

The 1907–1916 Russo-Japanese Secret Treaties: A Reconsideration

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Previous accounts of Russo-Japanese relations have concluded that the 1907–1916 Russo-Japanese secret treaties, which divided China into Russian and Japanese spheres of influence, were abolished either during, or soon after, the Bolshevik October Revolution of 1917. After World War II, the Japanese Foreign Ministry collected and published in 1951 a list of all of Japan's pre-war treaties with various countries. Under the heading Russia/USSR, the secret treaties of 1907, 1910, 1912 and 1916 were not listed. This publication noted that in 1925 the Soviet and Japanese governments agreed that all treaties “prior to Nov. 7, 1917, shall be re-examined at a conference to be subsequently held between the two governments,” but then added that “no such conference was held between Japan and the USSR nor was any measure taken by either party to revise or denounce these treaties.” Although admitting that a Soviet-Japanese conference had never revised these earlier agreements, this publication then falsely concluded that the four secret Russo-Japanese treaties had been “deemed void under obvious circumstances.”¹⁾

In sharp contrast with the Japanese Foreign Ministry's assessment, this paper will show that: 1) the former Russo-Japanese secret treaties were secretly renewed by the 1925 Soviet-Japanese Convention, and that the terms of these four treaties remained largely in force through 1945; 2) there has been a basic misunderstanding of Soviet-Japanese diplomatic relations by most Western scholars, who have wrongly viewed the 1925 Soviet-Japanese Convention as primarily economic in nature, and have therefore overlooked the seminal political impact of this agreement; and 3) the renewal of the Russo-Japanese secret agreements, which had the effect of redividing China into Soviet and Japanese spheres of influence, put Japan on a collision course with the United States.

First, the 1925 renewal of the Russo-Japanese treaties of 1907, 1910, 1912, and 1916 was destined to have an enormous and lasting impact throughout Asia. As S. C. M. Paine has discussed in her article above, it was Japan's victory in the 1894–1895 Sino-Japanese War that led to the Russo-Japanese War, to the division of Asia into spheres of influence, and to increased Asian friction: “The [Sino-Japanese] war would be the first act of a protracted struggle between Japan and Russia to establish spheres of influence in the Far East, a struggle which would continue unabated from the Russo-Japanese War (1904–5) until it culminated in a general Asian war in the 1930s.” The 1925 renewal of the Russo-Japanese secret treaties of 1907–1916, not

only set the diplomatic stage for the Soviet-Japanese conflicts of the 1930s, therefore, but these treaties remained valid through 1945, when the USSR finally broke relations with Japan and declared war.

Second, most Western historians of Soviet-Japanese diplomatic relations — such as Rajendra Jain, George Lensen, and Savitri Vishwanathan — have incorrectly concluded that the 1907–1916 secret treaties were abolished and that the 1925 Soviet-Japanese Convention opened primarily economic — not political — relations between the USSR and Japan. For example, Jain stated that the secret Russo-Japanese treaties were “nullified by the Russian Revolution of 1917.”²⁾ Lensen openly denied that the 1925 Convention had a political purpose, stating: “The basis of the convention was economic — the joint exploitation of Russia’s natural resources.”³⁾ Finally, Vishwanathan concluded that for “a brief time [in 1916] it looked as if Russia and Japan would make the Far East their exclusive domain,” but that the USSR in the 1925 Convention then “succeeded in preserving peaceful relations with Japan,” most importantly in economic matters, such as the “sale of the Chinese Eastern Railway by the USSR to Manchukuo, fisheries concessions, and oil and timber concessions in North Sakhalin.”⁴⁾

Third, the renewal of the 1907–1916 secret treaties had a huge impact on Japan’s foreign policy throughout the 1925–1945 period, especially in exacerbating tensions with the United States. Increasing US-Japanese friction was in line with the USSR’s long-range policies, since in the early 1920s Lenin had expressed his hope that Japan would soon go to war with the US: “America and Japan are on the eve of a war and there is no possibility of preventing this war, in which there will again be 10 million killed and 20 million mutilated.”⁵⁾ The signing of the 1925 Soviet-Japanese Convention promoted this Soviet policy, as A. I. Rykov, Chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars, declared to the Central Executive Committee on 3 March 1925 that Tokyo’s decision to recognize Moscow undermined Washington’s policy of isolating the Bolsheviks, and that “it is the United States policy towards the U.S.S.R. which turns out to be isolated.”⁶⁾ Finally, soon after the 1925 Soviet-Japanese Convention was signed, Foreign Minister Chicherin spoke confidently of Japan’s “coming war with the United States.”⁷⁾

Although most of the Soviet comments promoting war between the US and Japan were ignored at the time, in hindsight these projections do not seem quite so far-fetched. As a result of the secret diplomacy between Moscow and Tokyo, Japan was put in a position where friction with the United States eventually resulted in war. As the conclusions will show, immediately after Japan’s defeat in World War II, the USSR moved virtually unopposed into Japan’s former sphere of influence in Korea, Manchuria, China, and Indochina. As a result, with relatively little effort the USSR arguably became the largest winner in post-war Asia, as its allies — such as the Communist Parties of China, Korea, and Vietnam — quickly took control over many of the Far Eastern countries. This, in turn, set up new geopolitical lines that were to play a dominant role in the Soviet-American Cold War struggle in the 1950s and 1960s to

exert supremacy throughout Asia.

Historical Background

As S. C. M. Paine has shown in *Imperial Rivals*, it was during the mid-1800s that the Russian government turned its attention to the Far East. Between 1858 and 1860, Russia signed a series of treaties with China — the Treaty of Aigun, the Treaty of Tientsin, and the Treaty of Peking — which ceded to Russia the Amur region, the Maritime Province, and territories in Sinkiang. As a result of its diplomacy with China, and as a result of what is often referred to as “unequal treaties,” Russia gained 1,357,000 square miles of territory; this equaled in size all of the United States east of the Mississippi.⁸⁾

In 1860, Russia proclaimed its dominance over the Far East by founding Vladivostok, which means “Ruler of the East,” and by selling Alaska to the US, thus turning future expansion southward; Russia’s territorial appetite was not satisfied, however, as N. N. Murav’ev, the mid-nineteenth century Governor general of Eastern Siberia, wrote: “The political and commercial interest of Russia, even the security of our extensive land frontier, compel us to hope that these [Chinese] regions will return to their former independence . . . in the event of the fall of the Empire of the Manchus our activities must be so aimed as to enable the formation of an independent domain . . . in Mongolia and Manchuria.”⁹⁾ Clearly, Russia’s primary foreign policy in Asia was to continue its expansion southward.

Japan was understandably concerned about Russia’s rapid expansion into the Far East. Japan’s first treaty with Tsarist Russia was the Treaty of Shimoda, signed on 7 February 1855. By the terms of this treaty, the boundary between Russia and Japan divided the Kuril Island chain between Uruppu and Etorofu islands, while the island of Sakhalin was split between the two countries. As a result of border tensions, the Treaty of St. Petersburg was signed on 7 May 1875. This treaty agreed that Japan would control all of the Kurils in exchange for granting Russia all of Sakhalin Island.

The Russo-Japanese division of Asia continued during the 1890s, when Japan was blocked from taking the Liaotung peninsula after the Sino-Japanese War, and then Russia occupied it soon afterward in 1898; Russia’s position in Manchuria had been strengthened in 1896, when it bribed the Ch’ing government officials to permit the construction of the Chinese Eastern Railway.¹⁰⁾ This railway cut through the rich heartland of northern Manchuria and controlled over 250,000 acres of land, making it one of the largest foreign territorial concessions in China.¹¹⁾

The expansion of Russia and Japan into China also concerned the United States. To counter the division of China into competing spheres of influence, the American Secretary of State, John Hay, proposed the Open Door Policy in 1899. Hay hoped to limit the foreign rivalry by calling for the preservation of China’s territorial and administrative unity. One early historical account explained the Open Door Policy’s immediate success as “one of the most creditable episodes in American diplomacy, an example of benevolent impulse accompanied by energy and shrewd skill in negotiation.”¹²⁾

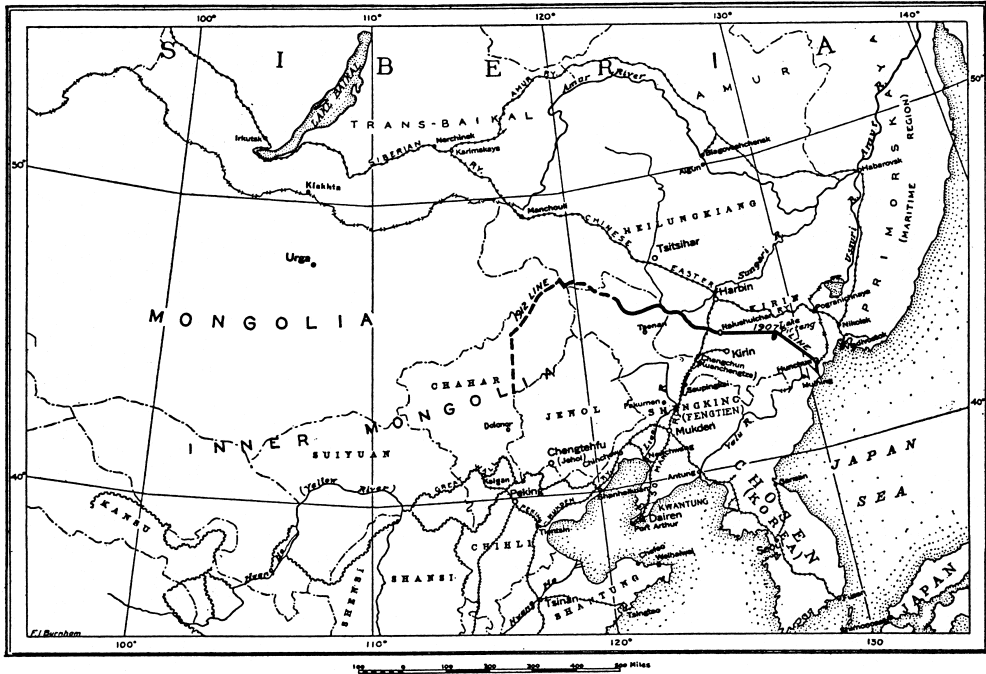
The struggle to partition Manchuria ended in war between Russia and Japan in 1904–1905. After Russia’s defeat, Washington offered its services to negotiate a peace treaty. Taking advantage of its role as broker, the US convinced Russia to declare that “they have not in Manchuria any territorial advantages or preferential or exclusive concessions in impairment of Chinese sovereignty or inconsistent with the principle of equal opportunity.”¹³⁾ Although the Portsmouth Treaty publicly supported the Open Door Policy, Japan received extensive territorial and economic rights in Southern Manchuria and regained the southern half of Sakhalin Island, while Russia continued to occupy Northern Manchuria. In practical terms, therefore, Manchuria was still divided into Russian and Japanese spheres of influence.

Ignoring all US attempts to enforce the Open Door Policy, Russia and Japan continued to carve up China, even signing four secret agreements — in 1907, 1910, 1912, and 1916 — which delimited their respective spheres of influence in Asia. In 1907, the first secret treaty granted Japan a free hand in Korea in return for Russia receiving a free hand in Outer Mongolia; a special article delineated the two spheres and was called the Motono-Iswolsky line (see Map 1). As reprinted by Ernest Batson Price, this line ran westward from the most northwestern point of the Russo-Korean border to the 122° meridian, passing “by way of Hunshun and the northern extremity of Lake Priteng, to Hsiushuichan; thence it follows the Sungari to the mouth of the Nunkiang, thereupon ascending the course of that river to the confluence of the Tola River.”¹⁴⁾

In 1910 these spheres were recognized by Russia and Japan, and the two sides agreed “not to hinder in any way the consolidation and further development of the special interests of the other Party within the limits of the above-mentioned spheres.”¹⁵⁾ The division of Inner Mongolia was carried out during 1912, and the Motono-Iswolsky line was extended “from the point of intersection of the Tolaho River and Meridian 122° East of Greenwich, . . . [and] follows the course of the Oulountchourh River and the Moushisha River up to the line of the watershed between the Moushisha River and the Haldaitai River.” As a result of this demarcation, Inner Mongolia was divided into a Russian section, west of the 116°27’ meridian, and the Japanese section east of this meridian, which ran right through China’s capital of Peking (see Map 1).¹⁶⁾

When the 1911 Chinese revolution divided and weakened China, Russia used this opportunity to negotiate an advantageous treaty with Outer Mongolia in 1912 and then convinced China to sign an agreement in 1913 which limited her rights in Outer Mongolia. Later, Russia pressured China to sign a tripartite treaty with Russia and Outer Mongolia in 1915, by which Outer Mongolia recognized the *suzerainty* of China in exchange for China recognizing the *autonomy* of Outer Mongolia.¹⁸⁾ The immediate effect of this tripartite treaty was that Outer Mongolia, which formerly had been internationally recognized as part of China, fell under the sway of the stronger Russian government.

In 1916, the two allied to keep China from falling under the domination of a third power — presumably the USA, since both Russia and Japan were at war with Germa-



Map 1. Russian and Japanese Spheres of Interest in Manchuria and Mongolia as Delimited by the Secret Treaties of 1907, 1910, and 1912¹⁷⁾

ny and Great Britain was occupied in Europe. Price has presented persuasive arguments that the United States was the target of this alliance, especially “in view of the history of the preceding decade of international relations in the Far East.”¹⁹⁾ As Jain has commented, the: “Fourth Russo-Japanese accord extended the spheres of influence of the two countries to the whole of China and contained a provision stipulating that the two Powers would wage war in common against any other Power trespassing on their vital interests. The fourth agreement . . . was, to all intents and purposes, a defensive and offensive alliance.”²⁰⁾

The history of Russo-Japanese secret diplomacy shows that the goal of the 1907, 1910, 1912, and 1916 treaties was to divide Asia into Russian and Japanese spheres of influence. The United States opposed these efforts, advocating instead an Open Door Policy that promoted free trade throughout Asia, thus eliminating the need for specific spheres of influence. In the Russo-Japanese treaty of 1916, it was the United States, therefore, that was identified as posing the greatest threat to Russia’s and Japan’s long-term territorial ambitions in Asia.

Following the Bolsheviks’ October Revolution in 1917, the Soviet government promised in the 25 July 1919 Karakhan Manifesto that it would immediately abolish all of Tsarist Russia’s so-called unequal treaties with China. Specifically, this manifesto promised to renounce “all annexations of foreign lands, any subjugation of other nations, and indemnities whatever.”²¹⁾ The Soviet government also promised to re-

spect China's territorial integrity by abolishing all secret treaties, and in particular, Russia's secret treaty with China from 1896, as well as Russia's secret treaties with Japan from 1907 to 1916 which divided Manchuria into Russian and Japanese spheres of influence. To most outsiders, the 1907, 1910, 1912, and 1916 secret treaties now appeared moot.

Soviet-Japanese Diplomatic Relations, 1925

After several abortive attempts to open diplomatic relations — at Soviet-Japanese conferences at Dairen, Changchun, and then in Tokyo — serious diplomatic talks leading to formal relations between the USSR and Japan opened in Peking during 1924. In its negotiations with the USSR, Japan's goals included renewing the former Russo-Japanese treaties, and especially the Portsmouth Peace Treaty of 1905. As for Japan's other treaties with Tsarist Russia, Tokyo did not insist that they be renewed in *toto*, but it did want to keep all of its territorial and economic gains from these former treaties. As this section will show, Japan succeeded in obtaining this goal when the Japanese and Soviet negotiators formally recognized all former treaties, but acknowledged that they could be changed at a future conference; so long as this conference was never held and the treaties never renegotiated, however, the terms of the former Russo-Japanese treaties remained valid.

Before Yoshizawa Kenkichi opened talks with Lev Karakhan in late March 1924, the Japanese Foreign Ministry discussed its goals with regard to the former Russo-Japanese treaties. On 14 March 1924, a list of treaties that Japan hoped to retain included the 1875 Treaty of St. Petersburg, the 1905 Portsmouth Peace Treaty, the 1907 Fishing Convention, and the 1907 Secret Treaty.²²⁾ By contrast, Lev Karakhan's goal was to abolish all former Russo-Japanese treaties: upon his arrival in Peking in September 1923, Karakhan gave a widely published speech in which he reiterated that in his 1919 declaration the Soviet government had annulled "all the agreements with Japan from 1901 to 1916."²³⁾

Thereafter, Karakhan opened negotiations by insisting that all of the former Soviet-Japanese treaties be abolished and presented a concrete proposal to Yoshizawa on 15 May 1924. The Soviet goals included negotiating new treaties with Japan without ever recognizing the validity of the former agreements. Therefore, in this Soviet draft not only was there no attempt to reaffirm the former treaties, but point three specifically suggested concluding a Soviet-Japanese Commercial Agreement, point five suggested signing a Fishing Convention, while point seven suggested that all treaties with third parties aimed against the other should be annulled.²⁴⁾

In reply, Yoshizawa proposed on 17 May 1924 that the following article appear in the future treaty: "Treaty of Peace of 1905 shall remain in force in its entirety. Other treaties and agreements concluded between Japan and Russia shall be replaced by new treaties and agreements so as to conform to new situation, it being understood that all rights and interests secured through old treaties and agreements to the High Contracting Parties and respective nationals shall be respected."²⁵⁾

Clearly, the Soviet proposal was intended to first cancel all former treaties and then negotiate new treaties. In sharp contrast to the Soviet approach, Japan hoped to retain the old treaties so that it would not lose control over its “rights and interests” in Korea, Manchuria, and Inner Mongolia. Later, Yoshizawa changed his proposal on 25 May 1924 to make it clear that the *status quo* should not be affected: “As regards the other treaties and agreements concluded between the Imperial Japanese Government and the former Russian Government, that is to say, the Imperial Russian Government and the Provisional Russian Government which succeeded, the Governments of the two Contracting Parties agree to revise them at a future conference in a manner corresponding to the altered circumstances, on the basis that the rights and interests enjoyed by the respective governments, citizens or subjects of the two countries by virtue of these instruments shall be fully respected, and that accomplished facts accruing from them shall not be affected.”²⁶⁾ As late as 24 May 1924, however, Yoshizawa reported that Karakhan refused to accept Japan’s draft and repeated yet again that the Soviet position was to first “open diplomatic relations” and only later negotiate new treaties.²⁷⁾

In addition to insisting that the Portsmouth Peace Treaty be recognized once again by both countries, Yoshizawa also made two further proposals intended to guarantee Japan’s sphere of influence in China. The first was a denunciation by both sides of any “military alliance, nor any secret agreement of military alliance, nor any secret agreement entered into with any third party,” which was “calculated to infringe upon the sovereignty or territorial rights of or to menace the safety of the other.”²⁸⁾ The second proposal was that neither the USSR nor Japan should conclude any “treaty or agreement with any third party looking to the cession, transfer or lease of any portion of their territories adjacent to the territory of the other, which is likely to be used in a manner affecting the security or vital interests of that other.”²⁹⁾

Clearly, both of these points — if adopted — would have had the effect of halting the USSR from returning its Manchurian concessions to China, which was the USSR’s stated policy from 25 July 1919, when it announced the Karakhan Manifesto. In fact, Japan’s reluctance to see the *status quo* altered in Manchuria suited the Soviet Union quite well. Although the Bolsheviks had repeatedly announced the abolition of all former Russo-Chinese treaties, in 1921 Aleksandr K. Paikes arrived in Peking as the first official Soviet “Plenipotentiary Extraordinary,” and on 26 April 1922, Paikes clarified the Soviet position on the former Russo-Chinese treaties: “My government formerly announced that all of the prior tsarist treaties were abolished, it did not say that the basis for these treaties was abolished. These matters have to be studied. But your government mistakenly thought that the 1919 [Karakhan] manifesto unconditionally canceled the 1915 [Outer Mongolia] treaty . . . On these matters your government is mistaken.”³⁰⁾

A letter from Paikes from 3 August 1922 further revealed that Moscow considered all former treaties valid until they were revised. With regard to the 1915 Russo-Chinese-Mongolia treaty, Paikes argued that its terms were still valid, since the treaty

“has not yet been revised, and that the revision of the agreement could take place by the participation of the contracting parties.”³¹⁾ Soviet efforts to renew the former treaties were rewarded in 1924, when Karakhan convinced Foreign Minister Wellington Koo to recognize the existence of the former treaties, albeit not enforced. A secret protocol attached to the 31 May 1924 Sino-Soviet Friendship Treaty stated: “It is agreed that pending the conclusion of such new Treaties, Agreements, etcetera, all the old Conventions, Treaties, Agreements, Protocols, Contracts, etcetera, will not be enforced.”³²⁾

Although this solution seemed to satisfy China’s desire to abolish the unequal Sino-Russian treaties, agreeing not to enforce the 1915 treaty was not the same as abolishing it. Until a new agreement was negotiated to replace the 1915 treaty, the secret protocol actually recognized that the treaty existed, even though not enforced. In fact, all the USSR had to do was delay the Sino-Soviet conference so as to continue using the terms of all of the former treaties. For example, with regard to the Soviet occupation of Outer Mongolia, so as long as a new treaty concerning Outer Mongolia was never negotiated, the Soviet troops could technically remain there indefinitely.

Soon after Lev Karakhan signed the Sino-Soviet treaty on 31 May 1924, which in effect recognized all former Russo-Chinese treaties, he backed down and agreed to recognize the former Russo-Japanese treaties as well. In a manner that closely paralleled how the USSR and China had approached the same problem of whether or not to recognize their old treaties, Karakhan and Yoshizawa agreed to recognize the former treaties, while promising to convene a conference to renegotiate them; in fact, this solution guaranteed that the current *status quo* in Soviet-Japanese relations was maintained.

In July 1924, an early form of this article was presented. It read: “It is agreed that the Treaties, Conventions and Agreements, other than the said Treaty of Portsmouth, which were concluded between Japan and Russia prior to November 7, 1917, shall be re-examined at a Conference to be subsequently held between the Governments of the High Contracting Parties and are liable to revision and amendment as altered circumstances may require.” This wording made it appear too obvious that the former Russo-Japanese treaties would continued unchanged, however, and so in a 21 July 1924 draft the term “amendment” was changed to “annulment.”³³⁾

By 30 October 1924, a final draft was negotiated and it later appeared unchanged in the 20 January 1925 Soviet-Japanese Convention: “It is agreed that the Treaties, Conventions and Agreements, other than the said Treaty of Portsmouth, which were concluded between Japan and Russia prior to November 7, 1917, shall be re-examined at a Conference to be subsequently held between the Governments of the High Contracting Parties and are liable to revision and annulment as altered circumstances may require.”³⁴⁾

Although to most outsiders this article seemed harmless — appearing on the surface to be supporting the annulment of the former Russo-Japanese treaties — in fact the negotiating records make clear that the underlying intent was to once again recog-

nize the former Russo-Japanese treaties, and in particular the secret agreements from 1907, 1910, 1912, and 1916. By this action, Moscow and Tokyo formally recreated the Russo-Japanese spheres of influence that divided Asia. Japan, on the one hand, retained unhampered control over Korea, Southern Manchuria, and eastern Inner Mongolia, while the USSR, on the other hand, received Japanese assurances that its claims over Outer Mongolia, Northern Manchuria, and western Inner Mongolia would not be challenged by Japan. As a result, this article had an immediate impact on Soviet and Japanese relations in Asia, and particularly with regard to China.

Impact of Soviet-Japanese 1925 Renewal of Secret Treaties

The 20 January 1925 Soviet-Japanese Convention promised that all of the Russo-Japanese Treaties, except for the Portsmouth Peace Treaty, “shall be re-examined at a Conference to be subsequently held between the Governments of the High Contracting Parties and are liable to revision and annulment as altered circumstances may require.”³⁵⁾ Foreign attention paid to the Soviet-Japanese Convention was relatively slight, although soon after this Convention was signed one newspaper warned that it was “tantamount to a league of the East facing an unleagued West across the Pacific.”³⁶⁾ Another linked the Soviet-Japanese convention with the USSR’s treaties with Germany, warning that this agreement was actually the final brick in a “Far Eastern ‘bloc’” between Russia, Japan, and Germany.³⁷⁾ But when this alliance did not form soon, interest in the 1925 Convention diminished; only in spring 1941 was this triple bloc temporarily achieved, when the USSR signed pacts with both Germany and Japan. Still, the Asian impact of the renewal of the Russo-Japanese secret treaties was rapid, as Japan remained neutral during the 1925–1926 and 1929 Sino-Soviet conflicts over the Chinese Eastern Railway (CER), and the USSR remained neutral during Japan’s so-called “Manchurian Incident.”

When the Soviet Union and Japan successfully renewed political and economic relations on 20 January 1925, they also simultaneously renewed the former Russo-Japanese spheres of influence dividing Manchuria and Inner Mongolia. While the 1925 Soviet-Japanese Convention specified that all treaties signed before 7 November 1917 would be reviewed by a special joint conference, it openly reaffirmed the validity of the Portsmouth Peace Treaty of 5 September 1905. Even without the renewal of the 1907, 1910, 1912, and 1916 secret treaties, therefore, this point alone meant that Tokyo tacitly acknowledged the USSR’s control over the CER, while Moscow likewise reaffirmed Japan’s control of the South Manchurian Railway.

Tokyo had suspected all along that the Soviet government was attempting to regain full control over the Chinese Eastern Railway. For example, in May 1924, the Japanese government had offered its help to China in managing the Chinese share of the CER, but Peking turned Tokyo down. Although this Japanese offer was likely intended to counterbalance the Soviet Union, instead of seeing this as insurance against the USSR the Peking government merely saw it as one more attempt to interfere in China’s domestic affairs and so immediately refused. When the Peking government real-

ized its mistake in August 1925, however, and asked Japan to help force the Soviet Union to return the CER to China, it was already too late and it was now Tokyo's turn to refuse.

Furthermore, although Japan had supported America's Open Door Policy at the Washington Conference in 1922, Tokyo made it quite clear that if changes in China directly threatened her economic interests, then Japan was prepared to "protect to the utmost her legitimate and important rights and interests in China through reasonable means."³⁸⁾ Once the Soviet Union succeeded in regaining tsarist Russia's concessions in China, then Japan felt compelled to do the same. In the process, Tokyo ignored its promises at the Washington Conference not to create spheres of influence in China and in so doing helped undermine the validity of the Open Door Policy in China. This did not mean that Soviet-Japanese relations were friendly, however, and Jain has remarked that the 1925 Convention "did not bring about any change in the basic Japanese attitude of distrust, suspicion, and hostility towards the Soviet Union."³⁹⁾

With Japan's neutrality assured, the Soviet Union's control over the CER was now guaranteed, as Karakhan later admitted that "without the resumption of normal relations with Japan," it would have been "impossible to hope for the full resumption of our rights on the Chinese Eastern Railway."⁴⁰⁾ During subsequent Soviet-Japanese negotiations which lasted from 1927 to 1929, other Soviet-Japanese agreements further divided their mutual spheres of interest in Manchuria; for example, one Soviet-Japanese agreement stated that 45% of the grain in Manchuria would be shipped by the Soviet concerns, while Japanese companies would ship 55%.⁴¹⁾

During May 1929, however, the Chinese government in Nanking tried to regain control over the CER, demanding the Soviet government sell the railway to China, as it had promised to do in 1924. Tensions increased until an undeclared state of war existed. On 3 December 1929, China's foreign minister, C. T. Wang, sent a note to the Japanese Charge d'Affaires accusing the USSR of reverting to force to resolve the dispute, a clear violation of the recently signed Kellogg-Briand pact renouncing war. Wang described the Soviet policy as "waging undeclared but actual war on China," and described how the Soviet "armed invasion" of Manchuria had resulted in the occupation of the cities of Manchouli and Chalainer during the middle of November.⁴²⁾ China was clearly hoping that Japan would intervene but, upholding its treaties with the USSR, Japan remained neutral.

Although the Bolsheviks profited from Japan's neutrality in 1929, it worked to Japan's advantage in 1931 following the Manchurian Incident. Ikuhiko Hata has discussed this period in terms of a "hidden crisis" between the Soviet Union and Japan, and has shown how the Japanese Kwantung Army was initially "apprehensive and cautious about invading the Soviet sphere of influence," and only later became bolder once it became clear that the USSR was "exercising a policy of general retreat."⁴³⁾ Meanwhile, Vishwanathan has commented that as a result of the 1925 Convention, Japan obtained the "neutrality of the USSR during the Manchurian Incident."⁴⁴⁾ Finally, Lensen has also commented on the strangeness of this situation, since when the

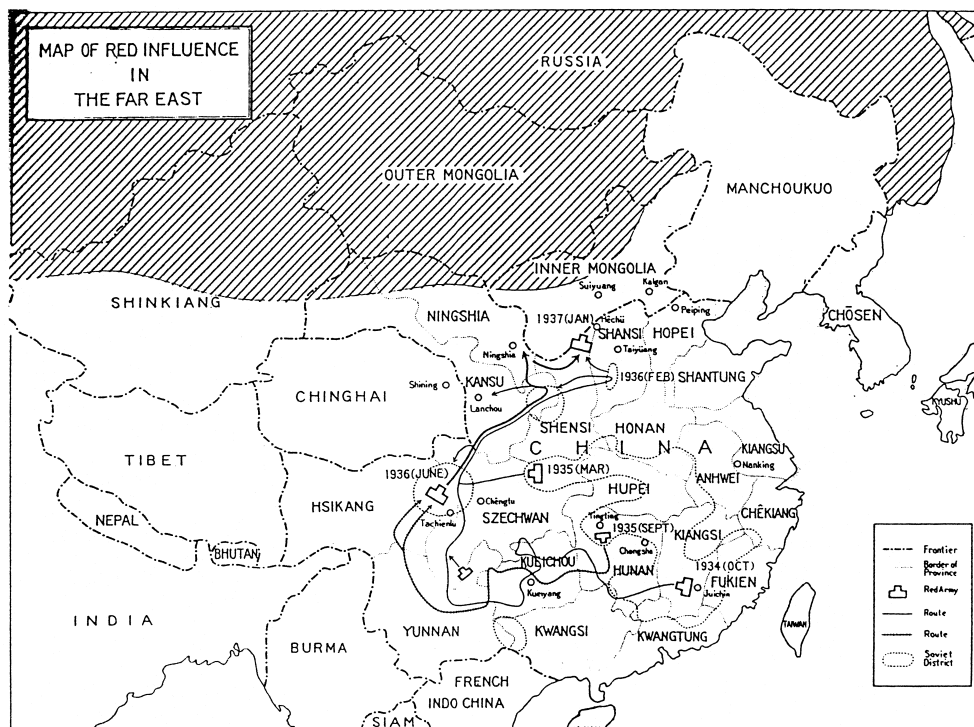
Soviet government proposed that the two countries sign a non-aggression pact, the “Japanese declined, stating that there was no need for a non-aggression pact;” not knowing about the renewal of the 1916 Russo-Japanese alliance, Lensen incorrectly assumed that Japan’s attitude was due solely to the 1925 Convention and to the Briand-Kellogg Pact.⁴⁵⁾

In fact, soon after sponsoring the formation of Manchukuo in 1931–1932, Tokyo and Moscow agreed to convene a conference and during 1935 they negotiated the terms of sale of the CER to Japan. Following the sale of the CER, a 1937 secret Foreign Ministry publication reprinted the 1907–1916 treaties and claimed that they were still valid. The 1907 secret treaty was substantially altered, however, since a crucial section on the CER was completely eliminated. The presence of this alteration in 1937 is a final reconfirmation that the 1925 article renewing all Russo-Japanese treaties until changed by an official Soviet-Japanese conference was still considered to be valid, since the results of the 1935 CER conference immediately led to changes to the 1907 treaty.

Japan continued to make inroads into Manchuria and even justified its 1937 invasion into central China as necessary to oppose Moscow’s parallel efforts in Sinkiang. On 28 December 1937, for example, the German Ambassador in Peking transmitted the following Japanese condition to stop the war against China: “China to abandon her pro-Communist policy as well as her anti-Japanese and anti-Manchukuo policies and co-operate with Japan and Manchukuo in the execution of their anti-Communist policy.”⁴⁶⁾ Throughout the 1930s the Soviet-Japanese struggle to divide China continued unabated. But, the secret Russo-Japanese treaties quickly led stalemate, as Tokyo opposed the USSR’s so-called “Red Influence” and published maps in its propaganda showing how Tokyo was fighting Soviet expansion in China (see Map 2).⁴⁷⁾ Japan’s 1939 encounter with the Red Army of Nomonhan, however shifted Tokyo’s attention southward.

By 1940–1941 the USSR and Japan had begun negotiating a non-aggression pact that divided almost the whole of China between the two countries. The existence of the 1916 treaty of alliance made a new Soviet-Japanese pact likely, and it is important to recall that in 1916 the main threat to Russia’s and Japan’s spheres of interests in China was the United States. Secret documents show that on 3 October 1940, Soviet and Japanese diplomats agreed that: “The USSR will abandon its active support for Chiang [Kai-shek regime] and will repress the Chinese Communist Party’s anti-Japanese activities; in exchange, Japan recognizes and accepts that the Chinese Communist Party will retain as a base the three [Chinese] northwest provinces (Shensi, Gansu, Ningxia).”⁴⁸⁾ In addition, Japan agreed that it would not oppose future Soviet expansion into Afghanistan, in return for the USSR’s agreement not to oppose Japanese expansion into Indochina.

On 13 April 1941, the USSR and Japan signed the non-aggression pact. Soon afterward, Japan invaded south into Indochina, and thus entered on a collision course with the United States. In sharp contrast to being a break with earlier Japanese foreign



Map 2. Japanese Map of the USSR's "Red Influence" in Asia

policy, however, these events are perhaps best seen as the end result of the 1925 Soviet-Japanese Convention's renewal of the 1916 Russo-Japanese secret alliance, as characterized by Foreign Minister Chicherin's 1925 prediction of Japan's 'coming war' with America.

Conclusions: The Soviet-Japanese Treaties of 1907/1910/1912/1916

As this essay has attempted to show, when the former Russo-Japanese secret treaties were renewed by the 1925 Soviet-Japanese Convention, this Convention became primarily a political agreement, not an economic agreement as so many historians of Soviet-Japanese diplomatic relations have claimed. The 1925 renewal of the Russo-Japanese secret agreements once again divided China into competing Soviet and Japanese spheres of influence, and in so doing increased Japan's tensions with the United States over the Open Door Policy. With the change in the Asian balance of power between Japan and the USSR that occurred during the 1930s, and with the 1941 Soviet-Japanese non-aggression pact and Japan's decision to expand southward, these events put Japan on a collision course with the United States.

A war between Japan and the United States not only was not contrary to Soviet interests, it actually served to promote them. For example, soon after the signing of the 1925 Convention, Gregorii Voitinskii, a noted Bolshevik specialist on Far Eastern affairs, argued that Japan's recognition of the Soviet Union was proof that the capital-

ist countries could never defeat the USSR, nor could they fail to “recognize the important position [of] the Soviet Union.” Most importantly, the Soviet Union had already “consolidated its power in the West,” and with the signing of its convention with Japan, had now accomplished the same in the East.⁴⁹⁾

During May 1925, Stalin further set the terms of this US-Japanese conflict by announcing that Moscow could now call on its allies, the “workers of the West and the oppressed peoples of the East,” to “unleash the revolutionary lion in every country of the world.”⁵⁰⁾ Stalin stated that the Japanese should be included in the category of “oppressed peoples.” Finally, during late 1925, Evgenii Varga, a well-known Hungarian Comintern official, felt confident enough to announce in a Comintern article that the “final struggle between the world bourgeoisie and proletariat will take place under the leadership of the United States and the Union of Socialist Republics.”⁵¹⁾

The Soviet goal of instigating war between Japan and the United States did not escape notice by American diplomats, and documents housed in Stanford University’s Hoover Institution archives help confirm that during the 1930s the Soviet Union continued its efforts to promote a Japanese-American war. William C. Bullitt, the American ambassador to Moscow, warned in a 19 July 1935 dispatch that the USSR’s real goal was to promote a war between the United States and Japan, and that if this happened, the Soviet Union would try to “avoid becoming an ally until Japan had been thoroughly defeated and would then merely use the opportunity to acquire Manchuria and Sovietize China.”⁵²⁾

Bullitt’s warning proved nothing short of prophetic, as the battle of Nomonhan Moscow’s non-aggression pact with Tokyo in 1941, and Hitler’s June 1941 invasion of the USSR all enabled the Japanese military forces to exert their full strength against the United States; Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor later that year, therefore, actually fulfilled a Soviet foreign policy goal which Lenin had enunciated during the early 1920s.

In post-World War II Asia, the USSR moved into Asia virtually unopposed. Although Washington’s support for the Open Door Policy in China intensified with America’s entry into World War II, it was unable to enforce this policy. In negotiations leading up to the 11 February 1945 Yalta agreement, Stalin appeared to support the principles of the Open Door when he acknowledged that after Japan’s defeat the Manchurian port city of Dairen should be made an international port open to all countries. In exchange for American Lend-Lease aid, Stalin also once again promised Ambassador Harriman that the USSR would adhere to the Open Door Policy. Therefore, on 18 July 1945, Harriman reported to President Truman that “Stalin had agreed on a number of occasions to support America’s open door policy for China and to respect the sovereignty of China in Manchuria.” But, Harriman further warned that if Stalin succeeded in gaining control over the Manchurian railways and the port city of Dairen, then “such control would violate the established policy and principles which the United States has held for a long period of time.”⁵³⁾

Archival records of Stalin’s summer 1945 negotiations with T. V. Soong, Chiang

Kai-shek's brother-in-law and the Chinese envoy to Moscow during the Sino-Soviet talks, have since revealed that Stalin obtained just such power over Manchuria, by insisting to Soong that Yalta's resolution giving the USSR 'preeminent interests' along the Manchurian railways actually meant that the USSR's rights throughout Manchuria would be greater than "China and other countries."⁵⁴ Once Stalin succeeded in forcing Soong to adopt this interpretation, then on 14 August 1945, Soong and Stalin signed a secret protocol which stated that the USSR would not only have predominant control over the Manchurian railways, but that the port of Dairen would "be leased free of charge to Russia."⁵⁵ This secret Sino-Soviet agreement was not only in complete violation of the Open Door Policy, therefore, since it gave the USSR 'special rights and advantages' in China, but Moscow was also able to provide the Chinese Communists with a base in Manchuria from which the CCP expanded its power throughout all of mainland China. Later, the USSR carried out similar policies in other areas that had formerly been part of the Japanese sphere of influence, including Korea and Vietnam.

In conclusion, the geopolitical framework of the Cold War in post-war Asia can be, in part, traced back to the four secret treaties signed by Russia in Japan in 1907, 1910, 1912, and 1916, and to their subsequent renewal and alterations by the USSR and Japan in 1925, 1935, and with the signing of the Soviet-Japanese non-aggression pact in 1941. For this reason, the revelation that these four treaties were not abolished following the 1917 October Revolution — a conclusion that even the Japanese Foreign Ministry supported in its 1951 collection of Russo-Japanese treaties — is sure to have an enormous impact on historians' understanding of the still murky events leading up to both the Pacific War during the 1930s, and to the Cold War struggle over Asia during the 1940s, 1950s, and beyond.

Notes

- 1) 日本国現行条約一覽表 (昭 16、12、7 現在) (条、条約課)、条約局条約課 (昭和 26)、外務省外交史料館 (外務省) B.0.0.0-14.
- 2) Rajendra Kumar Jain, *The USSR and Japan, 1945-1980*, (New Delhi: Radiant Publishers, 1981), 5-6.
- 3) George Alexander Lensen, *Japanese Recognition of the U.S.S.R. Soviet-Japanese Relations, 1921-1930*, (Tokyo: Sophia University Press, 1970), 365.
- 4) Savitri Vishwanathan, *Normalization of Japanese-Soviet Relations, 1945-1970*, (Tallahassee, Florida: The Diplomatic Press, 1973), 7.
- 5) David J. Dallin, *The Rise of Russia in Asia*, (New Haven: Archon Books, 1971), 164-165.
- 6) "Extracts from a Speech by Rykov at the Central Executive Committee," 3 March 1925, Jane Degras, *Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952), Vol. 2, 12-15.
- 7) Lensen, preface.
- 8) S. C. M. Paine, *Imperial Rivals: China, Russia, and Their Disputed Frontier*, (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1996), 352.
- 9) Thomas Ewing, *Between the Hammer and the Anvil? Chinese and Russian Policies in Outer Mongolia 1911-1921* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1980), 19.
- 10) Permission was gained through the use of a 3,000,000 ruble fund intended solely to bribe Chinese officials as well as a promise to form a secret Sino-Russian military alliance against Japan,

- an alliance which the Russian government later broke when it took the Liaotung peninsula. Paine, 175–268.
- 11) The exact amount of land was 105,661.98 “dessiatins,” with one dessiatin being equal to two-and-a-half acres. “The Lands and Land Administration of the Chinese Eastern Railway Company, and the Incident of August 1, 1923.” Foreign Ministry Archives, Taiwan (WCTA), 03–32, 263, 4.
 - 12) Mark Sullivan, *Our Times: The Turn of the Century* (New York, 1926), 509; Quoted by George Kennan, *American Diplomacy* (Chicago, 1984), 21–22.
 - 13) 5 September 1905, “Treaty of Peace-Russia and Japan,” or the Portsmouth Peace Treaty. John V. A. MacMurray, *Treaties and Agreements with and concerning China*, (New York, 1921), 522–525.
 - 14) Ernest Batson Price, *The Russo-Japanese Treaties of 1907–1916 Concerning Manchuria and Mongolia*, (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1933), 36.
 - 15) Price, 113.
 - 16) Price, 117.
 - 17) Price, 124.
 - 18) 5 November 1913, “Declaration, and accompanying Exchange of Notes, in regard to Outer Mongolia-Russia and China,” 7 June 1915, “Tripartite agreement in regard to Outer Mongolia-Russia, Mongolia, and China.” MacMurray, 1066–1067, 1240–1245.
 - 19) Price, 87.
 - 20) Jain, 5.
 - 21) French-language telegram received in Peking on 26 March 1920; WCTA; 03–32, 463 (1).
 - 22) 外務省, 2.5.1–106–5–9 (MT 251.106.28 216–237).
 - 23) 外務省, B100 C/R1(1); 6 September 1923, *Peking Daily News*.
 - 24) 外務省, 2.5.1–106–5.4 (MT 251.106.19 1434–1426).
 - 25) 外務省, 2.5.1–106–5.4 (MT 251.106.19 1527–1531).
 - 26) 外務省, 2.5.1–106–5.5 (MT 251.106.19 1909).
 - 27) 外務省, 2.5.1–106–5.5 (MT 251.106.19 1910–1912).
 - 28) 外務省, 2.5.1–106–5.6 (MT 251.106.19 2285).
 - 29) 外務省, 2.5.1–106–5.6 (MT 251.106.19 2285).
 - 30) Bruce A. Elleman, *Diplomacy and Deception: The Secret History of Sino-Soviet Diplomatic Relations, 1917–1927*, (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1997), 92.
 - 31) Elleman, 96.
 - 32) Elleman, 100–104.
 - 33) 外務省, 2.5.1–106–5.8 (MT 251.106.19 3218–3230).
 - 34) 外務省, 2.5.1–106–5.11 (MT 251.106.19 5585–5573).
 - 35) Lensen, 178.
 - 36) 23 January 1925, “Is it East Against West?” *Oregon Journal*.
 - 37) 8 April 1925, “Viscount Goto’s Proposal,” *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*.
 - 38) Chinliang Lawrence Huang, “Japan’s China Policy Under the Premier Tanaka, 1927–1929,” (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1968), 31.
 - 39) Jain, 6–7.
 - 40) Degras, Vol. 2, 8–9.
 - 41) 28 January 1928, “Shortage of Cars Now Facing CER,” *The Japan Advertiser*.
 - 42) 外務省, F 192.5–4–4.
 - 43) Ikuhiko Hata, *Reality and Illusion: The Hidden Crisis Between Japan and the U.S.S.R., 1932–1934*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), 4.
 - 44) Viswanathan, 7.
 - 45) George Alexander Lensen, *The Strange Neutrality: Soviet-Japanese Relations during the Second World War, 1941–1945*, (Tallahassee, Florida: The Diplomatic Press, 1972), 1.
 - 46) Wellington Koo Archives, Columbia University.
 - 47) The map appeared with the article, “The Present Situation of the Red Activities in China and Manchuria,” *Contemporary Manchuria*, Volume 1, No. 1 (April 1937), 73–96.

- 48) 外務省, B100-JR/1, 2.1.00–23.
- 49) Wei Ch'in (Voitinskii), "Lun Jih-pen chih Ch'eng-jen Su-o" (A Discussion of Japan's Recognition of the Soviet Union), *Hsiangtao choupao* (The Guide Weekly), 28 January 1925, #100, 836–838.
- 50) "Extracts from a Report by Stalin on the Work of the Fourteenth Conference of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union," 9 May 1925, Degras, Vol. 2, 25–28.
- 51) E. Varga, "Puti i prepiatstviia mirovoi revoliutii" ("Paths and Obstacles of the World Revolution") *Kommunisticheskii Internatsional* (Communist International), December 1925, #12, 5–23.
- 52) Hoover Institution Archives, Loy W. Henderson Collection, Volume Five, 978–980; also quoted in: George W. Baer, ed., *A Question of Trust The Origins of U.S.-Soviet Diplomatic Relations: The Memoirs of Loy W. Henderson* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1986), 469.
- 53) Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, W. Averell Harriman collection, Box 181: "Yalta Agreement Affecting China" 8–9; This document was declassified in 1986, but only became available in the Library of Congress during 1990 due to restrictions on the Harriman collection.
- 54) 2 July 1945–14 August 1945, "Notes taken at Sino-Soviet Conferences," 76 pages, Hoover Institution Archives, Victor Hoo Collection, Box #7, 4.
- 55) 14 August 1945, "Meeting between Dr. Soong and Mr. Molotov," 3 pages, Hoover Institution Archives, Victor Hoo Collection, Box 7, 3.