

# OPINION

## EDITORIAL

### PEACEFUL NUCLEAR COOPERATION

# Building Russo-Japanese ties

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The Russian Federation has sent out mixed signals over the last several weeks concerning the return of the Northern Territories to Japan as part of a formal peace treaty. Russian President Boris Yeltsin's March 23 ouster of his entire Cabinet makes the situation all the more unpredictable, on the eve of his summit in Kawana with Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto on April 18.

Japan probably cannot expect Russia's position on the Northern Territories to be clarified anytime soon — not at Kawana and not before Russia's parliamentary elections in 1999. But if relations can continue to improve, there should be good chances to achieve a formal peace treaty by 2000, as Yeltsin and Hashimoto agreed last November to do.

What is needed is a gradually increasing process of engagement, to build up cooperation and trust between the two neighbors. Indeed, this next round of talks is billed as "another step in the development of relations between Russia and Japan in the direction of good neighborliness, partnership and deep multilateral cooperation," according to a joint statement.

Diplomatic niceties aside, this really is the time to cement improved relations on several fronts. Japan has already committed to extensive financial assistance, having granted Russia a \$1.5 billion loan in February to support World Bank programs on Russian market reforms.

But financial assistance alone does little to improve cooperation and understanding. Russia and Japan should also undertake joint projects in areas of clear mutual benefit. Russia's post-Cold War disarmament and nuclear cleanup efforts are critical areas for such cooperation. Japan could help expedite these vital programs, which have been delayed by technical and financial problems, and gain security and environmental benefits for itself as well as Russia. In particular, nuclear materials removed from dismantled nuclear weapons — i.e., plutonium and highly-enriched uranium — must be securely stored and then ultimately disposed of, so that they can never again be used for military purposes.

Both of these are areas where Japan has a great deal to offer because of its advanced civilian nuclear technologies and experience.

Japan is already assisting Russia on the storage side as part of a \$100 million commitment toward denuclearization of the former Soviet republics. Beyond this, Japan is well positioned to participate on the disposition side as well: Technologies developed here over the past 20 years to make nuclear fuel out of plutonium and to consume such material in nuclear power plants are perfectly suited to Russia's disarmament needs. Japan should now help Russia make and use

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fuel in order to destroy weapons-grade plutonium, along with other G-8 nations addressing this matter in preparation for summit next month in Britain. To speed the process and help the financing, Japan can also purchase some of the fuel, to destroy it in Japanese nuclear power plants while at the same time producing electricity.

Japan has unique expertise to contribute to nuclear disarmament and Russia needs the help. This would offer an olive branch to Russia in the form of Japanese technology — not just cash — to solve a problem belonging not only to Russia but also to Japan and the world.

Cooperation on disarmament can form the basis for a broader peaceful nuclear cooperation agreement between Russia and Japan for other post-Cold War projects of mutual benefit. Japan has recently helped Russia build a treatment facility for radioactive waste from Russian nuclear submarines moored in Vladivostok, preventing a repeat of the

1993 incident when a Russian ship dumped such waste into the Sea of Japan. Japan should enter into further programs with Russia to promote sound environmental treatment of radioactive waste and prevent radiological pollution. For example, Russia's obsolete submarines, of which there are about 150, must now be defueled and decommissioned, and Japanese experience doing exactly this with retired nuclear power plants will be highly relevant. Furthermore, both Russia and Japan need secure storage facilities for spent fuel from nuclear power plants and should consider collaboration in building a joint storage facility. Russia also needs help converting its formerly secret "nuclear cities" to civilian economies, where hundreds of thousands of engineers and technicians were employed and who now need paying jobs. Japan and Russia could conduct joint research and development programs on peaceful nuclear and other applications in such cities. This could be a vehicle to give Japan access to unique Russian technologies useful to Japan's civilian energy programs.

Japanese assistance to Russia's post-Cold War nuclear cleanup needs can clearly increase global nuclear security and prevent radiological pollution. At the same time, they can improve cross-cultural understanding through the interactions of Japanese and Russian scientists, engineers and government officials who will have extensive opportunities to work side by side.

A gradual warming of Russian-Japanese relations is under way in many fields. Cooperation on nuclear disarmament first and foremost, as well as related post-Cold War matters, will surely contribute to this trend. The outlook for reaching a formal peace treaty by 2000 continues to improve. In this spirit, Hashimoto and Yeltsin should take action toward cooperation in nuclear disarmament and related post-Cold War issues as part of the Kawana talks.

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