

Japanese deplore U.S. buildup in Gulf

by Lydia Cherry

As Japanese Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu continues to recite Japan's litany on how it supports U.S. efforts in the Persian Gulf, statements by Japanese economic organizations and business influentials, complemented by a spate of articles in the popular media and scholarly journals, have made clear that Japan is actually "saying no" to the Bush administration policy of massive troop buildup in the Middle East. The Japanese are giving America the benefit of the doubt, saying that the Bush initiatives are well-meaning, but "this doesn't necessarily mean that such military deployment has been an appropriate response to the crisis," as a lead editorial in the *Japan Economic Journal* termed it. At the same time, Japanese leaders of all political persuasions are in regular contact with Iraq to try to find an alternative to a shooting war that they believe would alienate the Arabs from the West for generations to come.

A recent Japanese study documents the "global economic slowdown which has already begun," in which rising oil prices, which have resulted from the Bush-imposed boycott on Iraqi oil and the threatened outbreak of war, "have already dealt a serious blow to developing nations with the heaviest external debt burden." The country's Economic Planning Agency, in a report released Nov. 27, says the economic slowdown will be magnified by the outbreak of war in the Gulf region, and that "the most urgent task facing the world today is to solve the Gulf crisis as it has caused an adverse impact, not only on oil prices but also international financial markets and the global investment climate."

As Japanese leaders have become more vocal about their search for another approach, U.S. and Israeli operatives have registered their displeasure, trying to bash Japan into returning to the party line. Speaking on the opening of a new session of the Diet Dec. 11, U.S. Ambassador Michael Armacost once again called for a "Japanese physical presence in the Gulf as an important demonstration of its willingness to share the risks of responding to Saddam's aggression." He continued to drive the point home: "Impressions forged in a major international crisis like this one tend to have a durable effect."

A week earlier, Edgar Bronfman, a frequent mediator between the U.S. State Department, Israel, and Moscow, led a press barrage against Japanese companies who, he charged,

"placate Arabs." Bronfman leveled his criticism in particular against Matsushita Electric Industrial Company's buying out of MCA, calling Matsushita "a slavish adherent" to the Arab-led economic boycott of Israel.

On Dec. 11, major media focused on U.S. Department of Energy claims that Japan was "hoarding oil," and that the U.S. would raise the subject the following week at a meeting of the governing board of the International Energy Agency, according to wire service reports printed by the Bangkok, Thailand daily *The Nation*. "If everybody in the world did what Japan is doing, we would have a much more serious problem than we do; prices would be a lot higher," Linda Stuntz, an Energy Department deputy undersecretary for policy and planning, is quoted saying. She went on to say that Japan's action raises serious questions about the success of future cooperative activities among oil-consuming nations.

Japan's unilateral action in late November to respond positively to the Iraqi call to follow through on delivery of \$2 million worth of medical supplies previously agreed upon, according to UPI, "angered some of its allies, especially the United States."

'Don't hold gun to Saddam's head'

"The sentiment of business leaders is that the United States shouldn't be holding a gun to the head of Saddam Hussein," remarked Kazuo Nukuzawa, managing director of Keidanren, the largest Japanese trade association, statements then printed by both New York and German media. The president of a large Japanese energy company close to Prime Minister Kaifu is quoted by the Dec. 10 *New York Times* acknowledging that he had been on the telephone all day Dec. 7 with contacts in Iraq to try to suggest a possible compromise. He suggested that "it would be best if some sort of inter-Arab solution were to be found, giving Saddam some concessions on territory or oil prices or freedom of waterways."

Following former Prime Minister Yusuhiro Nakasone's trip to Iraq the first week in November—the subject of no small criticism by war advocates—numerous other diplomatic forays have been undertaken by the Japanese. The last week in November, members of the ruling party invited Iraqi legislators to Tokyo in December to discuss a possible resolution of the crisis. Meanwhile, leaders of the Japanese Socialist Party (JSP), which periodically functions as a back-channel for the government, met with their counterparts in France, and the two Socialist parties called for the convening of an international peace conference in Tokyo in late January. Issei Inoue, director of the JSP's International Bureau, told reporters that his party had proposed the plan to Iraq, and that Iraqi First Deputy Prime Minister Taha Yasin Ramadan had expressed positive interest in the proposal. Inoue said that the JSP will ask China, India, Thailand, Iran, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the Soviet Union, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom to attend the session.