Japan, a Land of the Rising Sanctions

Although Japan used to be associated with the poetic name “Land of the Rising Sun,” it has recently been increasingly turning, through the fault of its current political authorities, into a “Land of the Rising Sanctions.”

Until recently, under former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, relations between Russia and Japan were consistently good and even warm. Regular working and personal contacts between Abe and Russian President Vladimir Putin fostered trade and business cooperation between the two countries and were somewhat of a “failsafe” against Japan sliding into Russophobia under pressure from Washington and its own right-wing radicals calling for “war over the Kuril Islands.” It is precisely this skillful dialogue that distinguishes an outstanding politician, which Shinzo Abe no doubt was, from a run-of-the-mill Washington stooge willing to “please the big brother” even for a small handout from the big table.

Sure, Japan lost its identity after World War II and became an outright US dependent state, suffering a host of challenges from more than 75 years of US occupation, forced as a geisha to serve a contingent of thousands of US
troops, who rampage and commit multiple crimes against Japanese citizens on a regular basis. The US military has notoriously been stationed in Japan since the end of World War II. More than 70% of US military facilities are located on the island of Okinawa - some 30,000 US troops serve there and several tens of thousands of their family members live there. According to statistics, Americans have committed more than five thousand crimes in Japan since 1972. And the US military often went unpunished. The Japanese regularly take to the streets to demand the dismantling of the military bases, but Japanese politicians have not been sufficiently assertive and consistent in supporting such demands of their people, servilely preferring “not to anger Washington” in the UN and other international institutions.

Nevertheless, even this stance towards the US has not prevented the now legendary Shinzo Abe from pursuing a policy of his own, which has led, among other things, to maintaining a “special relationship” with Russia. Abe’s main foreign policy tenets have been, in addition to alliance with the US and containment of a fast-growing China, friendship with Russia. A friendship, or rather amity between the two parties that enables cooperation to solve common problems. Abe took the approach literally - building a good personal relationship with Vladimir Putin, whom he called his friend, and with whom he met almost 30 times for talks. Because of this relationship, in 2014, despite pressure from Washington, Tokyo imposed a very mild, minimalist package of sanctions against Russia, described in the press as “polite,” letting everyone know that it does so with great reluctance too.

Abe’s tremendous domestic support made it possible to hope that Japan, through him, would agree to a convenient compromise (for example, joint economic activities on the disputed islands) that would open a truly new era in bilateral relations.

Abe valued mutual understanding with Putin because he believed it could ensure the balance of power in the South China Sea region, where Japan’s main adversary and - potentially - mortal enemy, i.e. China, has been creeping expansion for years.

But the new leadership of Japan, a country with centuries-old traditions of morality and noble behavior, Bushido, which has always stood apart from the rest of the world, has decided to fundamentally change its policy and bow even more to Washington. As early as January 21, a meeting between US President Joe Biden and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida led to the conclusion that Japan’s new leadership, together with Washington, would open a second front against Russia in the Pacific Ocean if Russia carried out an “invasion” of Ukraine.

And now, according to the Japanese Mainichi Shimbun, some 70 volunteers, including about 50 former members of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces, are to go to Ukraine to fight for the Nazi authorities in Kiev. The Japanese government has announced the freezing of assets of four Russian banks, including VTB, as part of sanctions against Russia over the situation in Ukraine, Kyodo news agency reported, citing the country’s finance ministry chief, Shunichi Suzuki. Then the Japanese government imposed export sanctions on 49 Russian companies and organizations, as well as sanctions on 20 Russians, including businessmen, officials and prominent Russian figures in connection with the Russian military special operation to denazify and demilitarize Ukraine.

Given the clearly Washington-inspired support by official Tokyo for the Nazi authorities in Kiev, it is not surprising that the Russian embassy in Tokyo said in its Telegram channel that Japan “has supported a Nazi regime twice in less than a hundred years.” Meaning that the first of these regimes was Hitler’s Germany and the second the current Ukraine.

At the same time, Tokyo’s territorial claims to Russia have intensified, as expressed, in particular, in Prime Minister Fumio Kishida’s declaration during a March 7 parliamentary debate that the southern part of the Kuril Islands are “ancestral territories” of Japan. “Unfortunately, Japan has been very active in this Western mainstream, and is obeying all instructions without complaint. Japan does not seem to realize how destructive it is acting against its own national interests,” Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said on March 9 on Sputnik radio, commenting on Japanese officials’ statements about territorial claims against Moscow.

At the same time, Japan’s business world refuses to go along with Tokyo and Washington’s politicians in dealing with Russia. Despite announcements of large-scale withdrawal of Western companies from Russia and the fact that Dutch-British Shell is leaving the Sakhalin-2 project, Japan’s Mitsui & Co. and Mitsubishi Corp. consider it advisable to stay. According to Nikkei, a top corporate executive in Japan’s Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry has submitted a document saying that a hasty withdrawal is dangerous and will play into China’s hands. Sakhalin-2 is the first LNG project in Russia, in which Gazprom owns 50%, Shell another 27.5% and Mitsui & Co. and Mitsubishi Corp. 12.5 and 10%, respectively. The Japanese companies believe, Nikkei reports, that no matter what happens, Sakhalin-2 will continue to operate, and Japanese consumers will have to pay an extra $20 billion for LNG on the spot market.
if corporations leave Sakhalin-2.

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