

# Soviets bid to fill post-China Card power vacuum on Asian continent

by Richard Katz

Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev has launched a strategic initiative to fill the vacuum in Asia left by the demise of the China Card. In a March 24 speech, Brezhnev made new overtures to improve relations with both Japan and China, suggesting that the pattern of cooperation between the Soviets and India become the model for Soviet ties with those countries. Moscow's strategy is a parallel set of long-term, broad-scale economic cooperation arrangements between the Soviet Union and the three biggest Asian powers, India, Japan, and China, as an essential part of whatever new alignments emerge to dominate Asian geopolitics. Unlike Washington, Moscow recognizes that the elimination of the previous determining focus of Asian politics, the China Card, means a new political geometry, and that most of the nations in the region are beginning to respond to that fact.

For the past five years, American policy toward every country in Asia had been held hostage to the attempt to form a military alliance with China:

- The Carter administration helped to bring about the March 1977 electoral downfall of Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, because she was, among other things, an obstacle to the China Card;
- Washington supported the July 1977 military coup in Pakistan by the Peking-allied General Ziaul Haq, and continues to arm Zia's Pakistan in preference to, and against, India;
- Washington has tried to pressure Japan into joining a triangular military relationship with China and the United States;
- The Carter administration backed up China's invasion of Vietnam in February 1979, and Secretary of State Alexander Haig continues to pressure the nations of Southeast Asia to aid China's attempt to bring Pol Pot back to power in Kampuchea.

Now, however, this China-centered edifice is rapidly collapsing. The Deng Xiaoping regime in China, caught in accelerating political turmoil, threatens to downgrade diplomatic relations with the United States (see *EIR*, March 16). Indira Gandhi is back in power in India, while the downfall of Zia, perhaps within months, is foretold by the thousands who now demonstrate in defi-

ance of martial law. As the Chinese-armed Khmer Rouge suffer decimation on the battlefields of Kampuchea, the nations of Southeast Asia—who have long told Washington they fear China more than they fear the Soviets or Vietnam—are backing off from previous efforts to support an anti-Vietnam coalition including the Khmer Rouge. Even the Foreign Minister of pro-Chinese Thailand now speaks of “bilateral or regional” negotiations with Vietnam to settle the Kampuchean issue. Tokyo, while pursuing economic ties with China, refuses to join any three-way military schemes.

In short, the China Card is dead. Yet Washington refuses to come up with a policy to meet the new situation. Moscow, by contrast, is on the move.

## Brezhnev's Asia strategy

Speaking in the Soviet Asian city of Tashkent, a few hundred miles from India, Brezhnev pointed to Indo-Soviet relations as exemplary of the cooperation Moscow hoped to achieve with Japan, China, and other countries. “For more than a quarter of a century now,” Brezhnev declared, “the Soviet Union and India have been actively . . . working to develop . . . friendly cooperation . . . in the spheres of the economy, science, and culture.” This refers to the fact that since the 1950s, the Soviet Union has assisted India's industrialization efforts while the United States repeatedly spurned Indian requests. In addition, Moscow had sided with India, both in the 1962 Chinese invasion of India, and when Washington “tilted” (in Kissinger's phrase) toward successive Pakistani military dictatorships in the 1965 and 1971 Indo-Pakistani wars.

This history of Indo-Soviet ties, continued Brezhnev, “strengthens in considerable measure the feeling of security in both sides. It creates a big zone of peace and stability on the Asian continent. It enables the Soviet Union and India to cooperate successfully in the international arena and the effort to preserve and strengthen peace.

Aware of the Indians' proudly independent nationalism, Brezhnev noted that such Indo-Soviet cooperation in international politics is based on “full mutual

respect for the specific features of the foreign policy of either of the two countries.” This is diplomatic jargon for his recognition that India does not care to see the South Asian region serve as a *military* base for *either* superpower.

Moscow’s intervention in the late March Communist Party of India (CPI) congress to discourage further CPI alliances with Communist Party-Marxist (CPM) and Hindu chauvinist destabilization actions against Mrs. Gandhi shows the importance Brezhnev attaches to India’s international role.

### **Mending fences with China**

The Soviets, fully aware of Pekings’s growing tension with Washington, have for some time been encouraging steps aimed at a Sino-Soviet thaw. For the first time in 20 years, China sent a top economic mission to the Soviet Union to study Soviet economic-management methods.

Brezhnev aimed his overture at those factions in China who have increasingly criticized Deng’s close anti-Soviet alliance with the United States, though, as senior Soviet diplomats told *EIR*, Moscow has no expectation of a full resumption of the 1950s Sino-Soviet alliance.

Brezhnev laid out four principles aimed at ending hostility:

“First, despite the fact that we openly criticized . . . many aspects of the policy of the Chinese leadership . . . we have never tried to interfere in the internal life . . . and do not deny now the existence of a socialist system in China.” This point is aimed at ending the bitter ideological polemics and appealing to those forces who think of China as belonging to a “socialist camp” along with the Soviet Union.

“Secondly, we have never supported and do not support now in any form the so-called ‘concept of two Chinas’ and have fully recognized and continue to recognize the People’s Republic of China’s sovereignty over Taiwan Island.” The slap at the Reagan administration’s arms sales to Taiwan is obvious, particularly as this has become a hot factional issue in China.

“Third, there was no threat to China from the Soviet Union . . . and we are ready at any moment to continue talks on existing border questions . . . [and] ready to discuss possible measures to strengthen mutual trust . . . on the frontier.” This is the latest in a recent flurry of offers to discuss the border conflict that led to armed clashes in 1969. The phrase about measures for “mutual trust” is believed to refer to possibly willingness to discuss a mutual partial troop pullback.

“Fourth, we remember well the time when the Soviet Union and People’s China were united by bonds of comradely cooperation. . . . We are prepared to come to terms . . . to improve Soviet-Chinese relations . . .

economic, scientific, cultural as well as political relations.” This is a direct appeal to the anti-Deng faction’s nostalgia for the economic successes of the 1950s.

Though the Deng-controlled Foreign Ministry, as expected, issued an initial rebuff, *Pravda*’s characterization of that rebuff as “cautious and flexible” shows Moscow’s confidence in slow, steady progress as Deng’s position weakens and American-Chinese ties worsen.

### **Appeal to Japan**

Knowing, as a top Japanese government official told the *Los Angeles Times* on March 23, that Western recession and anti-Japanese protectionism make East-bloc markets and Siberian resources more enticing than ever, Brezhnev appealed to Tokyo for economic cooperation. He made a reference to the strain in American-Japanese relations caused by Washington’s pressure on Japan to support the China Card, to rearm, and to implement economic sanctions against the U.S.S.R. In the way of stronger Japan-Soviet ties, Brezhnev said, “stand no few hindrances created by external forces, which care little about the interests of our two countries, the forces which already since the first post-war years . . . strove to prevent Japan from operating in the world arena as an independent sovereign state.”

When Foreign Minister Yoshio Sakarauchi came to Washington on March 23, he rejected Haig’s pressure on Japan to back out of the Siberian pipeline project and to otherwise escalate anti-Soviet sanctions.

### **U.K.’s Heath points to reality**

Certainly Brezhnev’s scheme will not come to immediate fruition; and many nations of the region clearly will not welcome an increased Soviet role; however, Haig apparently has yet even to recognize the new Asian situation into which Moscow is intervening.

Former Tory Prime Minister Ted Heath of Britain argued in a March 2 speech in Fulton, Missouri (*EIR*, March 23) that changes must be made in American policy, pointing in particular to “the damage which has been done to the security interests of the West in the Persian Gulf, the Horn of Africa, and in South Asia by the failure of the United States to develop a close political partnership with India. This is a country which in the next century is set to become one of the world’s principal industrial powers. . . . I do not believe that India is, or has ever intended to be, a lackey of Soviet designs. . . .

Heath failed to put forth a policy toward China, though he had something to say on virtually every other subject, and India is not likely to be so easily lured by Imperial Britain; but Heath’s insistence on India’s pivotal role shows that this British aristocrat at least recognizes that the political power centers in Asia are changing and that world strategists must respond.