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## Special Analysis

### **USSR-JAPAN-KOREA: Bleak Prospects for Soviet Policy**

*The shutdown of the South Korean airliner has produced an upsurge of anti-Soviet sentiment in Japan and South Korea and further dimmed Moscow's prospects for breaking out of its diplomatic isolation in Northeast Asia. The affair has added to the strains in relations with Tokyo, already soured by the USSR's military buildup opposite Japan and its refusal to show flexibility on the Northern Territories question. It also has halted Moscow's cautious steps toward a dialogue with the South Koreans. On the other hand, the incident may prompt new Soviet efforts to repair ties with P'yongyang and to capitalize on heightened Korean tensions.*

Moscow's relations with Tokyo have been dealt a series of setbacks since the first of the year. The shutdown followed disclosures about Soviet intelligence activities and the expulsion of Soviet agents and added to the growing concern about the scope of the Soviet military buildup in the Far East. A series of attacks by Foreign Minister Gromyko and other Soviet officials on Japan's defense cooperation with the US has also aggravated relations.

Moscow seems determined to remain inflexible on issues of concern to Japan and is insisting that Tokyo must take the first step to improve the relationship. Although unwilling to make political concessions, the Soviets are seeking an expansion of trade and Japanese investment, arguing that economic ties should not depend on the status of political relations.

The continuing buildup of SS-20s in the Far East has also provoked a series of Japanese complaints to which the Soviets have been unresponsive. General Secretary Andropov's recent statements offering a possible freeze on SS-20 deployments in connection with an INF accord in Europe has not allayed Japanese concerns. Moscow has also rejected Japanese concerns about the buildup of Soviet forces in the Kuriles.

The Soviets continue to argue that Japan's defense cooperation with the US poses the real threat to Japanese security, and they have protested Japan's support for the US buildup in the region. Moscow has, at the same time, been ineffectual in trying to discourage Tokyo from strengthening the country's defenses. The Japanese were only angered, not deterred, when the Soviet media hinted that Japanese cities might again be subject to nuclear attack.

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Moscow apparently takes some solace from Japan's willingness to continue a political dialogue despite Soviet intransigence. Soviet inflexibility on the basic security and territorial issues between the two sides indicates that Moscow is willing to tolerate a continuation of the poor state of relations for the foreseeable future. [redacted]

### Changing Korean Priorities

Moscow seems to be using the inevitable, if temporary, setback to its growing unofficial contacts with South Korea to improve its relations with P'yongyang. The USSR's decision to boycott the Inter-Parliamentary Union session held in Seoul a month ago probably reflected a recognition that the shutdown had soured relations with Seoul for the time being. On the other hand, Moscow has also ignored statements by South Korean officials reiterating their interest in better relations with the USSR and has chosen even to raise questions about the suitability of Seoul as a site for the 1988 Olympics. [redacted]

The USSR has taken several steps to improve the atmosphere for its relations with P'yongyang. The Soviet media have given unusually prominent treatment to otherwise routine developments in the bilateral relationship. They have also replayed North Korean charges about alleged US-South Korean efforts to increase tensions on the peninsula and have supported P'yongyang's contention that the bombing in Rangoon was a plot by South Korean President Chun himself. [redacted]

[redacted]

Although the Soviet policy of opposing a new round of hostilities on the Korean peninsula has not appeared to change, Moscow may have reasons to welcome some renewed tensions between the North and the South. The Soviets are determined to play a role in any renewed effort to settle Korea's future, and they may have been alarmed by Japanese press reports of a new proposal for easing tensions on the Korean peninsula—talks involving China, the two Koreas, and the US, but not the USSR. If so, a desire to avoid being shut out of the process may also in part explain Moscow's renewed interest in shoring up ties with P'yongyang. [redacted]

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### Prospects

Resistance in Moscow to the kind of concessions that could mollify Tokyo appears to be substantial and enduring. Recent events are likely to have strengthened the impression in Moscow that serious efforts to improve ties with Japan at this time would not be productive. For the foreseeable future, the Soviets are likely to be primarily concerned with efforts to impede US-Japanese movement toward closer defense cooperation. [redacted]

The Soviets will, at the same time, watch for an opportunity to resume expanding their contacts with Seoul. Although Soviet officials insist they are not particularly interested in developing trade, cultural, or state-to-state relations with Seoul, they may view the South Koreans as a potential source of much-needed foreign technical cooperation in Siberian development. Moscow also views the possibility of improving relations with South Korea as a way to discourage P'yongyang from moving closer to China. [redacted]

The Soviets have long avoided providing North Korea with offensive weapons systems that might encourage P'yongyang to seek unilateral reunification of Korea by military means, and there is no indication of a change in this policy. Soviet steps to strengthen ties with North Korea could, however, include proposals for some increased military cooperation and perhaps an offer of more advanced defensive weapons as well as increased economic aid. Soviet distrust of North Korean actions and P'yongyang's need to maintain a productive relationship with Beijing, nevertheless, suggest that the warming in Soviet-North Korean relations will be limited. [redacted]

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