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**Reviewers:**

- Akira Iriye, Harvard University
- James I. Matray, California State University, Chico

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**Review by Akira Iriye, Harvard University**

The five essays in this special issue of the *Journal of Cold War Studies* focus on Japan's place in the history of the Cold War. They all seem to show, ironically, that the nation played little or no role in the international geopolitical drama after World War II.

To summarize briefly, David Wolff discusses the failure of the Soviet Union to avoid exclusion from considerations of postwar Japanese affairs and describes the little known-meetings Joseph Stalin held with members of the Japanese Communist Party in Moscow in 1951, in which he instructed them to engage more actively in turning their country against
the United States. Shinji Yokote’s article focuses on the problem of repatriating Japanese nationals from Manchuria, Siberia, and other USSR-controlled areas and argues that the frustrations Japanese officials felt in the process steadily turned them to the United States for help, in effect pushing the country into the Cold War. Jumping to the 1969-1972 period, Vladislav Zubok discusses the exchanges between National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger and Soviet Ambassador Anatoli Dobrynin and contrasts their ‘realism’ with Japanese leaders’ lack thereof. During 1969-1972, the period of détente in U.S.-People’s Republic of China (PRC) and U.S.-USSR relations, Zubok argues that Japan missed a ‘realist’ opportunity by failing to take the initiative toward a regional system such as that being constructed in Europe. Moving several years still further, Tsuyoshi Hasegawa offers an account of Japanese foreign policy during 1978-1985 when its leaders finally were willing to call the U.S.-Japan relationship an ‘alliance,’ hardening their attitude toward the Soviet Union and identifying Japan as a Cold War player. Last, coming to the early 1990s, essentially after the end of the Cold War, Sergey Radchenko and Lisbeth Tarlow provide a detailed account of formal and informal talks between Soviet and Japanese leaders on the disputed question of the northern islands. Focusing on the Japanese politician Ichirō Ozawa’s secret talks with Mikhail Gorbachev in Moscow, the essay shows how domestic political considerations in both countries inhibited a satisfactory solution of the dispute, which has remained to this day.

Altogether, what these essays offer is a view of a Japan that was only a peripheral player in the Cold War except percept toward the very end. Its leaders and people were reluctant to play a role in the geopolitical drama because Japan had tried it once and been destroyed as a result. But even if Japan did not actively participate in the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union, as well as China (both the Republic of China and the People’s Republic of China) continued to view the country in terms of power equations. They did not want a strong Japan except when it fitted into their calculations of power. In such a perspective, Japan was a Cold War participant by default.

All this is plausible, but such a power-political approach offers few novel insights. Power calculations are quite predictable, and the Cold War seen as a geopolitical game is therefore not a very exciting subject of study. What the authors attempt to do is to fit Japan into the picture, in the process offering some interesting fresh data but without significantly altering conventional accounts of Cold War history as yet another chapter in the long history of ‘the rise and fall of the great powers.’

However, several non-geopolitical themes do appear in some of the essays. The story of Japanese Communist Party leaders visiting Joseph Stalin, for instance, has as much to do with inter-party factionalism as with geopolitics. It did nothing to alter the course of the Cold War, but it served to reshape the party, whose primary interest abroad was its relationships with other communist parties, more a transnational than an international phenomenon. Likewise, the trauma of hundreds of thousands of Japanese trapped overseas after the end of the war was above all a human drama and had little to do, at least at the inception, with global geopolitics. It would be possible to fit the story not into the
framework of the Cold War, but of the history of displaced persons, refugees, migrants, and the like, a fit subject of study in transnational history.

It is ironic, as Tsuyoshi Hasegawa demonstrates, that Japan was beginning to show its willingness to play a geopolitical role in world affairs just when the Cold War was winding down. This reveals the Japanese (and, for that matter, American) leaders' inability to grasp significant changes that were reshaping the world at that time, and ever since. If the essays in the volume show that Japan played a minor role in the Cold War, it was perhaps a good thing.

Mark Kramer, the editor-in-chief of the Journal of Cold War Studies, deserves praise for devoting the Spring 2013 issue exclusively to the topic of Soviet-Japanese Relations during the Cold War. Six scholars with recognized expertise on the subject have written the five solid articles that appear in this special issue. They first presented the essays at an international conference that Hokkaido University’s Slavic Research Center sponsored on “The Cold War in Northeast Asia: New Evidence and Perspectives” on 25-27 June 2008 in Sapporo, Japan. Two other papers from the conference will appear in a future issue of the Journal of Cold War Studies. The Sapporo conference affirms the shift over the past two decades in research on the Cold War away from a dominant focus on the interaction between the United States and the Soviet Union, especially in Europe. Encouraging this trend, Kramer writes in his Editor’s Note, has been the ongoing release of new “diplomatic correspondence, intragovernment memoranda, intelligence reports, transcripts of high-level meetings, military planning documents, and other formerly sensitive items from former Warsaw Pact countries, China, South Korea, and Taiwan . . .” (1). Referencing many of these types of sources, the authors in this issue examine Japan as an actor and factor in the history of the Cold War in Northeast Asia from its onset in 1945 to its finish in 1991.

In the first essay, titled “Japan and Stalin’s Policy toward Northeast Asia after World War II,” David Wolff examines three separate issues—Japan’s place in Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin’s policy toward postwar Northeast Asia; Stalin’s reaction to the U.S negotiation of a separate peace and military alliance with Japan; and meetings in the spring and summer of 1951 between Stalin and leaders of the Japanese Communist Party (JCP). Wolff’s main thesis holds that there may have been a ‘lost opportunity’ to end the Korean War in the summer of 1951 because the Truman administration decided to conclude the Japanese Peace Treaty without the Soviet Union or the People’s Republic of China (PRC). “As a result,” he speculates, “the Korean armistice talks stalemated, forcing U.S., Korean, and Chinese troops to fight on while both the United States and the USSR raced to explode their first hydrogen bombs” (4). Wolff relies on Soviet documents and Russian language sources to support his case. He laments that not only is there a “relative dearth of both archival documents and historical analysis on the Japanese side,” but “almost nothing has been published on the Soviet and Chinese visions of postwar Japan” (5).

Wolff, under the first of four subheadings, emphasizes at the outset how the treaties Stalin signed with Jiang Jieshi in 1945 and Mao Zedong in 1950 were both directed against Japan. In an important interpretive shift, he presents evidence demonstrating how Stalin’s suspicion and hostility toward U.S. policy in Europe after World War II had its origins in the Truman administration’s rejection of the Soviet desire to have a meaningful role in the occupation of Japan. U.S. support for collaborators in postwar Korea added importantly to Stalin’s fears that Washington wanted to promote Japan’s revival as a threat to the Soviet Union. His second section attributes Stalin’s decision to surrender territorial concessions in China as part of a new treaty with the PRC to the Soviet leader’s adoption early in 1950 of
a new aggressive policy in East Asia that included approving Kim Il Sung’s invasion of South Korea and orders to the JCP to stop pursuing “peaceful revolution” (11). Under the third subheading, Wolff describes how in May 1951 “a thick vein of fear pulsed beneath the proceedings” for JCP leader at four meetings with Stalin, where they adopted a “hara-kiri resolution” (14) approving the Soviet leader’s plan for revolutionary challenges to the U.S. occupation that they knew would discredit the party. Two appendices print the Soviet interpreter’s and one of the Japanese participant’s recollections of these conversations.

In section four, Wolff explicates his “Missed Peace” theory, arguing that Stalin pushed Mao to request armistice talks in Korea that began in July 1951, but U.S. “speed and brusqueness in finalizing the Japanese peace treaty prevented any linkage Stalin (or [George F.] Kennan) might have sought to develop” (16). During June, Stalin had kept his options open, recommending to Mao that he prepare for a new offensive in Korea, while delaying implementation of the JCP’s new militant plan. His primary worry was that the United States would exploit his negation of the 1945 Sino-Soviet Treaty as justification to revoke the Yalta concessions for Soviet control of Sakhalin and the Kurile Islands. Prospects for any grand bargain evaporated in 13 August, however, when the United States published the final draft of the Japanese Peace Treaty and ruled out any changes prior to a vote on its approval. In response, the Chinese adjourned the armistice talks and continued the war. Following orders, the JCP initiated the “kamakaze” policy that “crippled” it, but reinforced “the USSR’s and China’s shared anti-Japanese credentials” (20). Impossible to disprove, Wolff’s counterfactual argument is imaginative and persuasive. Despite a jarring absence of transitions between subheadings, his article nevertheless is the most analytically interesting and valuable in the volume. While some writers have claimed that Communist intransigence at the truce talks sought to scuttle the Japanese Peace Treaty, Wolff’s speculation is more convincing.

Yokote Shinji’s “Soviet Repatriation Policy, U.S. Occupation Authorities, and Japan’s Entry into the Cold War” mostly summarizes events and then exaggerates their impact and importance. He first describes how the Soviet military transported more than 600,000 Japanese soldiers and civilians who surrendered in August 1945 to prison camps “and forced them to engage in hard labor for several years” (30). Over ten associations in Japan compiled and publish first-hand accounts but Japanese academics did not show interest in investigating the topic until the early 1990s when Russian scholars wrote studies on the issue using Soviet sources. Relying on these and subsequent Japanese publications, Yokote’s “article examines how the defeated and demoralized Japanese, faced with Soviet detention and repatriation policies, were embroiled in U.S.-Soviet antagonism that began with the making of postwar arrangements in Europe” (31). His objective is to explain how the Japanese government sought repatriation of its citizens from the Soviet Union, how its actions influenced postwar Soviet-American relations, and how “Soviet repatriation policy affect[ed] Japanese foreign policy in the initial stage of the Cold War” (32). U.S. success in using the issue to build Japanese public hostility toward the Soviets and “the potential influence of further detention on the future” Japanese Peace Treaty “were the probable factors pushing the Soviet leaders to reverse their policy on Japanese” (45) prisoners.
Yokote describes as purposeful the Soviet policy of capturing Japanese soldiers and citizens to become forced laborers in direct violation of the Potsdam Declaration. Early in September 1945, the Japanese government sought repatriation, using the Swedish government as an intermediary, contacting the Soviet ambassador in Tokyo, and appealing to the International Red Cross without success. During October, the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP) forwarded Japan’s requests for repatriation to Moscow, but Stalin “regarded the problem as nonexistent or negligible . . .” (37-38). Instead, he instructed his representative at the Allied Council to demand more punitive measures against Japan. According to Yokote, this “unexpected enmity” along with U.S. officials being “perplexed with Soviet behavior in the Far East” meant “the prospects for U.S.-Japanese cooperation against the Soviet Union appeared to be good” (38-39). During 1946, the Soviet advanced qualified repatriation proposals that SCAP easily exploited to build animus toward the Soviets among the Japanese populace. Finally, in December, Moscow agreed to repatriate 50,000 prisoners each month, but the Japanese conviction that the Soviets continued to hold captives would “push Japan into the Cold War” (48), “overcome . . . policy differences and unite against the USSR” (49), and make “it easier for Japan to conclude its security alliance with the United States” (50).

Jumping ahead nearly two decades, Vladislav Zubok nicely captures the focus of his article in his title—“Lost in a Triangle: U.S.-Soviet Back-Channel Documents on the Japan Factor in Tripartite Diplomacy, 1969-1972.” His analysis compares the memoranda from each side of the conversations between U.S. National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger and Soviet Ambassador Anatolii Dobrynin released in 2007. Ironically, President Richard Nixon proposed these exchanges in response to Mao’s initiative for rapprochement after the Sino-Soviet border clashes as being central to a “perfect conspiracy” to prevent “America’s highly ideological politics” (53) from scuttling his triangular diplomacy. Moscow agreed, reflecting its parallel adoption of a realist approach, although its “ideological inclinations prevented [Soviet leaders] from fully grasping the complexity and deviousness of the new U.S. strategy” (54). This allowed Kissinger to hide the U.S. purpose of playing the “China Card” to counterbalance Soviet power through using the “Japanese Joker” when he “shared with Dobrynin his concern that [a] Japanese-Chinese common effort or even a temporary alliance would emerge against the influence of other powers in the region” (56). When the Soviets reacted to Nixon’s China trip with surprise and anger, Kissinger told Dobrynin that Beijing’s motive was defense against the rising threat from Japan. In December 1971, the Indo-Pakistani war then exposed how U.S.-China ties were directed against the Soviets.

Zubok devotes the second half of his article to examining how the Soviets bungled the “only option” (62) available in response to Sino-American détente—restoring relations with Japan. Slow to exploit discord in U.S.-Japan relations, Moscow delayed action until August 1971 when it approached Tokyo to prevent an anticipated Sino-Japanese alliance, showing how old “historical prejudices and racial fears . . . continued to shape the politics of Soviet Far East diplomacy . . .” (63). Normalization talks quickly collapsed when the Japanese demanded the return of all four disputed Kurile islands, revealing how the Soviet realists
had exaggerated their ability to play the “Japan Card.” Zubok laments the absence of certainty in explaining this result because of the lack of Soviet and Japanese documents, but still argues that “Moscow’s playing of the ‘Japan Card’ was half-hearted and based on the wrong calculations and fears rather than on a new strategic vision” (70). Having “been dealt a short hand in the diplomatic game,” (64), it would watch as China hosted Nixon and Tokyo normalized relations with Beijing. “China became the major beneficiary of the U.S. triangular approach,” Zubok concludes, while “the period . . . marks a possibly missed ‘realist’ opportunity for Tokyo” (71). Providing fresh perspectives and insights using new sources, this article shows how “deliberate mutual misinformation and obfuscation” (52) between Kissinger and Dobrynin limited “the ‘realism’ of both negotiating sides” (69).

In his “The Soviet Factor in U.S.-Japanese Defense Cooperation, 1978-1985,” Tsuyoshi Hasegawa examines events in the aftermath of what Zubok describes, arguing that the threat from Moscow “was the most decisive motivation for the development of a closer U.S.-Japanese security alignment” (73). Previous historians have attributed the dramatic deterioration in Soviet-Japanese relations after 1978 to the dispute over the Kuriles and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, but Hasegawa contends that events surrounding the Iranian hostage crisis were more important. Moreover, he claims that although the Soviet military buildup in Northeast Asia did not pose a threat to Japan’s security, Washington and Tokyo exploited it to justify Japan’s association with U.S. global strategy. Referencing Japanese language sources and documents at the National Security Archive throughout, the author devotes the first third of his article to two issues. First, he explains how the Soviet military buildup in East Asia was in response to the emerging U.S.-led anti-Soviet coalition in East Asia, reflecting the new bipolarity in the region. Moscow’s fortification of the Kuriles unintentionally caused a frightened Japan to move closer to U.S. security policy. Second, he describes the failure of the Carter administration’s attempt to exploit this situation when it applied public and private pressure on Japan to assume more responsibility for defense.

Japan’s relations with the United States from December 1979 until the end of 1984 are the primary focus in the rest of his article. Japan’s refusal to stop buying oil from Iran during the hostage crisis angered the United States, requiring Tokyo to look for “an excuse to restore U.S. confidence that Japan was fighting for the common cause.” For Hasegawa, Afghanistan was the occasion, not the reason, for “propelling Soviet-Japanese relations into a deep freeze” (84). He then describes discord within the Japanese government about moving closer to alignment with U.S. security strategy, retracing steps along a prior road that he largely has traversed in earlier publications. The Carter administration’s pursuit of complete “defense cooperation . . . fell short” (88), but the Reagan administration achieved success with “a more sophisticated approach” praising “Japan’s ‘more vigorous policy’” (89), as well as linking defense to economic issues. Japan’s government initiated an “anti-Soviet campaign . . . to seek public endorsement of its stepped-up defense alignment with the United States” (94). Under Nakasone Yasuhiro, Japanese military collaboration with the United States peaked, while “Soviet-Japanese relations . . . deteriorated to their lowest point since 1956” (101). Almost as an aside, Hasegawa briefly discusses Soviet efforts to
reconcile with Japan, pointing to the Northern Territories dispute as an insurmountable barrier.

Finally, Sergey Radchenko and Lisbeth Tarlow examine “Gorbachev, Ozawa, and the Failed Back-Channel Negotiations of 1989-1990,” arguing that both sides shared blame for an episode “testifying to the importance of vision, resolve, good timing, and successful diplomatic skill” (104). Relying on Russian archival sources because Japanese documents remain classified, they first describe how Russian President Boris Yeltsin’s visit to one of the Kurile Islands in August 1990 caused the Japanese to conclude that the Soviets were ready to trade the Northern Territories for economic aid. Both the Japanese and Soviet Foreign Ministries, however, opposed “the islands-for-cash deal” (109). Many politicians sought to establish a back-channel, but Premier Mikhail Gorbachev chose to work with Ozawa Ichiro, Secretary General of the Liberal Democratic Party. After explaining the reasons for Gorbachev’s selection of the three representatives who first visited Tokyo in October, the authors provide perceptive coverage of how the Japanese hoped to repeat the process that West Germany used of buying Moscow’s acceptance of reunification with economic aid. But “the turbulent and unpredictable transformation of the Soviet political system then underway” (115) slowed the negotiations, allowing the conservative Foreign Ministry to assert itself, while “the influence of Gorbachev’s reformist team . . . reached a low point” (119). Unaware of this shift, Ozawa presented in January 1990 a specific proposal for the return of the islands in two stages in return for a package of $26 billion in economic aid.

In fascinating detail, Radchenko and Tarlow then skillfully explain how and why the Soviets spurned “a real windfall” (120). Gorbachev, they argue, “was counting on some sort of deal” (121), but anticipated public hostility toward surrendering territories earned in World War II. With his power evaporating in late January, “Gorbachev could not tell what he might bring” (123) to Tokyo during his scheduled visit in April. At this key moment, Artem Tarasov, the Russian parliamentarian, businessman, and ally of Yeltsin, sought revenge after special police raided his office pursuant to a recent Gorbachev decree to uncover illegal business ventures. “Not only did Tarasov expose the secret negotiations to sell the islands for cash,” Radchenko and Tarlow note, “he used a vastly inflated figure and injected wildly concocted accusations of intent” (124). Public opinion polls recorded vehement opposition to surrender of the Kuriles. “The degree to which this public uproar constrained Gorbachev’s options,” the authors stress, “cannot be overstated” (125). His decision was to let Yeltsin determine the future of the islands. On 25 March, Gorbachev met with Ozawa and spoke in vague terms about his intentions, but adamantly refused to agree to any deal for transfer of the islands at that time. Rejecting indecisiveness as an explanation for his actions, the authors contend that Gorbachev “decided not to budge on the territorial question” because this “was indispensible for his own political survival . . .” (128). “The islands-for-cash deal came too late for Gorbachev and perhaps too early for Yeltsin,” they conclude; “Japanese diplomacy fell between the cracks” (129).

Taken together, these articles add at least three shared conclusions to the literature on
Soviet-Japanese relations in the Cold War. First, Japan’s role in Soviet planning and strategy was more significant than previous studies have indicated. Second, unresolved issues at the end of World War II were sources of permanent animosity between Moscow and Tokyo. Third, persistent discord in postwar Soviet-Japanese relations contributed to perpetuating and at times deepening Cold War tensions in Northeast Asia. Importantly, all the authors make extensive use of Soviet documents and Japanese language sources that validates the credibility of their arguments. However, limited or non-existent use of U.S. primary sources weakens all five articles. For example, there may well be documents at the National Archives or the Douglas MacArthur Memorial Library contradicting Yakote’s claim that how exactly Japanese requests for repatriation “were delivered to the Soviet government is still unclear” (38). Indirectly, these articles provide reason to remember the centrality of United States in determining the course of events during the Cold War in Northeast Asia.

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