

POSITION PAPER

Committee: United Nations Security Council

Agenda: Pondering over the Kuril Dispute

Country: The Democratic People's Republic of Korea



“The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting.”

— Sun Tzu

Kuril Islands, Russian Kurilskiye Ostrova, Japanese Chishima-rettō, an archipelago in Sakhalin oblast (province), far-eastern Russia. The archipelago extends for 750 miles (1,200 km) from the southern tip of the Kamchatka Peninsula (Russia) to the northeastern corner of Hokkaido island (Japan) and separates the Sea of Okhotsk from the Pacific Ocean. The 56 islands cover 6,000 square miles (15,600 square km). Out of these 56 islands, only 4 of these islands have been in a dispute.

*The four islands (the Southern Kurils) at the heart of the dispute are **Iturup (Etorofu), Kunashir (Kunashiri), Shikotan, and Habomai**. The dispute started around 1945 when the Soviet Union captured the Islands. There had been many treaties such as The Treaty of Shimoda (1855) which stated that Japan has complete control over the 4 southernmost islands but the rest of the Kuril Islands belongs to Russia. In 1875, Russia and Japan signed the Treaty of Saint Petersburg. Russia ceded possession of the Kurils to Japan in exchange for uncontested control of Sakhalin Island. However, these islands were again seized by the Soviet Union at the end of World War II.*

In May 2019, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov announced that the Russian sovereignty over these islands is beyond question, and so the consideration of the issue of border delimitation is only possible after the signature of a formal peace agreement.

The US government supports Japan and recognizes the Japanese sovereignty over the northern territories. In 1956, as Russia and Japan reached the Russo-Japanese agreement that would have allowed two of the disputed islands to be returned to Japan, the United States constrained Japan did not sign the treaty. The existence of conflict between Japan and Russia was an excuse for American military presence mostly on the Japanese island of Okinawa, under the San Francisco Peace Treaty of 1952 and the Mutual Cooperation and Security Treaty of 1960 between Japan. In addition to the Russian issue, the United States provided constant military aid to Japan upon the rise of other regional conflicts, with South Korea and China, due to the Japanese respective occupation of the islands of Takeshima and Senkaku. The North Korean Government urges the United States to stop interfering in political matters in Asia or any other place.

Disputes for islands usually aim to extend a nation's exclusive economic zone, which assumes sovereign rights for exploring, exploiting, conserving, and managing natural resources, whether living and nonliving, of the seabed and subsoil and the superjacent waters and concerning other activities for economic exploitation and exploration of the zone, such as the production of energy from the water, currents and winds. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (Montego Bay Convention) legally defines the notion of EEZ as "an area located beyond and adjacent to the territorial sea, [...] which does not extend beyond 200 nautical miles" (arts. 56 and 57).

The interest of Japan and Russia is therefore not focused on the islands themselves, which are often uninhabited or uninhabitable, but rather on the extension of the EEZ they represent. Japan already has a very large exclusive economic zone (6th in the world) of 4.5 million km² due to the fact that it includes a very large number of islands. The sea is the country's main wealth. Russia's EEZ is even larger (4th in the world) with 7.5 million km². The transfer of only the two smallest of the four islands wouldn't represent an expansion of Japan's EEZ, but the conquer of all the four claimed territories would give the country access to natural resources in the Okhotsk sea, now exclusively explored by Russia:

🌿 Fishery, the sea is rich, especially in crab and salmon, which represents 40% of Russian fishery activity; It is estimated that the area comprises the third-richest fishery reserve in the world.

🌿 Hydrocarbon, representing 15% of Russian oil activity;

🌿 Minerals, such as iron, titanium, gold, silver, and rhenium, the last one is important for the production of supersonic aircraft, as well as oil and electronic industries.

Concerning the military, since the waters around the archipelago do not freeze during the winter it constitutes an open gateway to the

Pacific, and thanks to the exercise of its sovereignty over these four islands, Russia controls all access to the Sea of Okhotsk, thus making it a "Russian lake". This sea is a privileged area for patrolling nuclear missile submarines notably in the port of Vladivostok.

Russia also evokes the honor which represents the territories, arguing that the restitution of the islands would be considered a betrayal to the effort of their WWII army. Similarly, the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov affirms Japan should "accept the transfer of the islands as an outcome of the war". Moreover, the abandonment of the Southern Kurils could push other defeated states to contest their lost territories, and weaken Russian current disputes, such as the one for the oil-rich island of Svalbard against Norway.

Despite the increasing judicialization of disputes at present, the one that has opposed Japan and Russia for more than half a century has never been the subject of an attempt at official settlement before International bodies such as the 'UN or The Hague Tribunal. Even if the discussions are frequent, they all resemble each other and always lead to the postponement of the conclusion of the peace treaty, leaving these two powers of the international game in a state of war, now obsolete. The growth of economic and energy ties between the two countries seems to be the best hope for a long-term agreement. However, in 2015, tensions have been renewed due to the upsurge in Russian politico-military activities in Iturup and Kunashir, and to the adoption of an ambitious ten-year program of economic development on the Kuril Islands which was completed, in September 2014, the construction of a new airport on Iturup.

Abe's enthusiasm for relations with Russia was driven by three factors. First, he wished to secure his political legacy by resolving the territorial dispute over the Russian-held Southern Kuril Islands and concluding a formal peace treaty. On the territorial dispute, Abe indicated that he was willing to go beyond his predecessors and settle for the two smaller of the four islands, representing just 7% of the total disputed landmass. He appeared to make some progress when he secured Putin's agreement in November 2018 to base talks on the 1956 Joint Declaration, which promises the transfer to Japan of the islands of Shikotan and Habomai. However, despite this agreement, Putin proceeded to include a clause banning territorial concessions in the constitutional amendments approved in July 2020. In Japan, this was taken as proof of Putin's bad faith and is viewed as designed for Russia to keep territories incorporated into it, such as the South Kurils and Crimea.

What is more likely to happen is that Saga try to renegotiate the concession of the two smallest islands, Shikotan and the Habomai archipelago, to resolve the matter and "not pass it to future generations". This wouldn't cause any impact on Japan's EEZ, and would push the country from accessing the Okhotsk sea resources.

The Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea will always support Russia and will supply weapons to the Russian Federation. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea will use armed forces against Japan if Russia's sovereignty is disturbed.

We urge other countries to stop this war and also urge the United Nations to discuss this topic and try to stop this war.

Sources:

[Kuril Island Dispute \(drishtias.com\)](http://drishtias.com)

[\(PDF\) The Kuril Islands dispute \(researchgate.net\)](https://www.researchgate.net)

[Kuril islands dispute between Russia and Japan - BBC News](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-56111111)