

The Media Strategy Clock

By Isao Tokuhisa

A long narrow island stretches from north to south ending at Japan's northern border with the Far Eastern region of the Soviet Russian Republic. Slightly smaller than the State of Indiana, Sakhalin is completely frozen for six months of each year. This island in the Sea of Okhotsk has rich petroleum deposits in the north and ample marine resources from the surrounding waters. Flowing with the wave of *perestroika*, Sakhalin has wisely opted to develop its economy by increasing trade with Japan and South Korea, rather than to follow the centrally planned economy dictated by Moscow, 10,000 kilometers away.

Two years ago a crew from a small television station in western Japan visited the capital of Sakhalin, Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, a city that had been closed to foreigners for many years. The crew brought a present for the local television station—a small one-meter antenna dish for satellite broadcast reception. At that time, neither the Japanese crew nor the staff of the local television station had any idea that two years later, the \$600 antenna would be the source of the energy uniting Sakhalin and Far Eastern parts of Siberia—Khabarovsk, the region's center; Vladivostok, the base of the Soviet Pacific fleet; and other areas—against the leaders of the coup d'état during the three days that shook the world in August 1991.

A Japanese broadcast satellite stands in geostationary orbit 36,000 kilometers directly above Borneo Island in Indonesia, at 110 degrees east longitude. This satellite is designed to transmit waves only to the long Japanese archipelago. However, with a large antenna dish, reception of video images is possible not only in South Korea but also in the closed, totalitarian country of North Korea, as well as in all of Sakhalin Island, Taiwan and the Philippines. Furthermore, with a four- to six-meter satellite dish, reception is also possible in Beijing and Shanghai.

This satellite carries two channels from

Japan Broadcasting Corp. (NHK), the leading Japanese public broadcasting station, concentrating on international news, sports and the arts, as well as one commercial channel broadcasting mainly movies. Over four million households in Japan, and approximately 400,000 households outside of Japan, mainly in South Korea and Taiwan, receive these broadcasts.

NHK has cooperative agreements with ABC in the United States and major European stations, as well as arrangements for satellite broadcasts of news programming with CNN, BBC, France's Antenne-2 and stations in South Korea, the Philippines and Thailand. As a result, NHK is popular with foreigners living in Tokyo who look to it as a source of information about their home countries.

Sakhalin on Red Monday

Dateline: A little before noon, August 19, 1991. Sakhalin Television Station, Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, capital of Sakhalin. NHK Sakhalin temporary station chief Yasuhiro Kondo was in the editorial bureau of the local television station. The TASS teletype machine began ringing fiercely. Urgent! Urgent! The text of the statement by the State Committee on the State of Emergency appeared rapidly. It was the first announcement of the coup d'état.

Bureau Chairman Valery A. Belyaev, known for his reformist ideas, did not hide his surprise as he said to the NHK reporter, the only foreigner at the station, "This could mean the end of *perestroika*." The announcer on the state television broadcast from Moscow read the TASS statement in a monotone. The local military commander repeatedly called Belyaev, coercing him into broadcasting nothing but the bulletin from Moscow.

The phones rang wildly as requests for information poured in from organizations throughout Sakhalin. Broadcasts

from Russian Television and Russia Radio, both affiliated with Russian Republic President Boris Yeltsin, were halted with the shutdown of Russian Far East broadcasts. Then, it was the tiny antenna dish for the Japanese satellite broadcast installed on the roof of this isolated television station in the Far East that changed the situation. Satellite transmissions carried minute-by-minute reports from Japanese, American, British and French crews in Moscow covering the situation. From the Ural Mountains east across the wide Siberian plain there was just one man whose eyes were pinned on the developments in Moscow—Valery Belyaev.

Six hours after the coup, Belyaev gathered the station's camera crew into his office. He held a microphone as he stood in front of the television set. First he turned the channel to the Soviet state broadcast. There was an old movie on. Then he switched over to the broadcast coming from the Japanese satellite. The screen showed the crowds assembled in front of the Russian Republic's parliament.

A seasoned broadcast journalist, Belyaev addressed his audience. "I want everyone to see this. *This* is what is really happening in our country. And what is the state broadcasting? Nothing." The station's camera was focused on the television's satellite images from Moscow. On that day, at 10 p.m., television history was made when these dramatic images relayed from Moscow via the Japanese satellite hovering high above Borneo were broadcast on Sakhalin Television's Channel 12 throughout this isolated island 10,000 kilometers from Moscow. A shock wave ran across the island.

The red phone connecting the chairman's room with government agencies rang. It was the major-general of the Sakhalin KGB headquarters: "Are you trying to spread disorder among the citizens of Sakhalin? Think it over. Do you think you can get away with this?" Belyaev's reply was short: "I am a journalist," he said as he hung up the phone.

The information received from the satellite broadcasts was relayed to television stations in Khabarovsk, Vladivostok, Nikolayevsk in the Amur Province and Nakhodka by telex, telephone and facsimile. Requests flooded in for video footage. Belyaev attempted to transmit the images he had recorded to surrounding stations by bouncing the broadcast off the Soviet satellite in orbit directly south of Japan above the equator at 140 degrees east longitude. However, his attempts were blocked. The mainstream of the Soviet Ministry of Communications in Moscow had sided with the leaders of the coup. Controlling satellite transmissions was one of the KGB's main duties, as the supporters of the coup feared that the Sakhalin Television "rebellion" might spread throughout the Far East.

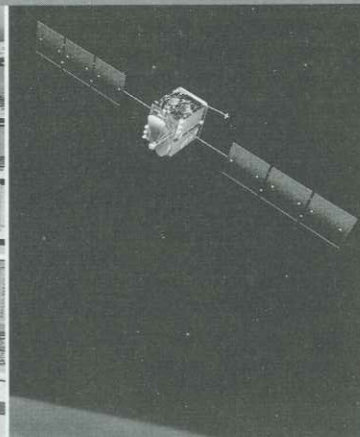
The following morning's satellite broadcast showed a close-up of Boris Yeltsin standing atop a tank in Moscow. Yeltsin's speech was taped and broadcast throughout Sakhalin. Local government officials transcribed the satellite broadcasts, and printed and distributed them to the public. The inhabitants of this isolated island in the Soviet Far East were the first Soviet citizens outside of Moscow to learn the truth about what was taking place in their capital.

August 22, 6 p.m. Sakhalin time. Sakhalin Television broadcast a special two-hour report on the coup's failure, prepared from satellite broadcasts of CNN, France's A-2 and other stations. Except for the addition of a Russian interpreter, the images were essentially broadcast unedited, as they were received by Sakhalin Television from the satellite.

Belyaev's secretary called the Moscow headquarters of the *Independent Journal*, a magazine that supported Yeltsin. By placing the phone next to the television microphone they were able to broadcast a live report from Moscow. Detailed reports of satellite broadcasts were provided by telex to Khabarovsk and a range of stations across Siberia. Over 100 telegrams poured in with requests for information. At the same time, an NHK reporter in Khabarovsk met with local government officials who stated, "We depend on the information from Sakhalin.



Television pictures sent via a Japanese broadcast satellite over the island of Borneo can be seen from Sakhalin to the Philippines.



Due to our high latitude we will need a 6-meter satellite dish to receive transmissions from the Japanese satellite."

Dawn breaks two hours earlier in local Sakhalin time than in Japan. There is an eight-hour time difference with Moscow. In mid-September, a month after the coup d'etat, Valery Belyaev visited Japan. He addressed Japanese television journalists with the following message: "The light shines from the east. The sun rises in the east. Dawn in the Soviet Union begins in Sakhalin."

Technologies of freedom

On June 14, 1989, former U.S. President Ronald Reagan gave a speech predicting that microchips would be the David to destroy the Goliath of totalitarianism, quite accurately foreseeing the revolutions of Eastern Europe and the collapse of the Soviet Union. The former president specifically mentioned facsimile machines, copiers, computer transmissions and satellite broadcasts, all electronic devices that played a role in the aftermath of the Soviet coup d'etat.

The leaders of the communist parties of Eastern Europe prohibited satellite broadcast reception for the general public while secretly watching it themselves. The leaders of North Korea, one of the few remaining closed societies, welcome the gifts of satellite dishes brought by powerful Japanese when they visit. Yet the possession of even a shortwave radio is prohibited for ordinary citizens.

There are some, although still minor, channels for information about the outside world to penetrate the Great Wall of ideology that surrounds China and keeps it isolated. There are thought to be several thousand satellite dishes in China

capable of receiving foreign television broadcasts. Successful Chinese living abroad bring home a constant supply of popular Hollywood movies and Japanese VCR units. Voice of America and BBC broadcasts are accessible. It is difficult to control the penetration of media from foreign sources, especially visual media, which has one thousand times the data of sound recordings. Although the Chinese government does occasionally jam such transmissions from the outside, its efforts are certainly not as exhaustive as were those of the Soviet Union, which until 1988 maintained a network of 2,000 jamming antennas manned by 15,000 personnel.

When a society that has gone to extreme lengths to close out information opens its doors, even just a crack, there is a high chance of chaos, internal disturbances and, consequently, an exodus of refugees and a rise of extreme nationalism. World leaders realize that media strategies based on American, European and Japanese equipment and software can at times amount to an unstoppable force, capable of overthrowing the most oppressive regimes, despite all attempts to check the flow of communication. It is just where the iceberg begins to thaw that the most lethal danger lurks. A sudden thaw threatens to deluge the surrounding areas.

The clock to which media strategy is set can move in increments of seconds, minutes and hours, or it can be adjusted to change slowly—over months and years, or even generations. The key to the success of the strategy lies in the hands of those who wind the clock.

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