

RUSSO-JAPANESE RELATIONS

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(April-May, 1945)

The salient feature of Russo-Japanese relations during the eight weeks which have elapsed since abrogation of the neutrality pact, has been the fulfillment of fears expressed at that time by Japanese Ambassador Sato at Moscow, that Russia would attempt to coerce Japan into adopting "a policy of obsequiousness based on fear".¹

Turning aside Japanese efforts to enter discussions regarding strengthening relations, with a casual "there is plenty of time"², Soviet diplomats adopted what seemed to the Japanese an intransigent attitude on other matters. While pressing for settlement of questions long in dispute, such as the return of Czarist Russian buildings in North China and Manchuria³, they lodged heated protests and demands regarding current incidents - expropriation by the Japanese military in Shanghai of apartments occupied by Soviet citizens (including the Tass correspondent)⁴; alleged violations of the Mongolian frontier by Japanese planes⁵; the "arbitrary and barbarous" action of Japanese police in arresting Metropolitan Sergei, head of the Russian Orthodox Church in Tokyo, who, bearing a diplomatic passport as a "representative of the Russian Church",

(1) H-176782, 7 Apr., Sato-Tokyo; DS-#1109 and #1110, Apr. 8, 9th
(2) H-179966, 23 Apr. & 180137, 24 Apr., Tokyo-Moscow; DS-#1131, 30 Apr.
(3) H-182787, 4 May; H-185334, 10 May, Togo Circular;
H-185398, 10 May, Togo-Moscow.
(4) H-179685, 27 Apr., Tokyo-Moscow; H-183174, 30 Apr., Tokyo-Moscow;
H-179686, 12 Apr., Sato-Tokyo; H-183219, 4 May, Tokyo-Shanghai;
H-184055, 8 May, Tokyo-Shanghai; H-179210, 3 Apr. Shanghai-Tokyo;
H-185773, 21 Apr., Togo-Moscow.
(5) H-180597, 26 Apr., Tokyo-Kalgan

intended visiting Patriarch Alexei in Moscow; delay of more than a year in constructing a (still incomplete) air raid shelter for the Soviet Embassy in Tokyo⁶; * "shadowing" of Soviet consular officials at Dairen^{**}, etc.⁷

Rejecting appeals from the Japanese Embassy, the Soviet courts in April confiscated the #6 Kosei Maru and imposed a ten-year sentence on her First Mate for having "deliberately violated Soviet waters for the purpose of collecting spy intelligence"^{8***}.

Meanwhile an unrelenting Russian press and radio jarred harshly on already taut Japanese nerves. From muddied waters of the past forty years, there was hauled forth to public gaze each of Japan's political sins. Among other symbols of Japanese aggressive policy, Manchuria, the Kwantung Peninsula and Sakhalin were duly exhibited, with Port Arthur^{****} given a

* During the raid of May 25/26th (in which the Foreign, War, Navy and Greater East Asia Ministries were all destroyed or heavily damaged), the Soviet Embassy was hit and the consular department burned out. (H-187032, 26 May).

** Last December, Vice Consul Petrov at Dairen was reported as involved with Chinese Communists operating a clandestine radio.

*** Ostensibly fishing, the vessel was actually on a Japanese Navy mission involving location of Soviet minefields, apparently some distance north-east of the Tumen River mouth, on the Korean-Siberian border. The captain appears either to have committed suicide or been killed in resisting arrest.

**** Of interest is a mention in traffic that a book entitled: "Port Arthur" has become popular in Soviet naval circles. A propaganda film of the same name, apparently a French production, was being shown recently in a Washington theatre.

- (6) Apr. 11, 1945; Dip. Sum. #1168, 6 June.
- (7) H-185090, 3 May, Togo Circular; H-177193, 6 Apr., Hsinking-Tokyo.
- (8) H-180854, 25 Apr. & 182854/55, 25 Apr., Sato-Tokyo;
H-183069, 3 May, Sato-Tokyo; DS, 31 Aug. & DS #1135, 4 May.

prominent place.⁹ Japan's latest transgression - "helping Germany" in her war on Russia, was dwelt on at length.¹⁰

Complementing the verbal barrage was the silent but more to be feared increase in Soviet military strength in the East. Japanese couriers and diplomats, alerted by Tokyo, reported "an average of thirty eastbound trains a day" carrying troops, tanks, guns, planes and supplies.* On at least three occasions Soviet planes were reported to be reconnoitering over the Sea of Japan and South Sakhalin.¹¹

The effectiveness of these Soviet moves is reflected in numerous despatches, particularly in repeated warnings from Foreign Minister Togo to Japanese officials at home and abroad to adopt: "Don't antagonize Russia" as the keynote of all their activities.

From Harbin, Consul General Miyakawa complained on May 25th that "with the Russian propaganda offensive directed at Japan and Manchukuo..., it is observable that the White Russians here have been gradually turning away from us and assuming a very high and mighty attitude".¹²

- (9) H-177504, 10 Apr., Harbin-Tokyo; H-177750, 7 Apr., Stockholm-Tokyo; H-180300, 13 Apr., Harbin-Tokyo; H-176955, 7 Apr., Moscow-Tokyo; DS-#1111, 10 Apr.; DS-#1132, 1 May; N.Y. Times, 8 Apr.
- (10) H-179861, 13 Apr., Harbin-Tokyo; H-187442, 16 Apr., Vladivostok-Hsinking.
- (11) H-183100, 3 May, Berne-Chungking; 183394, 6 May, Moscow-Tokyo; H-182852, 5 May, Moscow-Tokyo; H-186879, 18 Apr., Vladivostok-Tokyo; H-178387, 14 Apr., Peking-Tokyo; 179380, 14 Apr., Moscow-Tokyo; H-180790, 27 Apr., Tokyo Circular; 183070, 3 May, Vladivostok-Tokyo; H-186381, 22 May, Hsinking-Moscow; H-189139, 4 June, Moscow-Tokyo.
- (12) H-183205, 8 May, Tokyo-Peking; H-177296, 9 Apr., Tokyo-Moscow; H-177064, 9 Apr., Moscow-Tokyo; H-181770, 2 May 1040244-Comb; H-18349, 9 May, Moscow-Tokyo; H-187926, 25 May, Harbin-Tokyo.

* In one 68-hour period ending May 29th, 200 trains were observed, carrying 533 planes, 501 tanks, 1149 trucks, 88 field guns, etc.

In a gloomy message from Moscow on 9 May, Ambassador Sato saw the probability that Russia, availing herself of the golden opportunity to settle long-standing accounts, was "planning to seize the power of life and death over Japan". Considering the possibility that without actually resorting to war Russia might seek to gain her ends by offering to act as mediator, Sato saw that "if, backed by their vast power, the Russians were to succeed in effecting such a peace for the benefit of the Anglo-Americans ('now paying a tremendous price on Okinawa and in the future in Central and South China'), they would achieve without effort an international position surpassing that of their allies, a point which will not escape the eagle-eyed Stalin". Russia's price for her services as mediator, Sato thought, would probably revolve around the dissolution of the Portsmouth Treaty,* more or less as follows:

- (a) Return to Russia of South Sakhalin.
- (b) Cancellation of existing fishing rights.
- (c) Opening of the Tsugaru Strait (between Honshu and Hokkaido) to Russian shipping.
- (d) Return to Manchukuo to Chinese rule.
- (e) Transfer to Russia of the North Manchuria railroad and all other strategic railway lines in northern Manchukuo which have been constructed by Japan.
- (f) Placing of Harbin under Soviet administration.
- (g) Transfer to Russia of Japan's lease (from China) to the Kwantung Territory.
- (h) Incorporation of Inner Mongolia into Soviet Outer Mongolia.
- (i) In addition to the above, Sato thought it likely that Russia would bring up "the disposition of Korea and the question of China and other matters."

* A Harbin-Tokyo despatch of 22 May reported a rumor that "the Soviet Union will soon demand the abrogation of the Portsmouth Treaty... and they will shortly send a part of their fleet to the Far East". (H-188149).

On the other hand, Russia might find it convenient because of growing friction with the Anglo-Americans, to concentrate on European questions and on domestic recovery, allowing England and America to continue to sustain heavy losses. But whether she chose war or either of the above courses, Sato warned, Japan will "be forced to dance to whatever tune strikes the Russian fancy" unless she husband her present strength and increases it to the utmost. To this end he suggested complete abandonment of the southern areas and a concentration of effort in North China in preparation for a war of attrition. In view of Japan's vulnerability to American bombing, an increase of industrial strength in Manchukuo was of primary importance.¹³ In a message dated 22 May, Sato thought the Russian situation would "demand particular attention about July or August";¹⁴ while on 26 May the Japanese Military Attache at Lisbon reported the possibility that as a result of Anglo-American scheming, Russia might "enter the war against Japan at the same time that the U. S. launches its all-out attack on the Japanese mainland at the end of June".¹⁵

Also mindful of the part Russia might play, but less inclined than Sato to see Japan continue a war in which she faces "extinction as a nation", Minister Kase at Berns counselled Tokyo on May 14th to "renounce all the consolations of self-intoxication and keep foremost in mind the necessity of seeing the truth as it actually is". A plan must be worked out "for changing the situation by diplomatic means and, for the sake of the Empire's future,

(13) H-182459, 9 May, Moscow-Tokyo.
 (14) H-186276, 22 May, Moscow-Tokyo.
 (15) D-10379 - DI, 26 May, Jap Mil. Attache, Lisbon-Tokyo.

retaining as much of a foothold as possible". Japan could try to achieve such a change either by "direct approach to the Anglo-Americans" or "by talking with the Russians".

The first method would involve the danger, should the peace offer prove unacceptable, of "offering a temptation to the Russians to enter the war in order to insure a voice in the disposition of East Asia".

With regard to the second course, Kase reasoned, that Russia, despite heavy losses and need for a respite, still has great self-confidence. In the peculiar position of cooperating with the Anglo-Americans and at the same time making preparations to withstand them, Russia "certainly does not want all the spoils of the Pacific war to go to England, the United States, China, etc." To look for an early frontal clash between Russia and the Anglo-Americans" is mere wishful thinking, since Russia is not going to sacrifice her relations with the Allies for anything we can offer". Therefore, any approach to the Russians must be made "with a proposal for a general peace, asking for their help and offering them a considerable reward". Should Russia really desire peace between Japan and the Anglo-Americans, "she may want to accomplish her objectives without further fighting, and may be therefore willing to use her good offices".¹⁶

In addition to the above diplomats' analyses, traffic affords the following views of the Japanese military. On 7 May, the Army General Staff informed its military attaches in Stockholm and Lisbon that "there has been a steady increase in the concentration of Soviet troops, particularly air personnel

(16) Dip. Sum. #1149, 18 May, '45.

which have been transferred from European Russia". "We must view with alarm the possibility of future military activity against Japan".¹⁷

In early May, a Lieut. Colonel Hamada, an intelligence officer on the Kwantung Army Staff (very probably the Hamada who until recently was attached to the Japanese Military Attache's office in Moscow), stated that;

"Russia will probably leave a considerable number of troops in Europe, but it can be expected that the remainder will be redistributed. It is hard to say whether the present eastward movement of troops is being carried out:

- (a) for the purpose of bringing pressure against Japan;
- (b) in order to launch a military offensive against Japan and Manchukuo; or
- (c) because Russia's gaze extends from Outer Mongolia and western China toward India, Tibet, Iran and the Middle East."

"Assuming, however, that the Russians do intend to attack Manchukuo, they will probably try to gain a quick victory by using an overwhelming force—at least double the strength of ours - since a long war would tend to unsettle their social structure. In such an event, the Russians may concentrate airplanes on our eastern border and then, having diverted our troops in that direction, will invade western Manchukuo."

"We must be on guard as soon as we notice any marked movement of trucks toward eastern Siberia. The Russians at present have about 40,000 trucks in that area and will need another 60,000 for an invasion of Manchukuo. In any event, they will need at least three months to transport the necessary troops and armaments (to Eastern Siberia)."¹⁸

More inclined to optimism regarding Russia, Naval Attache Mishina at Stockholm believed on May 15, that Russia "will let Japan and America fight it out and, while American power is expended, they will be reviving their own power and carrying out their policy towards China." "Moreover they will try to prevent America from gaining a foothold to advance her influence in the future in East Asia". Mishina ruefully added, however, that "it is unlikely

(17) Dip. Sum. #1141, 10 May, '45.

(18) Dip. Sum. #1156, 25 May, '45.

that they are preparing to overthrow America by aiding Japan". With regard to England, Mishina believed that:

"Russia, particularly in regard to the problem of handling Germany, the Aegean Sea and Denmark, entertains hopes which she has cherished for years. However, those same problems are matters of life and death to England, and in view of this there is a very strong probability that those issues... will lead to war".¹⁹

In a later despatch (29 May), Mishina informed the Navy Vice Minister and Naval General Staff at Tokyo that "according to reports obtained from reliable sources, British and American diplomats (in Stockholm) say that Britain and the United States would make peace if Japan would give up all territory acquired since 1931". Japan "might, however, retain Manchuria...to provide a barrier against Russia". Mishina advised that "there is a good chance of the enemy coming forth with some peace moves in the near future", because: "Russian arrogance is becoming day by day more manifest; England, if she could recover her colonies in East Asia, would be willing to make peace with Japan immediately"; and the United States, although confident of eventual victory, sees a continuance of the war as "resulting only to Russia's advantage". In view of this situation.. the best policy for Japan would be to increase still more the morale of the people and their determination to fight on to the end".²⁰

Also from Sweden, Japanese Minister Okamoto on 26 May forwarded to Tokyo an intelligence report in which Russia's shift of military strength to the East is seen as possibly "a gesture to England and the United States, not signifying that the Soviet Union will enter the war against Japan". He continued:

(19) 15 May, NA-Stockholm to Navy Genl. Staff, Tokyo.

Dip. Summary #1151, 20 May, '45.

(20) 29 May, NA Sweden-Tokyo.

Dip.Sum. #1168, 6 June.

~~TOP SECRET ULTRA~~
(apparently evaluating public opinion in Stockholm)

"It is inevitable that the United States and the Soviet Union will in the future come into conflict on the Chinese continent, and conflict among the three Powers in Europe will from now on have free play, so it may not be impossible that the British and Americans, once having forced Japan to surrender unconditionally, should then impose generous terms upon her in order to make use of Japan against the Soviet Union".²¹

While these long-range views of diplomats and attaches abroad posed a doubt that Russia intended war, Foreign Minister Togo could not help "feeling anxious", and on 24 May instructed Minister Nishi at Hsinking, Manchukuo to be on the lookout for and report immediately any border incidents which "it is to be expected will be committed by the Russians".²²

The increasing fury of American blows on the homeland gave a new urgency to the need for learning Russia's intentions. On 21 May (four days before the Foreign Office was destroyed), Foreign Minister Togo despatched two interesting messages. In one of them (a circular), he denied categorically that "Japan has ever made peace proposals to America and England",* and asserted that in the probable event of repetition of "this sort of propaganda...the fixed policy of Japan will be in no way affected by it". In the other message he instructed Ambassador Sato at Moscow to see Molotov "as soon as possible"...and sound him out on Russia's intentions toward Japan", picking up at the same time any available information about the San Francisco Conference.²³

* On 19 May, Minister Morishima at Lisbon suggested denial of Reuter report that Japanese industrialists, including Mitsui and Mitsubishi sent peace proposals to Britain and U. S. through the U.S.S.R. (H-189042).

(21) H-187564, 26 May, Stockholm-Tokyo.

(22) H-186883, 21 May, Tokyo-Moscow, H186243, 21 May, Tokyo (Togo) Circular.
Dip. Sum. #1159, 28 May.

(23) Dip. Sum. #1166, 4 June.

After eight days (during which Mr. Hopkins conferred several times with Marshal Stalin), Sato succeeded in getting a forty-minute interview with Molotov.

Sato's account of the interview with Molotov leaves a mental picture of a spaniel in the presence of a mastiff who also knows where the bone is hidden. With the obsequiousness which he himself had foreseen and feared, Sato saw as "a matter for congratulation" Russia's "great victory in the war against Germany"; while, with Japan, who "no longer had any of her former allies, the situation was somewhat delicate". He earnestly hoped that "no important change would take place in Russo-Japanese relations. While Japan, following Russia's example, desired "to end hostilities as quickly as possible", the Pacific war was a "matter of life and death." "As a result of America's attitude", Japan had "no choice but to continue the fight".²⁴

Replying to Sato's inquiry "concerning the views of the Russian Government, which is a neutral in this war", Molotov stated:

"Russia is not a belligerent. We have had our fill of war in Europe and our only desire is to obtain a guarantee of future peace." He later stated: "The paramount question facing Russia today is the domestic problem, and this demands our immediate and deep attention".²⁵

Asked whether he "had been satisfied with the course of the San Francisco Conference," Molotov smiled and replied: "on the whole, yes".

Replying to a question put by Molotov regarding the outlook of the Pacific war,* Sato, explaining Japan's determination to continue, stated that

* On 24 May, the Naval Attache at Berne relayed to the Naval General Staff at Tokyo a French report that Russia agreed at Yalta to aid the Allies if after a specified period Japan had not yielded.

(24) H-187831, 29 May, Moscow-Tokyo.
(25) H-187060, 30 May, Moscow-Tokyo.

her objective was "to free the southern regions from the yoke of the European countries so that they might realize self government and independence". Referring to the case of Indo-China, Sato expressed great satisfaction "that the special declaration of France's DeGaulle Government had included a comprehensive offer of self-government for French Indo-China".* Sato said he was aware of Molotov's expression of the Soviet views on the question of colonies at the San Francisco Conference, and he understood that the ultimate aim for colonies was independence. He added that "evidently T. V. Soong (China) had also been expressing the same views".

Molotov, "though he laughed, asked in return with a certain sarcasm whether Japan's policies were concerned principally with the northern areas or the southern". Sato "returned his smile and suggested that he might be thinking of Korea, whereupon Molotov stated in an even more cynical manner that policies differed according to climes". To this, Sato replied that "the Korean question was one which would have to be studied seriously after the war".²⁶

Reporting the interview to Tokyo, Sato forecast that "we are facing future trouble with Russia and it is absolutely essential that we take immediate steps to meet this situation". He urged that Japan should at the very least take "decisive action" in settling all pending controversies with the Russians, and requested Foreign Minister Togo to "please have the Cabinet or the Supreme Council for the Direction of the War decide how far they are willing to go in making concessions to Russia".²⁷

*Apparently referring to the 23 March declaration of the French Government to the effect that Indo-China should be granted a greater degree of freedom within the "French Union".

(26) Dip. Sum. #1169, 7 June.

(27) Dip. Sum. #1164, 2 June.

On June 1st, with Tokyo's Ministries in ruins, Togo addressed Sato as follows:

"In view of our situation both at home and abroad, it is quite clear that we will find it extremely difficult to reach any settlement with Russia. We must realize, however, that it is a matter of the utmost urgency that we should not only prevent Russia from entering the war but should also induce her to adopt a favorable attitude toward Japan. I would therefore like you to miss no opportunity to talk to the Soviet leaders.

As far as we here in Tokyo are concerned, I feel that there would be certain disadvantages in my talking to Soviet Ambassador Malik personally. I have therefore delegated this task to former Premier Hirota, who will confer with Malik as soon as possible. Hirota will keep a close watch on Soviet tendencies and will try to lead the Russians along the lines we desire". 28

Summarizing the foregoing, it may be said that the months of April and May appear to have brought to completion the conditioning or "softening-up" of Japan with regard to Russia. While this applies particularly to the Foreign Office, the once disdainful Japanese Army also is now inclined to "view with alarm".

Whether the increasing weight of American bombs has pressed into fertile soil the seeds of peace suggested by Japanese diplomats in Switzerland, traffic as yet does not reveal. There is, however, ample evidence that in her present straits Japan is a ready prospect for tornado insurance from the northwest, and expects that the premium will be computed at "emergency rates" - this despite desperate hopes that Russia "will let Japan and America fight it out".

(28) Dip. Sum. #1166, 4 June.
H-188568, 1 June, Tokyo-Moscow.

In view of the attention which Japan has given to ways and means of alienating Russia from the Anglo-Americans, it is of interest to note the absence from the foregoing suggestions of diplomats and attaches, of recognition of the effect that would be produced were Russia, in her present status as a neutral, induced to secure through cession by formal treaty certain prizes (to be lost by Japan anyhow) whose disposition might otherwise be subject to controversy at the eventual peace table. Whether Foreign Minister Togo "will try to lead the Russians along" these or other lines in the forthcoming talks between ex-Premier Hirota and Soviet Ambassador Malik may be disclosed in traffic "by July or August".