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SOVIET BREAK WITH JAPAN

The Soviet denunciation on 5 April of its five-year pact of neutrality with Japan ended a period during which two fundamentally hostile powers, each involved in war on another front, found it in their mutual interest to avoid hostilities with each other. Steadily since the battle for Stalingrad in the winter of 1942-43, and especially during the last year, evidence of Russian intentions to reassert her freedom of action toward Germany's Far Eastern ally had increased. At the same time, Red Army successes and Japanese military reverses had made Japan increasingly willing to make concessions to the USSR. Should the terms of the pact be strictly observed by both parties, hostilities could not result until its expiration on 25 April 1946. However, the Russians may prefer to enter the war against Japan before then, and the Soviet public apparently is being prepared for further changes in Soviet-Japanese relations.

During 1944 the Japanese, while claiming to believe that Russia would not fail to renew the non-aggression pact, had shown themselves willing to yield to the Soviet Union in the Pacific. In the Soviet-Japanese Agreements of 30 March 1944, Japan surrendered her coal and oil concessions in North (Russian) Sakhalin, and gave up fishing operations in a number of strategic areas from Vladivostok northward along the shores of the Siberian mainland and the Kamchatka peninsula. Later the Japanese, who had formerly prohibited the passage of munitions, reportedly agreed to allow the Russians to transport all types of cargoes through the vital La Perouse Straits between Karafuto (South Sakhalin) and Hokkaido.

Meanwhile, in the Soviet Union, the public was apparently being prepared for a radical shift in Soviet policy toward Japan. During the summer and fall of 1944, the Soviet press and popular lectures in Moscow devoted increasing attention to the war between Japan and Russia's Western allies, stressing Allied victories and Japan's weaknesses. On 6 November, in his speech celebrating the 27th Anniversary of the Revolution, Stalin denounced Japan as an aggressor nation. Nine days later a Soviet military commentator, pointing out that Japan was heading for defeat, reminded his audience that Japan had attacked and raided the USSR several times. By the time of the Yalta Conference in February 1945 the military situation of both Germany and Japan had so far deteriorated that the Russians apparently saw no risk in agreeing to join with China as well as the United States and Great Britain in sponsoring the United Nations Conference opening at San Francisco on 25 April, the last date on

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which the Soviet-Japanese neutrality treaty could come up for revision or denunciation.

The Soviet Union appears to have both a strong motivation and the capability for early military participation in the Far Eastern War. While there would be an advantage in waiting until Japanese strength has been reduced by the other allies to the point where the actual Russian military investment will be small, the USSR may prefer to enter the struggle sooner in order to have a more decisive voice in the settlement of Pacific affairs. The heavy defeats suffered by the Japanese in recent months may well have convinced the Russians that if they wait until the formal expiration of the pact a year from now, Japan will have collapsed in the meantime. Furthermore, they may soon feel able to add to their already considerable strength in the Far East by the redeployment of forces at present in Europe.

Soviet leaders may prefer to accumulate greater strength in the Soviet Far East before attacking Japan, being confident at the same time that Japan is so anxious to avoid further military commitments that she will not attack first. On the other hand, they may believe that the Japanese Kwantung Army in Manchuria, goaded by the denunciation of the neutrality pact, will make the first move and that the Soviet forces in the Far East could withstand such an attack. In such a case the USSR would be relieved of the blame for starting hostilities which might be advantageous in Soviet post-war dealings in the Far East.

Should the Russians decide to enter the war against Japan before the expiration of the neutrality pact in April 1946, they have already opened the way for justifying their action on legal-moral grounds. In the note handed to the Japanese Ambassador, the Soviet Government declared that "Japan, Germany's ally, has been lending assistance to the latter in her war against the USSR," and that "under such circumstances, the neutrality pact between Japan and the USSR has lost its meaning and its continuation becomes impossible." The Soviet Union had used a similar line of reasoning with regard to Bulgaria, and followed the formal note with a declaration of war.

Perhaps in order to give the Soviet people time to digest the import of the Kremlin's action, the Soviet press waited 48 hours before commenting on the denunciation of the pact, and then stressed the case against Japan. On 7 April, the newspaper *Izvestia* cited the several examples of Japanese aggression against the Soviet Far East, beginning with Japanese intervention after the last war. An article in *War and the Working Class*, entitled "Deterioration of the Military and Political Situation in Japan," reassured the Soviet people that, in spite of the efforts required to defeat Germany, Russia has continued to build up her industrial and transport potential in the Far East. Most significantly it emphasized Japanese weakness and Anglo-American strength, explaining that "the war in the Pacific proceeds under the dominance of the overwhelming superi-

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ority of forces of the Anglo-American bloc," and that "the basis for this domination of Allied armed forces is in their colossal potential with which Japan cannot compete."

On 17 March, even before the denunciation of the pact, the trade union organ *Trud* had discussed the Russian position in Siberia. It pointed out that as a result of expansion of iron-mining in the West Central Siberia heavy industry region, the Trans-Siberian railroad has already been relieved of the movement of more than 1 ½ million tons of iron ore traffic which formerly moved eastward from the Ural mountains. This capacity was now said to be free for other traffic, and the article estimated that another 300,000 tons of capacity would be available by the end of 1945.

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