

# Reagan tightens Asian alliance in the face of the Soviet threat

by Linda de Hoyos

Since the end of the Vietnam War, the United States has adopted a policy of slow but steady military withdrawal from Asia, while the Soviet Union has been steadily upgrading, increasing, and expanding its military presence in the Pacific theater. It is therefore not surprising that the Soviet Union has chosen Asia as one of the key arenas for its pre-war deployment for a nuclear confrontation with the United States.

Since Sept. 1, when the Soviets announced their offensive with the downing of the KAL-007 airliner, they have brought their deployment of SS-20 intermediate range missiles in the Asian theatre from 108 to 117, targeting Japan, China, South Korea, and U.S. bases in the Philippines.

The increase belies the Aug. 26 promises of Yuri Andropov that the U.S.S.R. would not send its intermediate missiles to the Asian theatre from Europe—the Soviets are instead sending new missiles. The Japanese Defense Agency reports that the increase in SS-20s deployment was made possible by the completion of an intermediate range missile base on the northeastern border with China. When two more bases, now under construction, are completed, the Soviets will be able to deploy 135 SS-20s in the Far East.

The Soviets are also maintaining a campaign of air harassment against Japan. On Nov. 30, for the second time in two weeks, a fleet of nine Soviet bombers skirted the edges of Japanese airspace, leaving only when forced to do so by 30 Japanese planes. On Nov. 15, ten Soviet bombers flew a similar path, that time violating Japanese airspace. Since the KAL-007 downing, the Soviets have pulled this ostentatious maneuver whenever Moscow wanted to underline its pressure on the Japanese government—after the bombing-murder of the South Korean government in Rangoon, immediately after the trip of President Reagan to Japan and the Republic of Korea, and most recently during the visit of Chinese Communist Party General Secretary Hu Yaobang to Tokyo.

## Replace the 'China Card'

This pattern of escalating Soviet military pressure in the region has posed an urgent challenge to the United States to rapidly reverse the Carter administration era's policy of stra-

tegic withdrawal from the Far East, which has gone so far that liberal Democrats are demanding that the United States dismantle its base at Subic Bay in the Philippines. President Reagan's trip to Seoul and Tokyo in early November has laid the basis for a new U.S. strategic configuration in Asia. This policy replaces the Henry Kissinger-Carter administration "China Card"—whereby the United States disregarded the security of its long-term allies in favor of a policy of reliance upon Peking. The Reagan administration retains a desire to have good relations with China, but not at the expense of its crucial allies throughout the region. The primary point of American foreign policy toward the region, President Reagan told Premier Yasuhiro Nakasone, is "Japan first." Around that "partnership for good"—which the Reagan administration expects to mean an upgraded military contribution from Japan—U.S. allies are to be arrayed.

First to be tied to this alliance is Seoul, which has come under a barrage of provocations from its northern neighbors. In testimony Nov. 17 before that country's National Assembly, Defense Minister Yun Song-min reported that Reagan's declaration in Seoul that the defense of South Korea is "vital to the security of the United States" puts Korea in the highest category of U.S. allies, placing it back under the United States's nuclear umbrella. The Carter administration, he said, had downgraded Korea to the "Number 3 category, which entitled it to only naval and air power assistance from the United States in security emergencies." According to the *Korea Herald*, a high-ranking U.S. administration official who was in Seoul with President Reagan stated that if North Korea launches another full-fledged attack on the South, the United States would join in its defense and would not exclude using "nuclear retaliation."

The Reagan trip was followed the last week of November by a tour to Korea of John Vessey, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, to review U.S. military forces there and discuss military modernization and increased cooperation with South Korea. Vessey then went to Japan, where he met with Foreign Minister Abe and the deputy head of the Japanese Defense Agency.

Vessey's trip was followed up in the first week of December with three days of joint exercises between U.S. and South Korean air force fighters and bombers (500 of them), aimed at "improving the offensive capability" against possible North Korean attack. In the past two months, as the Soviet press has also taken angry note, joint exercises between the U.S. and Korean forces have also included Japanese observers, a sign of the growing military cooperation among all three powers. The Koreans have also been bolstering their naval power. Admiral O Kyong-hwan, chief of naval operations, announced right before Reagan's trip that South Korea can deter any seaborne attacks from the North by virtue of establishment of a ship-to-ship missiles system and an antisubmarine defense structure.

### **Peking-Tokyo talks**

Assuring that there is no further point of provocation on the Korean peninsula is now a major concern not only of the United States and South Korea, but also of Japan, for whom Korea functions as the front line of defense, and Peking. Ten days after President Reagan departed from Tokyo, Premier Nakasone hosted Chinese Communist leader Hu Yaobang, as Washington works to ensure ties from Peking from both sides.

In the talks between Hu and Japan's Nakasone, aside from accords boosting Japan's participation in Chinese industry-building, the major agenda points were the necessity for mutual efforts to ease tensions in Korea, and the Soviet installation of more SS-20s on its Asian rim.

In a public statement before Hu, Nakasone declared his concern for the "definite heightening of international tensions . . . particularly the stronger Soviet military presence in Asia represented by SS-20 missile deployment." Both leaders agreed that they would press Moscow to reduce the missile deployment.

The visit drew quick fire from the Kremlin. *Pravda* broke with its new friendly tone toward Peking, whom it is trying to court for a Sino-Soviet rapprochement, to harshly attack Chinese Foreign Minister Wu Xueqian for his endorsement of the Japanese claim on the four northern islands—the Kuriles—which reverted to the U.S.S.R. after World War II. "One can understand the words of Wu only as an attempt, in violation of international agreements and in deviation from China's previous position, to interfere in the business of other countries," said *Pravda*. The Wu declaration, the article continued, can only be seen "as a manifestation of hegemonism"—the phrase of accusation used throughout the period of the Sino-Soviet split. The Soviets are letting Peking know that, no matter what "confidence-building measures" the two nations have agreed upon, it is Moscow that will set the terms for any rapprochement.

Just as Hu's trip was ending on Nov. 21, the United States announced the guidelines for a relaxation of rules governing technology transfer to China. The new directives allow for

the export to China of sensitive "dual use" technology, and are expected to lead to a greatly increased export in computers and semiconductors, with the proviso that China will not re-export the technologies to third countries, like North Korea. In January, Chinese Premier Zhao Zhanqiang will be hosted by Reagan in Washington, to be followed by the President's trip to Peking in April.

### **Soviet military deployment**

Moscow has more reasons than history to protest Peking's backing of Japan on this issue. Although the Soviets officially acknowledge that the Kuriles should at some point be returned to Japan, the islands have rapidly been built up as military installations right at Japan's northern doorstep. In March of this year, the Soviets began using the islands as a base for MIG-21 supersonic fighters, which have been used on several occasions to intercept Japanese air self-defense force aircraft. The four islands off Japan lie along an arc of Soviet deployment which begins with air and navy bases in Kamchatka Peninsula, and extends through Afghanistan, which has given Moscow uncontested strategic superiority in the region:

- The Soviets now have triple warhead SS-20s stationed in three locations: central Siberia, east of Lake Baikal, and now on the northeastern border with China. These missiles demonstrate that the Soviet deployment toward China and Asia is first and foremost a nuclear deployment.

- Moscow also has 52 divisions of highly mechanized and highly trained troops stationed in its Asian theatre.

- There are major Soviet installations in Vladivostok and on Sakhalin Island north of the Korean peninsula, even though half the island is owned by Japan.

- The Soviets are establishing a major base at the port of Cam Ranh Bay in Vietnam. According to reports from Bangkok, the Cam Ranh naval base is now able to accommodate 12 Soviet warships at any one time. Large depots, communications facilities, including radar navigation and radio monitoring equipment and bombproof submarine pens have been built at the Vietnamese port. By expanding Cam Ranh, situated halfway between Vladivostok and the Black Sea, the Soviets have radically improved their maneuverability from the Pacific to the Persian Gulf.

- The Soviet Pacific fleet is the largest in the Soviet Navy, consisting of 765 ships, including 120 ballistic missiles and attack submarines.

- Since its 1979 invasion of Afghanistan, Moscow has built up a western equivalent of its Far Eastern Command, comprised of 100,000 troops and air bases guarded by SAM missiles.

Through the increased deployment of SS-20s to Asia and the air harassment of Japan, Moscow is making known its intentions on U.S. allies in the region, a course that will not be stopped unless the United States moves quickly to make the price of war too high even for the Kremlin command.