

Japan will aid U.S. beam-weapon defense

by Linda de Hoyos

Japan has become the first ally of the United States to offer its advanced technological capabilities for the U.S. program to develop beam weapons systems. In answer to a question in hearings in the Lower House of the Diet Feb. 20, Japanese Foreign Minister Shintaro Abe declared that Japan could provide technology for the U.S. space defense program if its uses are confined to peaceful purposes within the range of the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty. Abe then said that, since the program for the development of directed energy defense systems announced by President Reagan on March 23, 1983 is of a purely defensive nature, it can be subject to the Japan-U.S. agreement on military technology transfer.

This momentous statement went unnoticed in Washington and the Western press, but certainly not at the Kremlin. TASS had noted on Jan. 31 the possibility of Japan joining in the U.S. beam effort and warned that Japan would be taking a "dangerous and serious step."

The driving force behind this policy is Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone, who is determined to upgrade Japan's defenses in the face of the Soviet Union military build-up in the Pacific theatre. Nakasone's idea is that Japan must become an "unsinkable aircraft carrier"—a policy that can be realized only with beam weapons. Conversely, without beam weapons, Japan is basically defenseless against the Soviets' military and political pressure drive for the domination of Asia.

The channel for cooperation on the beam weapon effort is the U.S.-Japan Military Technology Transfer Commission, which was established Nov. 8, one day before President Reagan's visit to Japan where he met with Prime Minister Nakasone and called for a "partnership for good" between the two allies. On Feb. 2-3, the Commission met for the first time, in Tokyo, with Deputy Undersecretary of Defense Talbot Lindstrom representing the United States and Hiroo Kinoshita, head of the Defense Agency's equipment bureau, representing Japan.

Japan has major contributions to make to an allied beam-weapons defense effort. In the lead are Japan's advanced computer capabilities and its breakthrough in the fifth-generation computer. Japan has also made giant strides in the development of fiber optics, its own laser program, and in researching the interaction of lasers and matter. In December, the Japanese fired the world's largest laser fusion reactor

at the Institute of Laser Engineering at Osaka University.

The Japanese are also considering cooperation with the United States plan to build a manned space station, and NASA chief James Beggs is scheduled to visit Japan later this month.

Soviets take hard stand

The decision to join the U.S. beam-weapons effort and recent policy statements show that Japan is fighting to resist the pressure to decouple from its alliance with the United States. Although the Japanese population is notoriously pacifistic (at least on the surface), recent polls also indicate that 75% of the Japanese people view the Soviet Union as the country's number-one enemy.

In a speech Feb. 6 before the Diet, Abe charged that the Soviet Union was causing a chill in East-West relations through its "advance into Third World countries backed by its long years of military build-up, the downing of the Korean Air Lines jetliner last year, and the Soviet walk-out from the U.S.-Soviet Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces negotiations." It is therefore crucial, Abe said, that "the Western industrialized democracies sharing such fundamental values as freedom and democracy continue to maintain solidarity and cooperate."

For Japan, the Soviet Union's current global posture takes the form of daily violations of Japanese air space, the surfacing of nuclear subs right off Japanese coasts, and the build-up of Soviet air bases on the northern islands that the Soviets have occupied since the end of World War II, putting Soviet military capability nearly a stone's throw away from the Japanese coast.

In the last year, trade between the Soviet Union and Japan has declined 25%, not because of the worldwide recession, say Japanese government officials, but because of the chill in relations. While in Moscow Feb. 10 for Yuri Andropov's funeral, Abe was told by Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko that he would not accept an invitation to visit Tokyo because the Japanese government had not met the required standards for such a visit. Moscow, Gromyko said, finds the stance of the Nakasone cabinet "unfriendly"—a non-negotiable demand for a change of government. At the same time, in an unprecedented move, the military attachés of the Soviet embassy in Tokyo held a press conference to announce that Moscow would take definite "countermeasures" against the deployment of cruise missiles on the U.S. Pacific fleet—even though the Soviets have quietly increased their deployment of SS-20s in Asia from 107 to 144 in the last six months.

However, these threats and bully tactics have, if anything, backfired. The beam weapons provide Japan—which currently depends upon the U.S. nuclear umbrella and South Korea for its front lines of defense—for the first time with the possibility of an actual defense against thermonuclear attack. Now that potential must be protected against the appeasers in the United States and Japan, who are lining up for Henry Kissinger's "global package deal" with the Soviet Union.