Chapter 6

# The Soviet Union and the Future of East-West Relations: A Japanese View

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TO talk about the Soviet Union as a superpower on a par with the United States is rather misleading. Compared to the United States, the Soviet Union is a one-dimensional power: strong in the military field, but weak in many others. The power base of the United States, by comparison, is far more balanced and broadly based. This asymmetry has become even more pronounced in recent years, as the "correlation of forces" between the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. has appeared to shift in favor of the U.S.A. To be sure, the United States has not been immune from a number of problems as well-economic, financial, political, and diplomatic. But compared with the Soviet Union, these troubles are far less fundamental. Moreover, some observers have argued that the United States has already been regaining its strength under the "strong" leadership of President Reagan. By contrast, the domestic and international problems the Soviet Union has been facing since the late 1970s have become more serious and difficult to solve. In short, it seems quite plausible to assume that the Soviet "empire" has passed its peak and already has begun quietly to decline.

The November 1985 summit meeting in Geneva reflected those changing power relations between the two superpowers. True, to most television viewers around the world Mikhail S. Gorbachev may

have appeared as the much more attractive statesman, who outperformed the aging American president. Apart from Gorbachev's public relations success, which he scored by confirming his worldwide reputation as an energetic and impressive politician well able to withstand comparison with his veteran American counterpart, the general secretary did not, in fact, obtain much from the summit meeting. The two leaders only managed to sign a few agreements on secondary matters that could have been handled just as easily at the foreign ministerial level. Gorbachev was unsuccessful in accomplishing his major objective; that is, an agreement on arms control, particularly one that would block the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI). If such a major success in arms control continues to clude the Soviet leader, he will have to continue to pursue two incompatible goals simultaneously: the revitalization of the Soviet economy and a continuation of the arms race with the United States. It thus seems quite clear who "won" this particular round of the superpower dialogue in Geneva in 1985. Ronald Reagan came out on top simply because he had behind him the stronger country, while Mikhail Gorbachev lost out because he represented a country with an inferior economy and technology.

## THE SOVIET UNION UNDER GORBACHEV: A REVITALIZED SUPERPOWER AS A NEW THREAT?

Will the Soviet Union become stronger under the energetic leadership of Gorbachev? At the time of this writing, little more than a year after Gorbachev's accession to the highest office in the Kremlin, it is still difficult to answer this question.

In approaching this question, it is first necessary to examine the political environment in which Gorbachev finds himself. Even if we assume that Gorbachev fully intends to bring about significant changes and fundamental reforms in Soviet domestic and foreign policies, it must remain doubtful whether he will be capable of carrying out such reforms. The new general secretary of the Communist party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) does not operate in a vacuum. Gorbachev's success in actually implementing his reform policies will therefore depend largely on the constraints under which the general secretary will find himself.

The first of these constraints is what could be called the human

environment, including the nomenklatura (privileged elite), which can be expected to strongly oppose radical change, with its inertia, its entrenched conservatism, and its innate and instinctive fear of anything that could threaten its power and vested interests. The second constraint confronting Gorbachev is the Soviet system, within which the general secretary must work. The third aspect of the environment that the new Soviet leader must take into consideration is the international situation, which may confront him with major challenges. <sup>1</sup>

Gorbachev's ability to produce significant changes in the Soviet Union will thus be shaped importantly by political and bureaucratic constraints. But what do we mean by "change"? Some analysts argue that meaningful changes in the Soviet Union would only be possible after a major transformation of the basic institutions of state and society: fundamental changes in the relationship between the government and Soviet citizenry, in the selection procedures for government personnel, in decision-making processes, and in the production and distribution of economic wealth. Others seem content to detect any signs of change in the political climate, foreign policy style, or domestic policy tactics. Between these two extremes there is a wide range of notions on what "changes" Gorbachev can be expected to produce in the Soviet Union.

In my view, at least six significant changes can be distinguished: in style, personnel, approach, policy, the system, and in goals. Gorbachev's leadership has already clearly brought about considerable changes in the first three areas, while the latter three have so far hardly been touched.

To illustrate this argument, let us consider the changes discernible in Gorbachev's policy towards Japan. The style, approach, and personnel in charge of this policy have all clearly undergone significant changes since the advent of Gorbachev, but Moscow's basic policy orientation and objectives vis-à-vis Tokyo have not shown any substantial change. This became quite evident in the new "smiling-face diplomacy" of the January 1986 visit to Tokyo by the new Soviet foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze. As one foreign journalist put it then, "While Gromyko refused to come to the negotiating table because there was nothing to negotiate, Shevardnadze came to the table first and then claimed there was nothing to negotiate." What, then, has been the real difference between the

two foreign ministers and their respective policies? Clearly, none, in terms of substance—at least not so far.

Even under the new, dynamic leadership of Gorbachev, it thus seems quite unlikely that the Soviet Union will transform itself substantially—whether fortunately or unfortunately for us. This leads to a further point. Partly because of the shortcomings of the Soviet system and the remote prospects for change, most Japanese, myself included, do not necessarily see the Soviet Union as very threatening to the security of Japan.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps because their empire developed the vast, indefensible expanses, with no natural geographic barriers and fierce hostile neighbors, the Russians have developed a unique foreign policy behavior pattern. This pattern can be described as "amoeboid expansion."6 Like an amoeba, the Russians tend to expand constantly and without bounds. Only when and where they encounter strong resistance or insurmountable obstacles do the Russians retreat, and even then, they do so only to expand elsewhere and resume their advance when a new opportunity presents itself. In short, the Soviet Union expands opportunistically, cautiously, and in piecemeal fashion, based on its leadership's careful calculation of risk and benefit. This has implications for Japan, which is separated from the Soviet Union by a major natural obstacle—the Sea of Japan. As long as the Self-Defense Forces maintain a minimum defense capability against Soviet aggression, and as long as the United States provides protection through its nuclear umbrella, most Japanese consider the security of Japan ensured and therefore deem it unnecessary and even unwise to be intimidated by the excessive accumulation of Soviet military power. To give in to these tactics would mean to end up playing into the hands of the Soviet Union, which is particularly interested in gaining politico-diplomatic benefits through the deliberate demonstration of military might.

This means that most Japanese have a perception of the Soviet threat which differs from that of the Americans. (I will later touch upon such differences in perception of the Soviet threat between the Japanese and the West Europeans.) Publications such as "The Soviet Military Power," by the Pentagon seem to most Japanese to overestimate Soviet military power, focusing too heavily on the quantitative increases of physical muscle and neglecting qualitative or less tangible aspects of Soviet military power, such as logistics, war-

preparedness, and morale. If one goes beyond the "bean-counting" approach, Soviet military forces appear much less impressive. This is evident, for instance, from the testimony of the Soviet pilot V. Belenko, who defected to the United States via Japan in 1976 with his MIG-25, and from the less than impressive performance of the Soviet air defense in its two-and-a-half-hour chase of the KAL 007 passenger plane in the fall of 1983, which ended in the tragic attack.

### THE SOVIET UNION AND THE WEST: A MODIFIED APPROACH?

With the accession of Mikhail S. Gorbachev to the position of general secretary of the CPSU, the Soviet perception of the West—and its concomitant strategy toward the West—has undergone certain changes. These changes, however, are mostly a matter of degree of emphasis. They may be characterized as a shift from the Gromyko to the Iakovlev line of Soviet foreign policy orientation. Andrei A. Gromyko, a veteran diplomat with more than 30 years of experience in foreign affairs, had advocated a "U.S.-first" policy, emphasizing Soviet relations with the United States more than anything else. Aleksandr Iakovlev, on the other hand, who has been promoted by Gorbachev to head the CPSU Central Committee's propaganda department, as well as to membership in the Central Committee Secretariat, has raised doubts about the validity of Gromyko's "U.S.-first" orientation in Soviet foreign policy. The principal differences between Gromyko and Iakovlev appear to be as follows.

Military strength—above all, nuclear weapons—as the predominant factor in the Soviet concept of a "correlation of world forces," was no doubt uppermost in Gromyko's mind when he assigned top priority to the Soviet Union's relations with the U.S. above all other foreign policy considerations. As late as November 6, 1984, only half a year before his replacement as Soviet foreign minister by Eduard Shevardnadze, Gromyko was still holding on to his bipolar image of the world: "The international situation depends in many respects on the state of relations between the Soviet Union and the United States." In Gromyko's view, the U.S.S.R.'s relations with Western Europe, Japan, and other countries were to take a secondary place, subordinated to global confrontation with the United States. Gromyko's basic policy strategy vis-à-vis the United States thus called

for a "direct approach," in doing business or competing with the United States, leaving relations with other countries for a later stage. This line in Soviet foreign policy thinking seemed to consider it possible and expedient to control Western Europe and Japan through the United States.

By contrast, the lakovlev line tends towards an anti-American, pro-Western European, and pro-Japan position. Based on his premise that the world has been shifting from monotsentrizm (monocentrism) to politsentrizm (polycentrism), lakovlev argues that "the existence of three main centers of imperialism—the United States, Western Europe, and Japan—has become the crucial factor," thus attaching the same importance to West European countries and Japan as to the U.S.

This view of the world does not regard the contemporary international system simply as bipolar, but rather, like many American international relations theorists (such as Stanley Hoffmann), as a "pyramidal multilayer world order," that gives greater weight to Europe, Japan, China, and other parts of the world. Secondly, the lakovlev line gives more attention to what the Soviet Union may lose in its relations with Western Europe and Japan if it concentrates only on its major battle with its arch opponent, the United States. Thirdly, this view regards it advisable for the Soviet Union to exploit rifts—Lenin's term—or differences of views and interests within the Western camp. In short, the Iakovlev line advocates an indirect approach of first working on the weaker or more vulnerable spots (Western European countries and Japan), leaving the more powerful, harder center of resistance (the United States) for a later stage.

Gorbachev's position in this bureaucratic battle between different foreign policy lines is yet to be fully confirmed. He clearly has deliberately stressed the Soviet Union's desire to improve relations with other nations as well as with the United States. In his keynote speech to the 27th CPSU Congress on February 25, 1986, Gorbachev said: "The contradictions of mutual relations among the three main centers of present-day imperialism—the U.S.A., Western Europe and Japan—has become fully clear and visible." The CPSU program adopted by that Congress (the so-called "Gorbachev Party Program") has closely followed the Iakovlev line, even repeating his words almost literally: "Three main centers of interimperialist rivalry have emerged: the U.S.A., Western Europe, and Japan." In the

same speech, the new Soviet general secretary emphasized repeatedly that the United States remains the central focus of Soviet foreign policy. <sup>16</sup> It would, however, be premature and even inaccurate to conclude from this that the new general secretary has shifted completely to the Iakovlev policy line.

The Gromyko and Iakovlev policy lines are not incompatible or diametrically opposed, but rather complementary. Both share the basic perception that for the Soviet Union the United States is enemy number one; the difference lies in strategies and tactics of how best to deal with this arch adversary. It is therefore not surprising that at the 27th Party Congress, the Gorbachev leadership seemed to be taking two approaches at the same time—one indicating a shift from Gromyko's bipolar foreign policy to a multipolar one; and the other clearly showing that the United States remained at the center of Soviet foreign policy concerns. That Gromyko was kicked upstairs from the office of foreign minister to the figurehead position of president shows the new general secretary's determination to radically change the traditional Gromyko type of diplomacy. On the other hand, the appointment of Anatolyi Dobrynin, the veteran ambassador to the United States, to a key position on the Central Committee Secretariat can be interpreted as a continuation of the Gromyko line, with primary emphasis on U.S.-Soviet relations—or perhaps even as a political compromise forced upon Gorbachev by Gromyko and his supporters.

Although a broad spectrum of factors shapes Soviet foreign policy making, <sup>17</sup> the tools and instruments available to the Kremlin constitute one of the most important determinants. One might expect the Soviets to apply their own, unique tactics to the West. This is not the case, however. The Soviet Union uses more or less the same methods and instruments as Western countries, the real difference being that the former employs these techniques methodically, regularly and confidently; while the latter use them unsystematically, sporadically, and hesitantly. <sup>18</sup> Put another way, the Soviets are ready to utilize every possible means of achieving their goals, whereas Western countries often are not. <sup>19</sup> The appeal of Marxist-Leninist ideology, financial assistance, trade and economic relations, military aid, cultural exchange, diplomatic "peace offensives," propaganda and agitation, clandestine activities, blackmailing through demonstrations of military superiority, detente

diplomacy—these are only a few tools from the seemingly unlimited list of means and instruments the Kremlin uses in its foreign relations.

Generally speaking, these instruments seem to be most effective in underdeveloped or developing, rather than in advanced industrial countries. Put differently, the degree of economic, political, and cultural development and maturity, and consequently resilience, of a given country may serve as a yardstick for estimating the effectiveness of these Soviet diplomatic means. The less developed, mature, and resilient a country is, the more effectively these instruments of Soviet foreign policy may be employed. Soviet foreign policy, then, seems relatively powerless vis-à-vis those countries that enjoy developed, mature, and resilient political, economic, military, and cultural structures; while it appears to be relatively more effective vis-à-vis countries that are heavily deficient in one or more of these areas.

If one accepts the validity of this hypothesis, countries that may become promising targets for Soviet foreign policy instruments can be listed in roughly the following order: (1) the most underdeveloped countries, which are still suffering from starvation and other basic problems; (2) developing countries in the Third World with mounting domestic, political, and economic conflicts; (3) East European countries dependent upon the U.S.S.R. both as a supplier of energy and raw materials and as a market for their products; (4) China; (5) Western Europe; (6) Japan; and (7) the United States, which is currently the most self-sufficient country in the world. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Soviet Union pursued a global strategy that tried to gradually encircle the most advanced capitalist countries through expansion into underdeveloped countries in the Third World. This strategy was a key element in the policy of razriadka napriazhennosti (relaxation of tension or detente) pursued under General Secretary Leonid Breshnev. The Kremlin under Gorbachev may now be tempted to follow a similar strategy vis-à-vis the Western advanced countries; namely, to try to encircle the United States by directing a diplomatic offensive at the less self-sufficient industrial countries in Western Europe and Japan, leaving its direct assault on the United States to a later stage.

But does the Soviet Union have any effective diplomatic instruments toward Western Europe and Japan, who are, except in

the military dimension, much more advanced and self-sufficient than the U.S.S.R.? The Soviet Union does have some cards to play even vis-à-vis such advanced countries—perhaps precisely because they are so advanced. Taking advantage of nationalistic feelings and pride, for instance, the Soviets have been urging the advanced Western countries and Japan to adopt their own independent Soviet policies, instead of blindly following the United States. Since Gorbachev came to power, Soviet spokesmen and the media have referred to Japan as "the land of the rising sun"; but they never fail to follow this flattering salutation by what they really want to say: "[It is regretable that] under the pressures exerted over Tokyo by Washington, such a great country as Japan has been drawn into a dangerous course against the Soviet Union."

What about Western Europe? There are several major differences between West European countries and Japan with regard to their relations with the Soviet Union.<sup>22</sup> (1) Geopolitically, the Japanese islands are separated by water from the U.S.S.R. Japan thus feels more secure from Soviet military attack than do the West Europeans: there is no natural boundary that separates Eastern and Western Europe. (2) Economically, the Japanese can get along without the Soviet Union (trade with the U.S.S.R. constitutes only 2 percent of Japan's entire trade). Although the West Europeans' reliance on economic relations with the East is also limited, they have a more substantial stake in trade with the U.S.S.R., which is both a supplier of energy resources and a customer of their manufactured products. Finally, in terms of psychology, the independent-minded West Europeans may be more likely than the Japanese to be tempted to pursue an independent policy toward the U.S.S.R., different from that of the United States.

#### PROSPECTS FOR EAST-WEST RELATIONS

With all the uncertainties about the future global environment and international relations in general, at a time of profound systemic change, one trend seems to be certain: the Soviet type of socialism is out of date and will become even more so in the coming decade.

Fifteen years ago, Andrei D. Sakharov correctly warned the Soviet leadership that, if a course of democratization were not taken,

the Soviet Union would fall behind the capitalist countries in the second industrial revolution, to "be gradually transformed into a second-rate provincial power."<sup>23</sup>

Today, the situation in which the Soviet Union finds itself is in some respect even worse than Sakharov had anticipated. The Soviet Union is currently far behind the advanced capitalist countries in the "third industrial Revolution"—that of high technology. Gorbachev thus faces a dilemma of keeping tight control over central planning and information flow under the traditional Soviet socialist system of economic management, while at the same time, trying to encourage the worker and managerial initiative essential to master and make full use of the new high technology. Over time, it will be as difficult as squaring a circle for the Gorbachev leadership to catch up with the West without an "information revolution"—a revolution that would almost inevitably lead to the collapse of the Soviet system.

In theory, Gorbachev has only two options: (1) to change the system, i.e., to gradually or secretly reform the Soviet type of socialism so that it can foster indigenous scientific-technological innovation; or (2) to import advanced technology from abroad. Either way, the Soviet Union will find it necessary to become more flexible and to increase economic contact with the West. In other words, whether Moscow likes it or not, the Soviet Union will be forced to follow China and East European countries, which have given a greater role to market forces and to their relationship with the world market. There are some indications that Moscow recognizes this. In April 1986, the Soviet deputy minister of foreign trade indicated that the U.S.S.R. was considering changes in their domestic laws to facilitate joint ventures with Japanese companies.<sup>24</sup>

Despite prospects for more cooperation on the economic level, however, the confrontational relationship between East and West in the political, diplomatic, and security fields will not easily fade away. What, then, is the best way for the West to deal with the Soviet Union? Whatever individual approaches are developed by Western countries, they would do well to bear the following three principles in mind. First, we must keep our house in good order, since as mentioned above, development, maturity, and resilience are the key to coping with the Soviet Union. Second, since the Soviets remain a strong admirer of visible physical force (witness the Soviets' return

to the arms control negotiating table in Geneva after President Reagan's resolute declaration on SDI), it is essential to have military forces on the Western side that are sufficient to deter Soviet inclinations toward expansion and aggression. Third, if we believe that in the long run the East will lose in its competition with the West, it is unnecessary and even counterproductive to try to accelerate the decline of the Soviet empire. The Soviet Union under Gorbachev is facing increasingly serious problems and dilemmas at home and abroad. Under those circumstances, it would not be wise for the West to push the Soviet Union against a wall. This would only allow the regime to appeal to Russian patriotism to justify further sacrifices in the already low living standards of the Soviet people. Such a policy would therefore enable Soviet leaders to further strengthen their military forces, rather than weaken them.

For West European countries and Japan, policy towards one superpower, the Soviet Union, cannot be separated from policy towards the other superpower, the United States. These two policies in some sense constitute two sides of the same coin, since the two superpowers are locked in conflict with each other. In this sense, any discussion of West European or Japanese policy towards the Soviet Union that neglects their policy towards the United States is incomplete.

The first thing the West European countries and Japan should do is to stand firmly on the American side in this conflict. Western Europe and Japan share with the United States such common social and political values as freedom and democracy and the institutional structures that embody them. For both, moreover, military security against the Soviet Union can, in the final analysis, only be provided by the U.S.

Unity and solidarity with the United States thus must be the basic thrust and the minimum prerequisite of their U.S.—and hence of their Soviet—policy. This becomes all the more relevant as the Soviet Union once more turns to its favorite tactics of driving a wedge between Western countries, making full use of even the smallest rift between them. Although the Soviet Union warns Western European countries and Japan about the dangers of becoming embroiled in the U.S. global confrontation with the U.S.S.R., Moscow has never attacked countries that are closely allied with the United States. By recognizing that "the security of Western countries is indivisible."

at the Williamsburg summit in 1985, Japanese Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone has clearly associated Japan with the NATO position on intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF) negotiations with the Soviet Union. At the same time, Nakasone has strongly urged President Reagan to make no compromises to the Soviet Union over SS-20 deployment in Asia.

The basic requirement of unity and collaboration with the United States should not be taken to mean, however, that West European countries and Japan must always take exactly the same policy course as the United States. Given the differences in geographical, political, economic, and other conditions, it would be unnatural and even unwise to expect each member state of the Western alliance system to take identical action. Cooperation and close coordination does not preclude a division of labor. It would be dangerous, however, if such a division of labor saw Japan and West European countries employing primarily or solely the easier "carrot" strategy vis-à-vis the Soviet Union (in trade and economic cooperation, for example), leaving the harder "stick" strategy (confronting Soviet military power) solely to the United States.

#### NOTES

- For more detail, see Hiroshi Kimura, "Gorbachevism—Simply Old Wine in a New Bottle?" in Seweryn Bialer and Kinnya Niizeki, eds., The Soviet Union in Transition (New York: The Atlantic Press, 1986).
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- 3. Kimura, op. cit.
- Richard Nations, "The Russian Evolution," Far Eastern Economic Review (January 30, 1986), 26.
- For a more detailed discussion of this argument, see Hiroshi Kimura, "Relax— The Russians are not Coming," The Japan Times, November 16, 1980.
- 6. Hiroshi Kimura, "Soviet Policies in the Asian Pacific Region: A Japanese Assessment," Asian Affairs, vol. 11, no. 4 (Winter 1985), 39.
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- I am indebted in this to Prof. Hough, although my categories slightly differ from his. See Jerry Hough, "Soviet Perspectives on European Security," International Journal, vol. 15 (Winter 1984-85), 29, 39-40; "Russia's

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- Pravda, February 26, 1986. See also, M. S. Gorbachev, Zhivoe tvorchestovo naroda (Moscow: Politizdat, 1984), 36; Pravda, February 21, 1985, April 8, 1985.
- 15. Pravda, March 7, 1986.
- 16. Ibid.
- Christer Jonsson, "The Ideology of Foreign Policy," in Charles W. Kegley, Jr. and Pat McGowan, eds., Foreign Policy: USA/USSR (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1983), 91.
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- Krasnaia zvezda, March 28, 1985; Pravda, April 3, 1985, January 12, 1986;
  Izvestiia, January 10, 1986.
- 21. Pravda, April 3, 1985.
- 22. See, Wolf Mendl, Western Europe and Japan Between the Super Powers (London: Croom Helm, 1984), 1, 20, 24, 27. Professor Mendl's excellent contribution to this discussion perhaps neglected to underline differences between Western Europe and Japan, while emphasizing the differences between the United States, on the one hand, and Western Europe and Japan on the other.
- 23. Andrei D. Sakharov, Sakharov Speaks (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), 132.
- 24. Asahi Shimbun, Yomiuri Shimbun, Sankei Shimbun, April 17, 1986.