.S.R., Washington sources say he pledged to maintain Japan's sanctions.

The Suzuki administration has also quietly cooperated in Haig's China Card activities by providing timely financial bailouts to the Deng Xiaoping regime in Peking and abundant foreign aid to both Thailand and the Chinese-run Pol Pot forces in Kampuchea. Nonetheless, public resistance in Japan will limit the pace at which Suzuki can move.