

Theoretically, it was clear right from the very beginning that the planned visit to Japan by Boris Yeltsin was scheduled while the political and economic situation in Russia was unfavorable for such an undertaking. On the contrary, preparations made for the visit proved that Yeltsin's team as well as the experts were quite sure that it would be crowned with success.

The unexpected decision taken by the Russian president to put the visit off might be explained in various ways, and there are even experts who are eager to make a "scapegoat" of Japan itself. But in my judgment, the "scapegoats" are of Russian rather than of any other origin.

It is very likely that the primary reason for the present "status quo" was Yeltsin's self-deception in thinking that he had the opportunity to reach an agreement with Japan without the Northern Territory problem being settled. But despite the fact that there were 14 possible solutions to this complicated problem, none of them proved effective enough to resolve it. Grains of rationalism laid down in the compromise settlement by the Russian Foreign Ministry, such as corroboration of the Declaration of 1956, were blocked, most likely by some power-influencing structures comprising the president's machinery -- the Security Council for one. This fact proves, by the way, that the Russian Foreign Ministry stopped playing a significant part in the development of the foreign policy of the state or, at least, that this event damaged the prestige of the Russian Foreign Ministry.

The incomprehensibly uttered positions taken by both sides, Yeltsin himself and the Russian Foreign Ministry; on the territorial problem, paved the way for an outburst of anti-Japanese sentiment among the adherents of communism and nationalism. Nowadays those forces are celebrating their victory. But it is a Pyrrhic victory. And the fruits of this victory are as follows.

In the first place, in the eyes of the world, Russia has lost face as it proved it was incapable of adhering to the principles which were always proclaimed, by its leaders - I mean the principles of justice and legality.

In my opinion, Yeltsin himself must expect that his popularity will wane throughout the world as it was he who had declared in a speech delivered before the U.S. Congress that communist Russia was no more. Nevertheless, it turns out that the Russian communists have not only NOT been done away with, but together with national patriots they still influence the foreign policy of the state in general and the president's actions in particular.

It seems quite natural that cancellation of the visit almost before it was fully arranged, might be interpreted as an insult flung at a neighboring nation, and this situation is inevitably fraught with negative consequences" which might complicate the existing bilateral

relationship' between the two countries.

First, Japan might nurture the belief that so-called 'democratic Russia does not in the least differ from the former communist USSR with its imperialist approach to its closest neighbor.

The next result of the step taken by Yeltsin is in the realm of psychology, and this is fraught with the possibility of bolstering an anti-Russian mood throughout Japan, which in turn would give a boost to those who oppose Russian-Japanese detente.

In the military domain, Yeltsin's postponement of his trip might strengthen Japan's military and political alliance with the U.S. as well as trigger a build-up of Japan's military forces.

But the most tangible effect will be felt by the Russian economy. Russian-Japanese economic relations will surely be frozen and the extending of economic aid to as well as investment in Russia in general and the Russian Far East in particular will be delayed.

Tokyo might be expected to appeal more decisively to the participants of the Summit (the seven leading world powers) and request that Japanese territorial claims should be supported. It might also demand that the economic aid provided by the Summit members to Russia should depend upon the settlement of the territorial problem. In my opinion, Japan may hope that at least two countries - the U.S. and Canada – will support its position.

The fact that Yeltsin canceled his visit to Japan certifies not only that Russian diplomacy has flopped, but also that Yeltsin himself has suffered a defeat inflicted on him by national chauvinists.

Of course, there is still a chance to restore Russia's reputation and to eliminate errors. But all this can only be done if Stalin's policies are no longer adhered to, an adherence which so far has obstructed an end to World War II in the Far East. Otherwise we will not be able to do anything except perhaps look at the newspaper (Pravda) photo showing a Russian soldier sitting on his tank proclaiming, "The Kurils should not be returned to Japan."

Property belonging to anyone, if taken away, should be returned to its rightful owner.

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