

ern outskirts of Colombo), which houses a modern parliament complex, officially became the nation's capital.

*Manfred Domroes*

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**COLOMBO PLAN** The Colombo Plan for Co-operative Economic Development in South and Southeast Asia was proposed at the Colombo, Sri Lanka, meeting of the foreign ministers of the British Commonwealth nations—Australia, Ceylon, India, New Zealand, Pakistan, and the United Kingdom—in January 1950. Later these nations were joined by Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam and still later by Myanmar (Burma), Nepal, and Indonesia.

The meeting was intended to discuss international affairs, but the ministers realized that unless there was economic stability in Asia, there would be revolutionary disturbances, most often of the community sort. They understood that progress depended on economic improvement. It was decided that to promote development in Southeast Asia, they would give financial and technical assistance to their Asian counterparts.

The Consultative Committee, representing British Commonwealth governments, met in Sydney at the behest of the Australian government. At the meeting, nations planning development were asked to submit a "reliable" scheme for the next six years to act as a draft on their own future economic progress.

Next came the scheme for technical assistance and expertise necessary to practicalize large development programs. Governments providing aid were to bear the cost of basic salaries of experts they made available, and governments receiving aid were to bear the local costs of the experts. To aid in the preparation of the details of the scheme, a council for technical cooperation was proposed to meet at Colombo to aid in the economic development of Southeast Asia by providing technical assistance. This also required experts to participate directly in the process of development in Asia.

But this did not mean that there was a general Colombo Plan fund, although at the Sydney meeting the British Commonwealth governments had promised to provide 8 million pounds for the ensuing three years.

Every offer of assistance would be subjected to bilateral negotiation between the nations concerned, and

the progress reports would be discussed at periodic meetings. This was stipulated as a necessary caveat.

Finally, in September and October 1950, there was a further meeting of ministers in London, during which several development schemes were cleared and the need for "financial support of outside agencies" was approved. The Colombo Plan was originally proposed to run for six years, but at the Singapore meeting in 1956, its tenure was extended to 1961.

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**COMFORT WOMEN** From 1938 until its surrender at the end of World War II in 1945, Japan forced women from regions captured or otherwise occupied to serve as prostitutes for its military forces. The terms "comfort women" and "comfort stations" (the brothels set up by the Japanese military forces) are euphemisms for these women and the facilities set up for them. The Japanese word for comfort women, *ianfu*, is equivalent to the Korean *chongshindae* and the Tagalog *lola* (grandmother).

#### Japan's System of Military Prostitution

The establishment of a system of military prostitutes began with use of Japanese professional prostitutes who would be sent to overseas locations. These women were provided to Japanese military forces beginning in the 1920s, but often had high levels of venereal diseases. It was later decided to use foreign women, who, not being prostitutes to start out with, were relatively free of disease. An estimated 200,000 women from Korea, the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, China, Taiwan, and to a lesser degree Burma (now Myanmar), Malaya (now part of Malaysia), and Vietnam, as well as some British and Dutch women were used as comfort women. As the war drew to a close, many of these women were abandoned or killed, or claims were made by the Japanese that they had been nurses. Discussion of forced military prostitution was avoided during the American military occupation of Japan because of cultural sensitivities; women who had been forced into sexual slavery were unlikely to admit to the experience in the decades following the



Two elderly Korean women at a rally in Seoul, in May 2001. Both were forced to serve as comfort women to Japanese soldiers during World War II. They are protesting a new Japanese history textbook which Koreans feel downplays Japanese atrocities. (REUTERS NEWMEDIA INC./CORBIS)

war, due in part to the psychological pressures which had resulted from the experience.

### The Positions of the Japanese Government

The involvement of the Japanese army was denied by the government of Japan until 1992, when documents implicating the imperial government were discovered by a Japanese historian. Since that time the Japanese government has held that the "comfort women issue" is not one to be resolved through official channels, since war reparations had been agreed upon with its wartime enemies years before.

To be more precise, the government of Japan has adopted a series of official positions that acknowledge varying degrees of complicity, while maintaining that it holds no blame for any wrongdoing that may have occurred. The positions range from absolute denial that comfort women ever existed to an acknowledgment that the current government should accept historical evidence and apologize to the few who are still alive.

The Japanese educational system has also been hesitant to include discussions of comfort women. In 1997, for the first time, middle school social studies texts included references to *ianfu* (without explaining what they were). This drew criticism from politicians who criticized what they characterized as the "masochistic" inclusion of such material. The Japanese Ministry of Education was required to review all proposed school texts before they could be used, and could require publishers to change or delete passages that did not comply with official policy.

Two sets of feelings were apparent by the mid-1990s: members of the wartime generation, who were by that time in their sixties or older, saw themselves as victims and felt little remorse for other, non-Japanese victims. Members of the postwar generation, for their part, have been educated to believe in personal accountability for actions, not collective accountability, and therefore feel no sense of responsibility for acts carried out by the army before they were even born.

### The Controversy Surrounding the Asian Women's Fund

To deal with public pressure to acknowledge past wrongdoing while still avoiding a public apology, in 1995 the Asian Peace and Friendship Fund for Women (commonly known as the Asian Women's Fund, or AWF) was established. As first proposed, the AWF was to be a nongovernmental means to make amends to former comfort women. This, it was thought, would settle the issue of reparations without involving formal channels. Payments of approximately \$20,000 from the fund (which would be created from private and government contributions) would be accompanied by a letter of apology from the Japanese prime minister. This approach was widely criticized by former comfort women, and led to refusal to accept the payments. Former comfort women from South Korea, the Philippines, Taiwan, and the Netherlands asked Japanese legal and labor organizations to end support for the AWF, saying that the fund ignored the victims, who had declared they would not accept payments from it. Lila-Pilipina, a Philippines-based Filipina support group for former comfort women, announced its members would reject the offer from the AWF since it did not constitute a formal apology. The AWF's ability to make payments was complicated by an unwillingness on the part of those to be compensated to accept payments from an organization perceived as a smokescreen for the Japanese government.

The AWF attempted to defuse the issue by pledging to give 380 million yen over a ten-year period to the Indonesian government for distribution to private social institutions. This backfired when the Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation criticized the government plan to accept the AWF payments without an official apology from the Japanese government. The South Korean government asked Japan to cease payments because the AWF was seen as an attempt to avoid an official admission of responsibility, and interfered with South Korea's own support programs, since payments to former comfort women are made in secret.

The Japanese stance has also been criticized by the United Nations. In 1998, the United Nations Sub-

commission on Human Rights denounced the AWF for its failure to provide legal compensation to former comfort women. In 1999, the special investigator for the United Nations Commission on Human Rights commented that the AWF would be viewed with suspicion as long as Japan attempted to avoid responsibility.

The comfort women issue will not likely be forgotten. South of Seoul, the Historical Museum of Japanese Military Sexual Slavery depicts the sufferings of those Korean girls who were taken from their homes to be used as *ianfu*.

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**COMMUNISM—CENTRAL ASIA** The application of Communist ideology to the Central Asian environment was always a difficult undertaking. Throughout much of the Soviet Union's history, efforts were made to revise, adapt, or forcibly introduce Communist thought in the region, with mixed results. As was often the case, local leaders made use of the structure of the Soviet state and the rhetoric of Communism, but maintained their traditional views on power relations and society. Thus, when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, it was no surprise that Communism, as an ideological force, dissipated.

#### The Introduction of Communism to Central Asia

According to Marxist thought, the Socialist-cum-Communist revolution was to take place first in industrialized countries and only then proceed to the feudal (that is, less-developed) states. Imperial Russia was in the process of industrialization when Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (1870–1924) sparked the Bolshevik Revolution. In that empire, the Central Asian region was largely agrarian or pastoral. The small communities of industrial workers that existed were overwhelmingly ethnic Slavs. Thus, one of the more significant problems for the Bolshevik leadership and theoreticians was how to introduce Communism to a region that had

recently been under either feudal or precapitalist forms of government and society. (The Bolsheviks sometimes called Czarist Russia "precapitalist," suggesting that the basic elements of capitalism were present in the industrial sector, but that other parts of the economy and the mentality of the population were still lagging behind.)

During the Bolshevik Revolution, the local population in Central Asia generally viewed the new ideology as a foreign import and stayed away from much of the political wrangling that took place in 1917 and 1918. However, the collapse of the Russian empire did prompt members of indigenous elites to call for independence and for new states in Central Asia, and during the Civil War, a myriad of conflicting organizations and groups vied for power.

Many in Central Asia viewed Communism not necessarily as an ideology, but as a political and military force that would ensure continued Russian domination of the region. Some opposition groups of native inhabitants became part of the Basmachi revolt, a movement of Central Asians of all ethnicities who sought to create an independent political entity in the region. The weakness of the Basmachi was the varying views of participants—from Jadidist ("New School") thinkers who wanted to emulate the Young Turk movement in Turkey (Ottoman military officers who sought to reform what they saw as a corrupt political system in the late 1800s and early 1900s) to Islamic fundamentalists who wanted to recreate a caliphate in the region and base the new society on precepts of Islamic law. The divergence of views ensured that the Basmachi would not be able to cooperate successfully, and by 1922, the Bolshevik Red Army controlled much of the region.

In contrast, the reformist elite in Central Asia, particularly those living in the principalities of Bukhara and Khiva, saw the Bolsheviks as potential allies in their efforts to modernize the region. By enlisting the support of the Red Army, it was argued, the reformists could overthrow the repressive and conservative regimes in the respective states (ruled by executive councils modeled somewhat after the Bolshevik leadership structure in Russia) and create new, progressive entities. However, instead of being able to create their own independent states, these leaders found themselves beholden to the Bolshevik victors. By 1924–1925, Central Asia was delimited along ethnic- or national-republic borders—in spite of the fact that Lenin had originally rejected the notion of national republics and had adhered to the classic Marxist belief that ethnic identities would disappear in the new state.