

# Soviets bid to split Japan from the U.S.

by Linda de Hoyos and Mary McCourt

With the visit of Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze to Japan Jan. 15-19, the Soviet Union has made its diplomatic bid to break away Japan from its alliance with the United States. It was the first visit by a Soviet foreign minister to Japan in over 10 years. Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko had declined Japan's repeated invitations with statements complaining that Japan's "attitude" would have to change first. Japan would have to meet two conditions: drop its support for the U.S. Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), and drop its claim to the four "northern territories," the four lower islands of the Kurile chain that were seized by the Russians from Japan in the last minutes of World War II.

Shevardnadze's visit did not signify that the Soviets have dropped such demands, but was designed to place the emphasis on Moscow's "offers" to Japan: lucrative business deals developing resources in Siberia. Although the Japanese government of Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone made no concessions in Soviet demands to break away from the United States, the visit did yield a joint communiqué that was produced after hours of wrangling by Soviet and Japanese foreign ministry officials.

The way for the communiqué was cleared when Shevardnadze admitted that Soviet retention of the northern territories of Japan is an "issue" between the two countries. Because of the islands dispute, the Soviets and Japan have not signed a peace treaty ending their war relationship of World War II. Nakasone emerged from his 80-minute meeting with Shevardnadze to declare, "We are in agreement to continue negotiations on a peace treaty upon the basis of confirming the 1973 joint statement" between then-Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka and Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev. This statement declared that the U.S.S.R. and Japan acknowledged that there existed unresolved issues, including the four Kuriles.

On the SDI, the Soviets got nowhere. Japanese Foreign Minister Shintaro Abe informed Shevardnadze that "Japan is studying its position on the SDI and will make its own decision independently within the context of security arrangements between Japan and the United States." On this issue, the Soviets will continue to rely on the stalling by the State Department and certain quarters in the Pentagon on Japan's

repeated indications that it is ready to collaborate on the beam-weapons program.

On the economic side, Moscow is eager for as much Japanese high technology as possible, to build up its war machine, and blames the United States for blocking its access to Japanese capabilities. In the 1970s, *Pravda* recently claimed, Japan was the Soviet's biggest trading partner in the capitalist sector, but by 1984 was down to sixth, because of Japan's sanctions against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The Japanese lifted the sanctions in December.

Development deals are already in the works. According to the East German newspaper *Neues Deutschland*, the Japanese financial daily *Nihon Keizai Shimbun* had reported that Japanese firms will take part in developing offshore natural gas deposits on the continental shelf of Sakhalin Island to the north of the Kuriles. An agreement exists, the East German paper reported, to start a project in 1989 to build facilities to extract, liquify, and transport the natural gas.

"Shevardnadze hopes for a basic agreement on a joint natural gas project," reported the Jan. 17 *London Guardian*, when a Japanese team goes to Moscow later in January. Japanese companies just entered bidding on \$4 billion worth of contracts for two large processing plants in the U.S.S.R., offering long-term credit at low rates supported by the Japanese Export-Import Bank, in an attempt to undercut European bidders.

## No victories

But these deals by no means constitute a Japanese shift in policy. Foreign Minister Abe bluntly told Shevardnadze that "conditions are not right" for more cooperation. Furthermore, when Shevardnadze extended an invitation for Nakasone to visit Moscow, the Japanese prime minister declined for the short term, stating that such a trip would be a waste unless there were evidence that the visit would yield "substantial progress."

The Japanese are under no illusions of the intention of Soviet policy. Foreign Minister Abe "expressed concern" to Shevardnadze, according to official reports, "over the Soviet Union's buildup in the Far East . . . called on the Soviet Union to scale back its presence." And just as Shevardnadze was executing his diplomatic maneuvers in Tokyo, Moscow Soviet Chief of General Staff Sergei Ahkromeyev declared that Soviet reduction of its 145 SS-20 missiles east of the Urals would depend upon the removal of U.S. nuclear bombers in the Pacific theatre. The U.S. nuclear capability in the Far East is the only protective military umbrella Japan has against the Soviets.

Nor do the Japanese believe the Soviets are prepared to give up one inch of the four northern territories. The Soviets have built bases on the southern two islands, which at the extreme end are but 2.5 miles from Japan. The islands are armed with 10,000 combat troops, long-range artillery, MiG-

23 fighters and the Mi-24 Hind helicopter gunships. In October, the Soviets ran a military exercise for the seizure of the Japan's northern-most island, Hokkaido. Russian control over Hokkaido would give the Soviet Pacific Fleet a break-out capability from its Vladivostok home base.

The key factor in determining Japan-Soviet relations is Washington. The SDI for Japan provides the country with a viable defense against the Soviet Union. Conversely, if the United States self-destructs the Strategic Defense Initiative or blocks the program for Japan, then Japan will continue to sit defenseless in the Pacific under conditions of a U.S. strategic withdrawal in the region—a circumstance that will force a reappraisal in Tokyo of Japan's strategic position.

The decisive point for Japan's final answer to Moscow may well be U.S. policy toward the Philippines. If the United States, as it is currently projecting, withdraws its strategic bases from the Philippines, leaving the South China Sea to the Soviets, Moscow will have gained a blackmail capability over the economic supply line to Japan. In that case, Japan would be forced to take a new look at Russian "offers."

### **The Korean kicker**

From Tokyo, Shevardnadze traveled back to Moscow through Pyongyang, where he met with North Korean leader Kim Il-Sung. Contiguous with Shevardnadze's diplomacy, the North Koreans have put out their own highly unusual offers. On Jan. 15, Pyongyang said it would cancel its own maneuvers if the United States and South Korea canceled their "Team Spirit Exercises" which take place annually in January-February. The offer was rejected, understandably enough. The North Koreans have moved a full 65% of their forces to the border area with South Korea and are being equipped with SAM missiles and MiG-23s from the Soviet Union.

Since the Oct. 9, 1983 North Korean terrorist bombing of the South Korean cabinet in Rangoon, Burma, the Soviets have drawn Pyongyang closer under their wing. On Jan. 14, the *Korean Herald* reported that Shevardnadze carried to Tokyo a message for Nakasone from Kim Il-Sung, and that Japanese parliamentarian Yoichi Tani, a member of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and chairman of the Japan-North Korea Parliamentarians' Friendship League, was on his way to Pyongyang, via Beijing, carrying a response.

The contents of these missals is unknown. However, as one diplomat cited by the *Korean Herald* pointed out, the fact that the Soviet foreign minister is carrying Kim Il-Sung's messages signifies that Moscow has taken over the role of North Korea's protector and benefactor—shifting Pyongyang's previous careful balance between Moscow and Beijing. The Russian takeover of the crazed North Korean regime, which functions as an integral component of the terrorist international, implies danger for all the countries in the region.

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