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U.S.S.R.-JAPAN RELATIONS

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At about the same time in late 1982, two eminent leaders Yurii Andropov and Yasuhiro Nakasone assumed office in the USSR and Japan respectively. Although postwar Soviet-Japanese relations have never been very good, they have dramatically worsened during the fifteen month period since these men assumed office, and are currently at one of their lowest points in recent history. This paper thus addresses the following questions: First, how and to what extent have relations deteriorated? Second, what factors have contributed to this deterioration? Since these two questions are inseparably linked they will be discussed together (I). Third, what are the prospects for an amelioration of the current state of affairs? (II)

I.

1. Global and Asian Developments.

There is no need to mention that any analysis of Japan-Soviet relations would be incomplete if viewed simply from a bilateral perspective. In other words, Soviet-Japanese relations must be viewed within a much broader global, or at least regional, context, and must take into account the current world situation, or at least that of the Asia-Pacific region.

The deterioration in Japan-Soviet relations which has occured in the last fifteen months has coincided with a global deterioration in East-West relations. The United States headed by Ronald Reagan and the USSR led by Yurii Andropov have squarely confronted each other, a confrontation which has included an exchange of harsh criticism and hostile acts. This confrontation has led some to speculate that we are now witnessing a new cold war. When confronting Washington, it has been almost customary strategy for Moscow to attempt to drive a wedge between the US and Western Europe. Except for a few disparities in trade and economic sanctions, however, the Soviet Union under Andropov has not had much luck this time in its pursuit of this strategy. Kohl, Mitterrang, and Thatcher continue to be united with Reagan in regard to the INF

and other military-arms control issues.

All in all, the USSR under Andropov has not been successful in its relations with the major powers in the world. Although Andropov continues to follow the general policy initiated by his predecessor, Brezhnev, to mend the Sino-Soviet rift, he has been unsuccessful in making any major diplomatic-political break-throughs in his efforts to achieve rapprochement with the PRC. Under these circumstances it might be one way of conducting diplomacy for the Soviet Union to try to improve its relations with other powers, including Japan. Strangely enough, however, Moscow has never been willing to make such a move toward Tokyo. Perhaps Moscow considers Tokyo so firmly allied with Washington that there is no possibility for any measure of success in its divide and conquer strategy. Or, Moscow may consider conditions proposed by Tokyo for an improvement in bilateral relations too high and too expensive to be accepted by Moscow.

In contrast, Japan and the United States have recently been doing fairly well in their foreign policy conducts. Tokyo and Washington seem to have established one of the strongest relationships in the post-war period. Perhaps this is best illustrated by the personal and intimate relationship between Reagan and Nakasone who call each other on a first name basis (so-called "Ron-Yasu relations"). Both Tokyo and Washington currently have good relations with other major powers in the world. The Reagan administration has succeeded in drawing Beijing closer to Washington through its promise of arms and technology transfers. Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang has just concluded a successful trip to the US (Jan. '84), and Reagan is scheduled to visit China in April. Although "China fever" has disappeared in Japan, Sino-Japanese relations have been steadily improving. Chinese Party General Secretary Hu Yaobang visited Japan in November 1983 and, Nakasone will be making a return visit to Beijing

in April. A series of visits to Tokyo by several world leaders including Reagan, Hu Yaoband, Kohl and Trudeau in the fall of 1983 demonstrated more than anything else Japan's good diplomatic relations with the major powers in the world except for the USSR.

2. Nakasone's Soviet Policy.

Nakasone's policy toward the Soviet Union has two distinct features: (i) Jishu diplomacy and defense posture, based on increasing the self-confidence of Japan's own position; and (ii) more active coordination with US Soviet policy, based on the recognition of the global nature of the Soviet threat.

Nakasone himself is a new breed of Japanese leader, and different from his predecessors in many ways. To begin with, he is a self-confident nationalist who has repeatedly stated that Japan should demonstrate "a resolute attitude in her diplomacy as an independent sovereign state." For example, although he regards the return of the "Northern Islands" from the USSR as an urgent necessity for Japan's national interests, Nakasone warns that Japan should not "show any coquetry" to the Soviets in order to achieve this diplomatic goal. Nakasone advocates jishu (autonomous and independent) diplomacy and defence, by which he means that diplomacy and the defense of Japan as an independent nation ought to be decided and carried out primarily by the Japanese themselves. As he put it: "If we do not do anything much for our defense, Japan will end up becoming a country like Finland, which must ask favors from the Soviet Union (in order to survive)." This remark reveals the crux of Nakasone's Soviet policy. For one thing, it emphasizes that, unless Japan wants to literally become "Finlandized," she must do her utmost to defend herself. According to Nakasone, in order to ensure the security of Japan, "the whole Japanese archipelago should be like an unsinkable aircraft

carrier putting up a tremendous bulwark of defense against infiltration of the (Soviet) bomber." Nakasone's remark implicitly implies that, as long as Japan takes care of herself, particularly in regard to defense matters, she does not have any particular reason to take the initiative to improve relations with the USSR. This fundamental policy orientation stems from the Nakasone government's cold assessment of the current situation, as well as from an increasing self-confidence on the part of the Japanese. Namely, Tokyo believes that as long as Moscow does not change its uncompromising policy toward Japan, neither can Tokyo initiate anything. More importantly, Tokyo can afford to refrain from taking action, but in the long run Moscow will not be able to refrain from acting.

Nakasone is an internationalist with a global perspective. He is well aware of the fact that Japanese security cannot be guaranteed by Japan's self-reliant efforts alone. The security of Japan is possible only when it is combined with close cooperation with the "Western Community," with which Japan shares common values such as democracy and freedom. Furthermore, this awareness is enhanced by a similar awareness that security itself is geographically indivisible and that the security of Japan is inseparably linked with that of the rest of the world. Thus Nakasone's twofold efforts,--on the one hand, a more self-reliant effort and, on the other, more cooperation with the West, particularly with the US--, do not contradict but rather supplement each other in the overall objective,--that of ensuring the security of Japan from its major source of threat, the USSR. Breaking with past policy, Nakasone frankly admitted the military aspect of the US-Japan alliance and referred to Japan-US relations as "unmei kyodotai" (a community bound together with a common destiny). At the Williamsburg summit Nakasone further made public his intention to accelerate Japan's globalization drive when he

fully endorsed the clause in the final joint statement which declares: "the security of our countries is indivisible and must be approached on a global basis."

Based on this stance the Japanese government under Nakasone has put forward several concrete measures, including the following : the continuance of economic sanctions imposed on the Soviet Union for its misconduct in Afghanistan and Poland; the expulsion from Tokyo of a Soviet diplomat charged with espionage; the decision to provide the US with Japanese defense-oriented high technology; the endorsement of a US-Japan study on joint 1,000-mile sea lane opperations; and a steady and gradual increase of the defense budget. Certainly, these measures, may still far short of what Nakasone himself intends to do, and what the US and other allies may want Tokyo to do. But, given factional struggles and other domestic constraints, it can be said that he has done well and is headed in the right direction and on the right track. Of course, how far he can go depends inter alia upon how long he can stay in office.

3. Andropov's Japan Policy

Soviet foreign policy under Andropov has remained the same as under Brezhnev, in terms of both strategic goals and methods.

Soviet strategic goals toward Japan are (i) to prevent Tokyo's closer ties with Washington; (ii) to stop the process towards the "globalization", or "NATOization", of Japan; (iii) to prevent Japan from cooperating with the PRC; (iv) to stop "militarism" in Japan; (v) to promote more active economic cooperation with the USSR; and (vi) to contain the Japanese demand for the return of the Northern territories. Clearly, these aims are quite arbitrary and represent the maximalist program. The first salient characteristic, and perhaps error, in the Kremlin's policy toward Tokyo lies in attempting

all these goals at once, disregarding the fact that some are incompatible or mutually exclusive. For example, the USSR's hard-line position on the territorial question is counterproductive to its achievement of other objectives. Yet, the Andropov leadership has revealed its unwillingness to alter its position, as illustrated by the fact that Soviet spokesmen under Andropov have employed the same phrases initiated by Brezhnev himself, i.e., "demands bezosnovatel'no i nezakonno (unfounded and illegally) fabricated by the Japanese." True, the issue four small islands in the North appears to have lost its significance in the face of a massive Soviet nuclear buildup which threatens the four main islands of Japan. Yet the Northern territorial question still serves as a symbol of Soviet-Japanese relations at any given time, and as a convenient barometer with which to measure the flexibility or inflexibility of the Soviet leadership.

The foregoing has already indicated that Andropov has deviated little from Brezhnev in the field of tactics employed vis-a-vis the Japanese. Namely, while the USSR has refused to provide any carrot attractive enough to impress the Japanese, it remains determined to continue Brezhnev's method of dealing with the Japanese, bluff by stick. This is the second feature of the recent Soviet conduct of foreign policy toward Japan. Nobody can deny the cold fact that the Soviet Union under Andropov has demonstrated its continued interest in the buildup and improvement, both in quantitative and qualitative terms, of its military forces in the Far East and in the vicinity of Japan, including the Japan-claimed Northern islands.

Why do the Soviets continue to pursue this policy? Probably Soviet leadership believe that Soviet military muscle can be translated into political influence and that intimidation is the best policy to be applied to the Japanese. Undoubtedly part of the reason for Andropov's attempt to increase

the number of Soviet SS-20s in Asia stems from his intention to use them as a political tool. When Tokyo has protested the deployment of SS-20s in Asia the Soviets have given the Japanese deliberately ambiguous and inconsistent replies. On occasion they have stated that the Japanese do not have to worry about the SS-20s in Asia since they are not targeted against Japan. On other occasions, particularly when addressing non-Japanese audiences, the Soviets have indicated that they are indeed directed at Japan. In so doing, Moscow seems to believe that not only can she block Tokyo's protests better but she can also make the Japanese feel more uneasy than they would it the Soviets declared their target more categorically. Furthermore, the Andropov government has tried to use the issue of the SS-20s to condition Japan's behavior. Namely, according to G. Arbatov,the Soviet Union would not use its SS-20s deployed in Asia against Japan, as long as Japan faithfully abides by the so-called "Three Non-nuclear Principles." In addition, the Soviets have attempted to exploit Japanese concern about the Soviet deployment of SS-20s in Asia in order to achieve diplomatic goals with Japan - that is to say, the signing by Japan and the USSR of any kind of treaty will serve as a symbol of Soviet diplomatic victory breaking the impasse between these two countries. As a matter of fact, taking full advantage of the apprehension felt by the Japanese concerning Soviet intermediate missiles, Soviet ambassador to Tokyo V. Pavlov has been pressing Tokyo to conclude with the USSR a treaty on the non-use of nuclear weapons.

Such bluff diplomacy under Andropov, though more skillful and even more sophisticated than that under Brezhnev, proved to be as counterproductive as it was under his predecessors. This kind of bluff diplomacy is an ineffective means when applied to the Japanese who have become increasingly self-confident and even nationalistic. It has helped awaken the Japanese

defense consciousness and has led to the realization of the necessity to counter the Soviet military threat (e.g. the SS-20s deployed in Asia) on a global basis. Furthermore , it has made the Japanese more aware of the importance of closer solidarity with the US and other Western allies, as illustrated by the joint statement at Williamsburg.

4. The Impact of the KAL Incident.

One unexpected event greatly contributed to the deterioration of Soviet-Japanese relations: the Soviet downing of a Korean airliner on September 1, 1983. Prior to this incident, bilateral relations between Japan and the USSR had begun to show signs, though still to a very limited degree, of inprovement. However, the Soviet destruction of KAL Flight 007, in which 28 Japanese passengers were killed, destroyed in one stroke any possibility for inprovement, and instead relations between Japan and the USSR further deteriorated.

Generally speaking, measures adopted by the Nakasone government against the Soviet Union after this incident were modest and limited in scope. The impact of the incident upon the Japanese people, however, was deeper and more profound than the magnitude of the sanctions initiated by the Government. It would not be an exaggeration to say that, so far as the Japanese public is concerned, the Korean jetliner tragedy played a much greater role in their attitudes toward the USSR than Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and Poland, events which, after all, had taken place in countries thousands of miles away. Among other things, the atrocity and subsequent handling of the affair by the Andropov government served to clarify in Japanese minds more than any other event the cold realities that Japan has to face: (i) that the Russians have an extraordinary and deep-seated obsession with the security of their borders; (ii) that the military-strategic importance and tension in the Sea

of Okhotsk area is very high; (iii) that Soviets are a hard partner to deal and negotiate with; (iv) and last but certainly not least, that the Soviet armed forces are not a facade but rather a physical reality which the Soviets will not hesitate to resort to when necessary. In other words, the reason the Soviet Union under Andropov is interested in continuously increasing its military forces lies in not only in its intentions to exploit this as an effective political instrument but also to actually employ it as a coercive phisical means to fulfill genuine military purposes.

5. Economic Fields

In the past no matter how bad Soviet-Japanese relations became in the politico-diplomatic field, trade and other economic dimensions, based on an economic complementarity between Japan and the USSR, prevented overall bilateral relations from worsening. In fact, even after the Soviet invasion of Kabul and Japan's subsequent participation in economic sanctions against the Soviet Union, economic exchanges between these two countries not only continued but even showed a gradual increase. In 1983, however, this was no longer the case and Soviet-Japanese trade showed for the first time a declining trend, --about 20 per cent less exchange in the total amount of import and export than in 1982.

Recession in the Japanese economy and Tokyo's continued participation in sanctions account in part for this decline. But the principal reason for this development is ascribable to the Soviet domestic economic situation, as well as to a change in their attitude toward external economic relations. During the late part of the 1970s the policy of Soviet leaders changed regarding expanding Soviet economic relations with Western advanced industrial countries. Evidence suggests that inside the Soviet Union the debate on this issue has intensified between those who still advocate the promotion of

an international division of labor and those who emphasize more self-sufficiency or autarchy in the Soviet economy. By the early 1980s the argument of the second group seems to have gained the upper hand in the USSR, assisted by the recognition of such developments as follows: the general background of parochial Russian nationalism; the shortage in foreign currency; a massive debt in the USSR and in East European countries; the inability to diffuse imported technology into the Soviet economy; the political crisis resulting from economic debts and bankruptcy in Poland; Western disenchantment with lending credit to the USSR; and so on. In his last years Brezhnev himself appeared to have shifted from economic cooperation, a corollary of his detente policy, to a more "inwardlooking" economic posture. The campaign for "intensification of production" initiated by Brezhnev and succeeded by Andropov concentrated external economic relations on the development of the gas industry in Western Siberia in cooperation with West European countries, --that is to say, the Soviets are working on completing as soon as possible the "Urengoi gas pipeline project." The success of this project will help solve the Soviet's perennial economic dillemma through the annual sale of 8-10 billion U.S. dollars of Siberian gas to Western Europe. This means that the Soviet Union will not and cannot afford for the time being to develop more active trade and economic relations with Japan, who is not considered a very high priority.

II.

What are the prospects for bilateral relations between Japan and the USSR? This is the final question to be examined. The future course of Soviet-Japanese relation depends in large part on external factors, such as US and Chinese policies, and international events. If, however, one limits oneself

to considering bilateral factors alone, one must conclude that these two countries are unlikely to reach any major diplomatic breakthroughs in both the short and long run.

First lets look at the short-range prospect. Considering the current situation as not necessarily an ideal one, both governments, to be sure, now feel that they have to do something to improve relations. The so-called "dialogue" diplomacy posture or gesture will shortly be resumed on a vice-ministerial, or even ministerial and other levels, and personel, cultural, and sports exchanges will occur more frequently. But this appears to be all that both countries can do. Why? (i) Each side regards the others recent policies and behavior as solely responsible for the deterioration in relations. Consequently both Tokyo and Moscow will consider a "wait and see" attitude as the best policy. (ii) Nether Japan nor the USSR occupies a very high place in each others list of foreign policy priorities. The Soviet's primary concern is its confrontation with its global adversary, the United States. From the Japanese perspective, cooperation with the US constitutes its best Soviet policy. (iii) Disparities between both nations concerning security, the means for solving international conflicts, and concepts of territory are too great to be bridged.

Next, let's consider the long-range prospect. Two scenarios are conceivable for the improvement of relations between Japan, an economic giant but military dwarf, and the USSR, a military superpower but an economically developing state. The first is that for some reason Japan decides not to keep up with the US request to share more of the defense burden and chooses instead to make a compromise with the USSR, for example, the signing of a peace treaty which will return to Japan two of the four northern islands. However, this option will be hard to swallow for the Japanese who have

become more nationalistic and realistic concerning security and national sovereignity issues. The other possibility is that for primarily economic reasons the post-Andropov leadership may come to consider it necessary to initiate a campaign to more seriously woo Japan to wards the Soviet Union. The chances are good that the "inward-looking" or "Western-Europe oriented" economic posture of the recent Soviet leadership will not last long for the following reasons: (i) Andropov's type of method of strengthening labor discipline will shortly turn out not to be the hoped-for panacea to cure the serious illness of the Soviet economy; (ii) the USSR will find it necessary again to import more efficient, less expensive technologies from the West; (iii) after the completion of the Uregnoi gas pipeline project, Western Europe will avoid further economic involvement with the Soviet Union; (iv) then, the Soviet Union will turn her interests to the East, i.e., to Japan, for more economic exchanges and for cooperation to complete and utilize the BAM, as well as for the importation of Japanese high technology. However, it is doubtful even if the preceding were to occur that the post-Andropov leadership itself will regard it worthwhile to pay such a high cost as the reversion of the four islands to Japan, which is Japan's sine qua non for improving the relations with the USSR.