

Washington hurls new insults at Japan

by Jeffrey Steinberg

Since the temporary cease-fire went into effect in the Persian Gulf, the Bush administration has been firing a continuous diplomatic barrage at Japan. The latest and most egregious calculated insults came directly from the Oval Office, when President Bush abruptly canceled his long scheduled state visit to Tokyo early this month and then, up until the last moment, refused even to meet with Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Nakayama, who was in Washington on March 20. (The Bush-Nakayama meeting did finally take place, but only after the foreign minister arrived with a \$7 billion check).

Early in March, Ichiro Ozawa, the general secretary of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), had to cancel a scheduled six-day tour of the Middle East when U.S. authorities refused to grant him permission to visit occupied Kuwait. Responding to the cancellation of Bush's Tokyo visit, Japanese Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu told a television interviewer March 13, "The conduct of the United States makes me grind my teeth. I think that Japan is not estimated appropriately in the U.S.A."

This Bush administration arrogance has provoked a profound reassessment among policymakers in Tokyo, who see the situation going from bad to worse, but who have so far developed no strategy for confronting the Bush menace.

'A feeling of dismay'

A March 14 article in the *International Herald Tribune* reported that Bush is being widely compared with Franklin Roosevelt, whom many Japanese believe lured Tokyo into World War II. The *Tribune* quoted Prof. Sakuji Yoshimura of Waseda University: "The Gulf war was a trap set by Americans to crush Iraq. . . . It is crucial to recognize that the war began from America's own plan for a monolithic control of a postwar world."

In the March 16 issue of the *Japan Economic Journal*, author Masahiko Ishizuka called on the Japanese government to "end this laissez-faire relationship with the U.S. There is a feeling of dismay about the relentless use of military power by the U.S., the mainstay of the allied forces. By Asian or Oriental standards, the Anglo-American decisiveness in the use of military power—their belligerence—is disquieting and questionable. Many hesitated to call it a just war, with the massive bombing appearing less of a 'sacred mission' than an exercise in self-righteousness and arrogance. . . . Had the Gulf crisis been resolved peacefully, it would have

set a good precedent—contrary to the way things turned out."

Ishizuka continued: "For all its success in the Gulf war, the fact remains that the U.S. had to depend on other countries for meeting an overwhelming proportion of its war costs. . . . In future military conflicts, should they happen, the U.S. will again count on Japan and Germany to be its major supporters, at least financially. . . . If there's anything Japan has learned the hard way from the Gulf crisis, it's the realization that Japan can't continue to be so miserably dictated to by Washington, simply because Tokyo didn't know what to do in the absence of its own firm strategies and policies. . . . Self-assertion and true independence in formulation of foreign policy have been utterly absent for too long. The Gulf war served as a catalyst to the realization by the Japanese that the situation can no longer be allowed to continue."

Washington, meanwhile, continues to escalate its attacks. U.S. Ambassador Richard Armacost, part of the CIA triumvirate running Bush administration East Asia policy (along with Ambassador Donald Gregg in Seoul and Ambassador James Lilley in Beijing), tore into Japan for failing to submit to American free trade demands at the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) talks. Speaking on Feb. 28 in Tokyo, Armacost denounced Japan's refusal to deregulate interest rate policies and submit to other free trade demands, warning, "The question is whether Japan will act in a timely manner or wait passively and accept the inevitable." On March 8, the Bush administration threatened that it would file a formal complaint at GATT if Japan failed to deregulate its interest rates by the May 1991 deadline set last year by Treasury Undersecretary David Mulford.

Japanese-Soviet diplomacy

In this context, the Kaifu government is proceeding with plans to host Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachov April 16-18. Although Japanese expectations about a successful summit had been dampened by recent Soviet crackdowns in the Baltic republics, on March 14, senior Communist Party official Valentin Falin paid a visit to Kaifu to deliver a message that Gorbachov was ready to make a dramatic breakthrough in their relations at the April meeting. Shortly after, it was announced that LDP chairman Ozawa would probably visit Moscow prior to the summit. Soviet Foreign Minister Aleksandr Bessmertnykh will arrive in Tokyo March 30-31.

While the main thrust of the Japanese-Soviet talks will be joint economic projects (Moscow is talking about a "new economic community" involving Japan, China, Taiwan, the Soviet Union, and the two Koreas), Moscow is also hinting that the thorny issue of the northern islands, occupied by the Soviets since World War II, could be resolved. On Feb. 28, Gorbachov's military adviser Marshal Sergei Akhromeyev told Kyodo news service that it was his "personal opinion" that the U.S.S.R. should open talks leading to the return of two of the islands.