

only argue that Moscow's assertion had no status as a unilateral amendment to a joint declaration was not binding on either party.<sup>10</sup> In spite of this disclaimer, many attempts were made subsequently by Tokyo to interpret the Soviet statement as leaving open at least some possibility that Moscow might be prepared to negotiate the return of the disputed islands.

In May 1969, in an effort to develop a more coordinated approach to the issue, the Diet established the "Association on the Northern Territories Problem"<sup>11</sup> to conduct research and disseminate information and to provide assistance to former holders of fishing rights in disputed waters. By naming members of all political parties to the Association's governing body, or Council, the government was able to reach a loose consensus of how to proceed.<sup>12</sup>

The dispute assumed a much higher profile when, in 1970, Moscow declared a 200 mile fishing zone based on the inclusion of the Northern Territories.<sup>13</sup> With Tokyo under pressure to reach an early agreement on fishing quotas in order to salvage at least part of the seasonal catch, the Soviets argued for wording in the proposed agreement which would have constituted Japanese acknowledgement of Soviet claims. After prolonged negotiation, the two sides settled on wording which stipulated that none of the provisions of the agreement would be construed in such a way as to prejudice the positions or views of either government on various problems concerning bilateral relations.

During the October 1973 talks between Brezhnev and Prime Minister Tanaka, the Japanese side sought agreement that bilateral issues to be discussed included the territorial issue; Japanese official and media reports indicated Brezhnev's response was a short and terse "Da". In fact, prospects for settlement continued to be elusive for the remainder of Brezhnev's term, with Japan becoming more resolute in insisting that the Northern Territories be returned in toto and the Soviet Union ceasing any pretence of being prepared to transfer them in the absence of any convincing incentives.

### Strategic Concerns:

For Japanese defence planners, Russia now poses the principal potential military threat to Japan and to East Asia.<sup>14</sup> The Japan Defence Agency (JDA) estimates that the Russian Federation/CIS<sup>15</sup> maintains one fourth to one third of its strategic missiles, one sixth of its ground troops, one quarter of its aircraft, and over one quarter of its naval forces in the Far East. In addition, Backfire bombers capable of carrying nuclear-armed air launched cruise missiles (ALCMS) have been deployed in the region. The JDA views Japan's strategic position, denying the Russian Pacific Fleet free access to the open ocean, and astride air and sea lanes which link eastern Russia with north and east Asia, as providing a geographic basis for a possible Russo-Japanese military confrontation.<sup>16</sup>