RUSSIAN RELATIONS WITH JAPAN FROM 2000-2010:
ENDURING OBSTACLES, LIMITED OPPORTUNITIES

by

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

Although Russian relations with Japan experienced notable progress from 2000-2010, recent claims by the Russian government of advancement toward a “full-blown partnership” are premature and imprecise. To be certain, many aspects of the Russian-Japanese relationship remained problematic and competitive during this period. A number of factors intimate that Russian assertions regarding the scope, promise and genuine friendliness of relations were exaggerated, not least an unresolved territorial dispute over the Southern Kurile Islands, the continued absence of a World War II peace treaty and historically entrenched mutual distrust. These and other important considerations undermined the substantial expansion and diversification of Russian political, economic and military cooperation with Japan over the last decade. Interestingly though, they did not preclude entirely the development of cooperation in these three spheres. Indeed, Russian-Japanese relations flourished in a number of areas – albeit in areas of lesser significance than the territorial or peace treaty issues that did not have much bearing on the development of a “full-blown partnership”. This case-study explores the complex nature of Russia’s relationship with Japan as it evolved and existed from 2000-2010 by assessing the extensiveness of bilateral cooperation that developed in political, economic and military spheres during the last decade. This work also identifies and discusses the theoretical bases of this relationship in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding as to why it did not expand more substantively during the Putin-Medvedev era. Specifically, this study demonstrates how three major areas of international relations theory help explain the nature of Russia’s cooperative and conflictive interactions with Japan since the turn of the millennium. These three areas include the neorealist-neoliberal debate, perception and misperception in international politics, and the prisoner’s dilemma game-theoretical approach to international relations analysis.
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Russian relations with Japan have become increasingly complex since the turn of the millennium. During the Putin era, Russian cooperation with Japan expanded significantly in virtually all areas, particularly in the economic sphere. This trend persists in the Medvedev era. Despite notable progress, Russia’s claim that its relationship with Japan is advancing toward a “full-blown partnership” is premature and imprecise. Indeed, many aspects of the Russian-Japanese relationship remain problematic, underdeveloped and competitive, if not explicitly conflictual. Several factors suggest that Russian assertions regarding the scope, promise and genuine friendliness of Russian-Japanese relations from 2000-2010 are exaggerated, not the least of which an unresolved territorial dispute over the southern Kuriles, the continued absence of a post-World War II peace treaty and historically entrenched mutual distrust. Moreover, these and other considerations intimate that Russian cooperation with Japan likely will not extend substantially beyond its current level in the near or distant future.

In attempting to explain the intricacies of Russian relations with Japan since 2000, a number of questions arise. First, what factors prohibited or discouraged Russia from expanding cooperation with Japan from 2000-2010 in a more comprehensive and sincere manner? Why? Next, why is it likely that these same issues will continue to prevent or dissuade the Russian government from establishing a truly “full-blown partnership” with Japan in the near or distant future? Also, what motivates Russian officials to proclaim that Russia’s relationship with Japan is approaching this level of confidence? And finally, on what grounds can Russian officials assert that such a partnership is expected to emerge? This study investigates these fundamental queries by analyzing political, economic and military relations between the Russian Federation and Japan since the turn of the millennium from a predominantly Russian perspective.
Beyond an examination of the more substantive issues characterizing Russia’s relationship with Japan from 2000-2010, this study also identifies and discusses the theoretical underpinnings of the relationship during this period. Specifically, it demonstrates how three major areas of international relations theory assist in explaining the nature of Russia’s cooperative and conflictual interactions with Japan since the turn of the millennium. These three areas include the neorealist-neoliberal debate, perception and misperception in international politics and game-theoretical approaches to international relations analysis. In assessing the theoretical implications of this case-study, this inquiry does not seek to artificially incorporate real-world phenomena (i.e., Russian-Japanese relations in the past decade) into prefabricated theoretical constructs. Rather, it intends to establish how the assumptions and arguments of these three major areas of international relations theory help explicate Russia’s relationship with Japan as it existed and developed in the international arena from 2000-2010.

**IMPORTANCE OF CASE-STUDY**

A case-study in Russian relations with Japan from 2000-2010 is important and valuable for two reasons. First, there exists a chronic deficit in empirical international relations research and scholarship on Russian-Japanese relations in post-Cold War era. That this deficit in academic treatment and consideration persisted in the Putin-Medvedev period even as Russian efforts at reconciliation with Japan expanded and experienced relative success is at once understandable and alarming. It is understandable because the bulk of empirical studies on post-Soviet Russian foreign policy have analyzed Russian behavior toward the West – especially the U.S., the EU and NATO – and Eastern Europe, as well as toward the ex-Soviet republics and China. Russia’s new relationship with Japan, though interesting seemed to take a “backseat” role, so to speak in regard to the intrigue of studying the manner in which Soviet collapse
impacted Russian ties to its former enemies and allies in the 1990s. As the dissolution of the Soviet Union fell further into the past and Russia’s cooperation with Japan appeared to stagnate in comparison to the rapidity with which its other friendships with China, the U.S. and the EU were emerging, the academic community produced fewer and fewer empirical works pertaining to this subject. The growing deficit in scholarly attention to Russian-Japanese relations in the post-Cold War era, particularly over the last 10 years, has reflected an apathy that has been increasing among policymakers and leaders of countries that have vested interest in the stability of bilateral ties between these two countries. This development has proven particularly alarming.

The increasing absence of studies and policies regarding the importance of stability in Russian-Japanese relations is alarming because the extent to which interaction between these two countries is cooperative or competitive has much to offer or withhold from the international community, respectively. Russia and Japan are two of the most powerful states in the world and wield significant political and economic influence abroad – each retaining the capacity to project its military power beyond its borders and region. As such, sound Russian and Japanese relations can serve as a source of stability and prosperity in Northeast Asia, Asia-Pacific and the international community as a whole. Dysfunctional or adversarial relations between the two countries, however, can have the opposite effect and exacerbate incredibly the strategic tension that already exists in Northeast Asia. After all, it should not be forgotten that the first modern war broke out between Russia and Japan and nearly became global in scope. It also should not be forgotten that Russia and Japan still technically are engaged in a state of war as they have yet to sign a peace treaty following World War II. And, although not likely, it is not impossible that conflict over the southern Kuriles could break out again between the two countries. Such a
possibility is not in their interests or the interests of their primary partners, China and the U.S. Consequently, greater attention in scholarship to the state of Russian-Japanese relations will facilitate greater attention in international affairs to the state of this relationship.

The second reason that a case-study investigation of Russia’s relationship with Japan from 2000-2010 is important and valuable is that it helps to expand relevant subfields in international relations theory literature. To be certain, the unique nature of the Russian-Japanese relationship – one constantly teetering between ambivalent civility and semi-functional, albeit tenuous partnership – adds an exceptionally unique dimension to the concepts of cooperation and competition as they apply to theoretical analyses of international relations. Infused with recurring themes and incidents of cooperation and competition, the Russian-Japanese relationship tests the explanatory limits of international relations theory in regard to the neorealist-neoliberal debate, perception and misperception in international politics and game-theoretical analyses in state-to-state interaction in the international arena.

**CONTRIBUTION TO LITERATURE**

Although many studies concerning Russian-Japanese relations in the post-Cold War era and since 2000 have emerged in the form of articles, books and monographs, most tend to be rather limited in terms of their treatment of the subject. Works to date on the topic of Russian-Japanese relations, although insightful, informative and compelling, tend to focus almost exclusively on the southern Kuriles dispute as principal determinant of all interaction between Russia and Japan – whether cooperative or competitive. And, even though the territorial dispute remains a fundamental issue in Russia’s relationship with Japan, and the shaping of its Japan policy, neither it, nor the absence of a peace treaty, maintain exclusive influence over the manner in which the trajectory of this partnership evolves. It is unfortunate, indeed, that these two issues
often eclipse further consideration of the manner in which other important factors impact and shape this relationship. It is the purpose of this study to provide a comprehensive assessment of Russian relations with Japan from 2000-2010 that acknowledges and treats in significant detail the territorial and peace treaty issues, while at the same time analyzing and commenting on – in depth – a number of other issue-areas affecting political, economic and military ties between these two countries. Unlike many analyses of Russian-Japanese relations, this study also combines comprehensive empirical and qualitative assessment with theoretical explanations as to why a “full-blown partnership” has not yet emerged between these two states.

**METHODOLOGY**

**RESEARCH DESIGN**

This dissertation is an in-depth, qualitative case-study of Russian relations with Japan from 2000-2010. Through detailed narrative, it argues that Russian interaction with Japan during this period finds its principal theoretical basis in three major areas of international relations literature: the neorealist-neoliberal debate, perception and misperception in international politics and the prisoner’s dilemma game-theoretical model. More importantly, it is the purpose of this case-study to demonstrate how and why the assumptions and arguments of these three subgenres in international relations theory help to explain Russia’s relationship with Japan as it existed and developed from 2000-2010. In particular, this case-study confirms Russian government claims of advancement toward a “full-blown partnership” were premature and imprecise by establishing the dominance and pervasiveness of neorealist tenets in Russian-Japanese political, economic and military relations since the turn of the millennium. This study uses as its independent variables: Russian concern for territorial and, to a lesser extent, economic, security (particularly in the Russian Far East); Russian-Japanese historically entrenched mutual distrust; Russian
desire for great-power status in the international community; and, Japanese behavior toward Russia, especially in regard to the Southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues. It uses as it dependent variable Russian cooperation with Japan from 2000-2010.

**DATA**

This study consulted and cites a variety of primary and secondary sources for the purposes of its research. Primary sources include transcripts of official interviews with Russian and Japanese political leaders and senior foreign policymakers; transcripts of speeches made by these same officials; statements issued by Russian presidential and Japanese prime ministerial, foreign and defense ministerial, and parliamentary press agencies concerning matters of foreign policy; documents such as the Russian and Japanese constitutions, legislation passed over the last decade, national foreign policy concepts, military doctrines, bilateral agreements, and treaties with other countries; and public opinion polls. Primary sources were generally available through Russian and Japanese government websites and political autobiographies (such as those written by Yeltsin and Putin), but can also be accessed through non-governmental websites as well. Secondary sources included books, monographs, book chapters, scholarly articles, newspaper editorials and newspaper articles.

**CHAPTER SYNOPSIS**

Chapter 2 discusses the theoretical underpinnings and implications of this case-study. It illustrates the manner in which the neorealist-neoliberal debate, perception and misperception in international politics and the prisoner’s dilemma game-theoretical approach to international relations analysis help to explain the nature of Russian-Japanese interaction from 2000-2010. Regarding the neorealist-neoliberal debate, this study reviews the extent of cooperation and competition that existed between Russia and Japan over the past decade and attempts to estimate
the level of interdependence that was present in their relationship at this time. Regarding the concepts of perception and misperception in international politics, this study considers the degree to, and manner in which, Russia’s historically entrenched distrust of Japan and sincere efforts to overcome this detrimental legacy impacted the development of bilateral relations in the last 10 years. Regarding the prisoner’s dilemma game-theoretical approach to international relations analysis, this study seeks to establish how well the prisoner’s dilemma model assists in understanding the nature of Russia’s interaction with Japan, whether cooperative or competitive, from 2000-2010. This chapter demonstrates that each of these areas of theory yields significant explanatory power in the analysis of different spheres of Russian-Japanese interaction.

Chapter 3 examines the factors that influenced Russian policy toward Japan in the Putin-Medvedev era. Prior to its examination of these factors, this chapter provides a detailed account of the historical backdrop against Russia formulated and implemented policy toward Japan over the last decade by discussing the major events and experiences that comprised Russian-Japanese relations from 1855-2000. The second part of this chapter identifies and discusses the psychological, strategic, economic and political factors that shaped Russian policy vis-à-vis Japan during the past ten years. In particular, this chapter argues that territorial and economic security were the primary driving forces behind Russian behavior in its interactions with Japan.

Chapter 4 explores the historical, conceptual and theoretical bases of the southern Kuriles dispute and contends that a resolution to this matter will be forthcoming in neither the near or distant future. It further establishes a long tradition of Russian-Japanese competition and conflict over these territories that has perpetuated a seemingly permanent atmosphere of misperception and mistrust between the two countries. Chapter 5 confirms that Russia’s position on the southern Kuriles dispute under Putin and Medvedev essentially has reverted to that espoused
during the Soviet era and consequently there has been virtually no progress on the matter since 2000. It does note, however, Russian acknowledgement that the settlement of this matter is critical to both sides and that trust-building initiatives toward this end are highly necessary and important.

The sixth, seventh and eighth chapters provide in-depth discussions and analyses of political, economic and military relations between Russia and Japan from 2000-2010, respectively. Chapter 6 examines the cultivation of personal rapport between Russian and Japanese leaders, the 2003 Japan-Russia Action Plan, intergovernmental exchange, environmental cooperation and cultural and educational exchange. It asserts that Russian-Japanese relations expanded considerably in the political sphere in the last 10 years and can attribute a good amount of the stability that they have experienced to positive development. Chapter 7 debunks common myths about Russian-Japanese economic ties, provides a detailed summary of the history of Soviet and Russian economic interaction and indicates that, even though economic relations grew impressively from 2000-2010, they did not expand “dynamically” as so many Russian and Japanese officials claim. Chapter 8 examines Russian and Japanese threat perceptions of one another and how the development of these views impacted the evolution of military cooperation between the two countries after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, particularly in the Putin-Medvedev era. This chapter further demonstrates that a careful analysis of bilateral military dialogue and personnel exchanges reveals that military relations between Russia and Japan from 2000-2010 neither expanded nor deepened to an extent commensurate with the strategic partnership that Russia allegedly seeks to establish with Japan over this period. The conclusion chapter presents the findings of this study and discusses how they either confirm or invalidate the central argument that Russian claims of advancement
toward a “full-blown partnership” with Japan from 2000-2010 are premature and imprecise. It further explains the theoretical underpinnings of this study and the contributions of its findings to the relevant literature.
CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL BASES OF RUSSIAN
POLICY TOWARD JAPAN FROM 2000-2010
As noted in the introduction, this study confirms that Russian government claims of advancement toward a “full-blown partnership” with Japan over the past decade were premature and imprecise by establishing the dominance and pervasiveness of neorealist tenets in Russian-Japanese relations during this period. This chapter establishes the prevalence of the neorealist paradigm in Russian-Japanese relations from 2000-2010 by identifying the theoretical underpinnings of neorealism, such as rational choice, fear and competitiveness, in the subgenres of misperception and game theory. Accordingly, this chapter reviews and discusses in separate sections the neorealist-neoliberal debate, the conception of misperception in international politics, and the prisoner’s dilemma game-theoretical model in bilateral interaction among states. Each section treats the theoretical and conceptual subject matter, the manner in which it applies to cooperation, competition and conflict in international relations, how the subgenre under consideration relates to the neorealist paradigm, and the relevance of the specific theory to the Russian-Japanese case-study.

**THE NEOREALIST-NEOLIBERAL DEBATE IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

The study of Russian relations with Japan from 2000-2010 finds its principal theoretical basis in the core controversy of international relations theory: the neorealist-neoliberal debate. Although complex, the neorealist-neoliberal debate essentially reduces to the likelihood of cooperation between states. An exploration of the neorealist-neoliberal dialectic in relation to this case-study provides important theoretical insights into the nature of Russia’s relationship with Japan under Putin and Medvedev from a predominantly international-systems standpoint. Moreover, the difficulties of Russian-Japanese relations during this period test the limitations and explanatory power of neorealist and neoliberal arguments in respect to the probability of
international cooperation. A review of the neorealist-neoliberal debate as it pertains to Russian relations with Japan from 2000-2010 proceeds below.

NEOREALISM AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Neorealism assumes that the international environment, lacking in centralized governing authority, is inherently anarchic and extremely competitive. It further assumes that this particular type of dog-eat-dog international system foments persistent anxiety among states in regard to their security and continued existence.\(^1\) Apologists for neorealism therefore argue that states, the primary actors in world politics, are self-interested and deeply concerned with survival. Consequently, the desire to maximize security, particularly military and territorial security, is the principle determinant of state behavior in international relations.\(^2\) Indeed, neorealism perceives virtually all state-to-state interaction as a function of geopolitical considerations and security competition. Chapters 3, 4 and 5, which discuss the historical context of Russian-Japanese relations, the factors influencing current Russian policy toward Japan, and the prominence the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues, confirm the primacy of security competition and maximization in Russian behavior vis-à-vis Japan from 2000-2010.

At first glance, the neorealist understanding of international relations does not appear especially amenable to the possibility of cooperation between states. Despite its assumption of an anarchic international arena replete with states engaged in continuous security competition, however, neorealism asserts that international cooperation, defined as a mutually participatory effort by states to address an issue of coinciding interest, is possible.\(^3\) Nevertheless, neorealists are quick to note that the anarchic and competitive conditions of this milieu generally inhibit, and render infrequent, collaborative endeavors between states.\(^4\)
Ultimately, neorealists regard the uncommon instances of cooperation among states as a function of security competition in the international arena. More specifically, they interpret cooperation as a highly sophisticated, competitive means to a carefully calculated and anticipated end. From the neorealist perspective, cooperation is rarely non-competitive and essentially constitutes competition by other means. This suggests that neorealists understand interactions between states, fundamentally and exclusively, in terms of competition. According to some neorealist scholars, however, cooperation, under certain circumstances, can serve as an important form of self-help, especially in respect to security gains. Consequently, cooperation, as per this neorealist treatment, can become the optimal choice for competitive, security-seeking states in various international contexts. Its appreciation as an effective method of self-help proves a powerful incentive for cooperation between states. Russia’s pursuit of stable relations with Japan from 2000-2010 as a means by which to develop and defend its highly vulnerable flank in the Russian Far East reflects the Russian government’s understanding of this conception of positive bilateral interaction.

The understanding of cooperation as a form of self-help and competition by other means, however, also can serve as a disincentive for interstate collaboration in global politics. The following queries help to explain why Russia understood the self-help and competitive conceptions of cooperation as disincentives, as well as incentives, for collaboration with Japan from 2000-2010. If Russia recognizes its own motivation to cooperate with Japan as competitive and self-serving, should it not logically conclude that Japan’s motivation to cooperate is equally competitive and self-serving? Moreover, if Russia understands that cooperation constitutes merely another zero-sum, interactive medium through which to increase or maximize its security at the expense of Japan, should it not anticipate that Japan has formulated a similar
understanding of cooperation? Though rhetorical, these questions emphasize the neorealist assumption that Russia and Japan are well aware of each other’s propensity to increase security at another’s expense, regardless of pretense for cooperation. Indeed, this awareness reinforces Russia’s not entirely misplaced fears that Japan seeks to exploit Russian weaknesses when it is in Japan’s interests to do so.

According to neorealist thought, cooperation essentially veils and enables the competitive, self-interested behavior of states in their relations with others. Most states are therefore keen to avoid, or highly skeptical of, such a course of action. States are very sensitive to the potential losses they may incur from cooperation, particularly in regard to territorial and military security. In this respect, they are most apprehensive about relative-gains considerations, limitation and restriction of autonomy, and the likelihood of their “partners” cheating on agreements or in cooperative endeavors. As a result, the objectives that some neorealists identify as incentives for international cooperation – self-help and security maximization – can serve as powerful disincentives for Russian collaboration with Japan as well. From a neorealist perspective, cooperation between Russia and Japan will likely occur only in “low policy” areas such as political and economic relations. Chapters 5-7 confirm this argument.  

**NEOLIBERALISM AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION**

Although chapters 5-7 confirm some neorealist arguments, they also give support to neoliberal claims that cooperation – even in the military sphere – is not as difficult to achieve and maintain as neorealists contend. The neoliberal understanding of international relations is arguably more amenable to the possibility of cooperation between Russia and Japan than its neorealist counterpart. The assumptions and guiding principles of neoliberalism represent a notable, albeit by no means complete, departure from those of idealism. Neoliberalism accepts
the neorealist perspective that the international system is inherently anarchic.\textsuperscript{13} It further acknowledges the neorealist contention that states are the primary actors and units of analysis in international relations theory.\textsuperscript{14} Neoliberal thought also recognizes the innately competitive nature of states, as well as the relative difficulty with which states achieve and maintain periods of cooperation. Neoliberals additionally concede that the primary goal of all states is survival and that states seek to maximize national interest, in this instance security, toward this end.\textsuperscript{15}

Although neoliberalism acknowledges these fundamental characteristics of the neorealist international system, its conception of these traits differs considerably from neorealism in four respects.

First, neoliberal apologists do not perceive the concept of international anarchy as a frenzied, relentless competition between states for increased security as do proponents of neorealism. Rather, neoliberals understand international anarchy as a decentralized system in which state-to-state interaction occurs on the basis of military-security and political-economic interests.\textsuperscript{16}

Second, neoliberalism maintains that cooperation, though certainly difficult to achieve and preserve, is not as hard to realize and perpetuate as neorealism contends.\textsuperscript{17} That neorealism fails to explain the absence of conflict between Russia and Japan over the southern Kuriles lends a certain degree of credibility to the neoliberal point of view in this particular instance.

Third, neoliberal thought emphasizes the important role that international institutions and regimes play in mitigating state self-interest and encouraging cooperation between states in military-security and political-economic spheres.\textsuperscript{18} In fact, neoliberals contend that the potential gains from such cooperation inspire states to create international institutions and regimes.\textsuperscript{19} As
shown in Chapter 6, 7 and 8, Russia and Japan have become important actors in international regimes concerned with political, economic and military issues.

Fourth, neoliberals do not regard military force as the primary means by which to ensure security. Instead, states promote economic strength and increased trade as equally formidable mediums through which to secure their survival. This trend has become increasingly evident in Russian efforts to attract Japanese investment into the Russian Far East to assist in the socio-economic development and modernization of the region. The discussions of Russian policy toward, and economic relations with Japan in chapters 3 and 7, respectively, illustrate this trend in Russia’s foreign economic strategy.

Although neoliberalism emphasizes international cooperation more than does neorealism, it does not deny the presence of a competitive element in cooperation. Nevertheless, neoliberal thought places substantial emphasis on the facilitating role of international institutions and regimes in the cooperative process – these institutions and regimes include basic bilateral agreements and accords between countries. In particular, neoliberals assert that they moderate the impact of anarchy on “interstate cooperation.” Regardless of the context or manner in which it takes place, neoliberals tend to view international cooperation in world politics through the “prism of interdependence” – “situations characterized by reciprocal effects among countries or among actors in different countries.” These reciprocal, albeit “not necessarily symmetrical,” effects involve “international transactions” in the form of “flows of money, goods, people, and messages across international boundaries.” Neoliberal scholars argue that such transactions have multiplied noticeably since the end of World War II.

Based on the extensiveness, diversity and frequency of these transactions, neoliberal scholars divide relationships between states into two general types: those of “interdependence”
and those of “interconnectedness.” Interdependence exists where political, economic and military exchanges are remarkably extensive, diverse and frequent and there are “reciprocal costly effects” on such international transactions. Where interactions between states do not yield “significant costly effects” on such international transactions and exchanges, neoliberals contend that only “interconnectedness” exists. The evidence presented in chapters 6-8 suggests that a relationship of “interconnectedness” emerged between Russia and Japan from 2000-2010. Specifically, it shows that Russian-Japanese political, economic and military agreements encouraged an expansion of such transactions and exchanges during this period; however, bilateral cooperation in these spheres remained cumulatively limited in terms of extensiveness, diversity and frequency. Indeed, the level of Russian cooperation with Japan in the past decade was not indicative of an interdependent bilateral relationship.

NEOREALIST AND NEOLIBERAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE ROLE OF COMPETITION IN COOPERATION

Neorealism and neoliberalism both acknowledge the presence of a competitive element in cooperation between countries in the international arena, but differ in respect to their estimations of the extent and impact of this element on international cooperation.

First, neorealist and neoliberal views diverge over the level of competition that exists between states engaged in collaborative endeavors. The former perceives a far higher level of competition in such instances than the latter.

Second, proponents of neorealism and neoliberalism disagree in regard to how severely the competitive, self-interested nature of states undermines the potential outcomes of a given instance of cooperation, as well as the possibility of expanded interstate collaboration in the future. This case-study indicates that Russian cooperation with Japan veiled a notable level of
competitiveness. The impact of this influential competitive subtext differs from one sphere of cooperation to the other. On one hand, the generally competitive undercurrent in Russia’s interactions with Japan precludes neither political nor economic cooperation. On the other, however, it retards bilateral military cooperation. Neorealist and neoliberal perspectives on the second matter are more complex than the first and therefore merit explanation in greater detail.

Neorealist assumptions that states are hypersensitive to the prospect of other states exploiting their weaknesses, and thus diminishing their security, infer that the competitive nature of states would significantly limit the potential outcomes (i.e., benefits or gains) of a given instance of cooperation. Moreover, from a neorealist perspective it is not likely that a previous, positive experience in cooperation would necessarily expand the possibility of future collaboration between two states. Ultimately, state concerns for security and survival would facilitate a reset in a state’s consideration of the risks involved in cooperating with a former partner – regardless of past successes and achievements in its relations with that particular country. Neoliberals, however, contend that the competitive nature of states does not affect the process of cooperation as adversely as neorealists claim. Therefore, neoliberals argue that self-interest does not limit the benefits or gains that a state experiences in collaborative endeavors with others in a significantly detrimental manner. Advocates of neoliberalism would also assert that productive cooperation between states encourages expanded relations in the future.

In regard to Russia’s relationship with Japan from 2000-2010, this neoliberal assertion was only partially accurate. That is to say, the only instances and spheres in which previous cooperation encouraged and served as a firm basis for future collaboration between Russia and Japan were the less substantive areas of political, economic and military interaction. Such areas included cultural, educational and inter-governmental exchanges, environmental cooperation,
limited trade and investment, and reciprocal, albeit generally symbolic, military official visits. Absent from these spheres of progressively recurring cooperation were the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues – chapters 4 and 5 provide a thorough examination of these issues and explanation as to why neither falls into this category of continuing cooperation.

**NEOREALISM, NEOLIBERALISM AND INTERDEPENDENCE**

Neorealist and neoliberal attitudes toward interdependence stem from, and generally reflect, their respective outlooks on international cooperation. On one hand, neorealists interpret cooperation among states as a function of zero-sum security competition in an anarchic international system. Proponents of neorealism essentially understand that cooperation veils and enables the ambitious, self-serving behavior of states in their relations with others. Neorealists further argue that cooperation provides states with a convenient pretext to increase their security and power at their partners’ expense. Because cooperation provides such an effective medium through which states can take advantage of one another’s weaknesses to their own benefit, many states, according to neorealist thought, are highly sensitive to the potential losses they may incur from cooperation, particularly in regard to territorial and military security, and therefore engage in the process only when absolutely necessary. This is especially the case for weaker states, once powerful states in decline, and states recovering from decline – with Russia falling into the latter grouping. Great, rising, or super powers, however, may be inclined to cooperate with weaker states to expand their influence over international outcomes. Nevertheless, for neorealists, international cooperation in spheres of notable significance like free-trade agreements, border demarcation and military alliances is infrequent and difficult to achieve and maintain. This is especially the case in more substantive areas of Russian
interaction with Japan, particularly in respect to the resolution of the southern Kurile and peace treaty issues.

Neoliberals, on the other hand, have a far more optimistic understanding of the possibility, likelihood and importance of cooperation between states. Although neoliberalism acknowledges neorealist apprehensions about cooperation, it contends that neorealism exaggerates the competitive nature of states as well as the extent to which interactions among states compromise their security and autonomy. Moreover, neoliberals criticize neorealists for dismissing the impact of international institutions and regimes in facilitating cooperation among countries and reducing states’ distrust and suspicions of one another. In response, neorealists argue that neoliberals underestimate the importance of military-security interests to states and the degree to which these interests determine states’ behavior vis-à-vis their peers in the international system. In this instance, however, neoliberalism accounts only partially for Russian relations with Japan as they existed and evolved from 2000-2010. To be certain, the regimes that their bilateral political, economic and military agreements created in the last decade were not particularly effective in reducing Russian suspicion or distrust of Japan, as is noted in chapters 4-8. These four chapters further indicate the continued dominance of neorealist military-security concerns in Russian policy toward Japan. In many respects, what neorealists would have considered disincentives for Russian collaboration with Japan, neoliberals would have perceived as incentives.

For the neorealist and neoliberal schools of thought, interdependence basically constitutes a type of intensive cooperation between inherently, self-interested states in an anarchic international environment. According to neorealist assumptions, weaker states would be skeptical of such a relationship with other, more powerful states in light of their susceptibility to
manipulation and resultant military-security losses. And, although stronger states would likely seek to take advantage of weaker states in this respect, even they would remain skeptical of the costs and risks associated with interdependence. Interdependent relationships are neither “evenly balanced” nor of consistently mutual benefit to the states involved. Indeed, they often consist of asymmetric dependencies that the more dominant state cannot necessarily exploit to its benefit. Consequently, the prospect of becoming entrapped in a situation of asymmetric interdependence and incurring military-security losses or restrictions to their autonomy dissuades weak and powerful countries alike from pursuing more intense, intimate relations with one another. States with a traumatic history of military invasion, occupation, and partition may be especially averse to entering into cooperative endeavors with other states that could render them the more dependent parties in an asymmetrically interdependent relationship. It is for these many reasons – confirmed throughout the case-study – that Russia favored the cultivation of increasingly “interconnected” as opposed to “interdependent” relations with Japan from 2000-2010, especially in the economic sphere. Toward this specific end, chapters 3 and 7 indicate Russia’s fear of becoming a “raw materials appendage” to Japan.

Neoliberalism makes an important note of neorealist concerns about the potential shortcomings of interdependence. Neoliberal scholars admit that interdependence does not guarantee an absence of conflict between states in the global community. In fact, they assert that conflict occurs in different forms, mainly through economic mediums, and may even increase under conditions of interdependence. Despite its attention to neorealist reservations regarding interdependence, particularly asymmetric interdependence pertaining to military-security matters, neoliberalism identifies this type of intensive partnership as a key incentive for interstate cooperation in the international arena, and endorses interdependence as a positive
phenomenon in world politics. Specifically, interdependence encourages states to create international institutions and regimes that can mitigate propensities to the use of military force to resolve issues among states or influence international outcomes to produce absolute, as opposed to relative, gains. Thus, neoliberal scholars contend that their conception of interdependence provides a more accurate depiction than neorealism of the manner in which states interact with each other in a given international context; but in the case of Russo-Japanese relations from 2000-2010, it seems less relevant than a neorealist interpretation.

THE NEOREALIST-NEOLIBERAL DEBATE AND COMPLEX INTERDEPENDENCE

The bedrock of the neoliberal paradigm is the conception of complex interdependence – a neoliberal ideal type designed to counter the neorealist ideal type. A relationship of complex interdependence exists between countries when the following three conditions are present:

- multiple channels of communication and interaction connect their respective societies,
- there exists no hierarchy among the issues on which they cooperate, and
- governments reject the use of military force in their relations with one another.

The absence of priority in military-security and political-economic issues further suggests a reduction in instances where military-security concerns for survival obstruct cooperation between states. Essentially, complex interdependence focuses on expanding the potential area for cooperation among states as well as reducing the role of force, and emphasis states place on their relative power positions, in the international system. To be certain, one could argue rather effectively that the criteria of the “full-blown partnership” with Japan to which Russia aspired since the turn of the millennium echo those of complex interdependence. The evidence presented in this study, however, suggests palpable incongruence between Russian rhetoric and
Russian behavior. Specifically, chapters 4-8 indicate that while an expansion in certain areas of Russian political, economic and military cooperation with Japan did occur in the past decade, it was by no means commensurate with or demonstrative of a relationship approximating complex interdependence – or interdependence for that matter. Rather, the evidence provided in these five chapters intimates a Russian-Japanese relationship of improving, albeit tortuously, “interconnectedness” and Russian interest in greater cooperation with Japan.

The principal area in which complex interdependence emphasizes international cooperation is economic relations. Indeed, complex interdependence affords significant attention to the manner in which economic interaction, primarily trade and investment, establishes states’ mutual interests in one another and encourages further cooperation. In this regard, complex interdependence recognizes economic relations as an important element contributing to state security. Specifically, states may seek to avoid conflict with neighbors or partners because they do not want to jeopardize important economic projects and interactions, and because military action is too costly. The Russian government’s repeated calls to cultivate trust with Japan through increased trade and investment indicates an appreciation for expanded economic relations as a source development and territorial security in the Russian Far East.45

States engaged in a relationship of complex interdependence can use economic means, as an alternative or supplement to military force or the threat thereof, when bargaining with one another.46 Economic strength also provides a state with the capability to become a formidable military power if it so desires; but economic means alone are likely to be ineffective against the serious use of military force.47 Thus, the concept of complex interdependence provides for military force, along with economic strength, as central to national power and state security.48 Between 2000 and 2010, economic means did not supplant the primacy of military power in
Russia’s general strategy toward Japan; so it appears unlikely that Russia’s relationship with Japan will approximate complex interdependence – or a “full blown partnership” – any time soon.

Neorealists and neoliberals adopt different perspectives on states’ use of military force to influence outcomes in the international arena. Neorealists regard offensive and defensive military force as a “usable and effective instrument of policy,” whereas neoliberals adhering to the notion of complex interdependence generally consider military force as “irrelevant or unimportant as an instrument of policy.” These divergent perspectives proceed from the level of priority that neorealism and complex interdependence assign to the security interests of the state. For neorealists, there exists a clear hierarchy of “high policy” and “low policy” issues in international relations. High policy issues consist of concerns over the military and territorial security of the state. Low policy issues consist of political-economic matters. According to neorealism, military force, or the threat thereof, ultimately guarantee the interests of the state in high and low policy areas beyond any potentially alternative means. This study demonstrates that matters of “high policy” dominated and largely shaped Russia’s relationship with Japan from 2000-2010.49

**PERCEPTION AND MISPERCEPTION IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICS**

The role of perception and misperception in cooperation, competition and conflict between states is important to understanding Russian relations with Japan. Negative perceptions have plagued Russia’s relationship with Japan ever since the establishment of formal diplomatic relations in 1855 – especially in regard to the Southern Kuriles dispute and peace treaty impasse. They have continued to be a pervasive theme in Russian relations with Japan from 2000-2010.
Indeed, Russia’s negative perceptions of Japan account for many of the dysfunctional aspects of this relationship. Whereas neoliberalism and neorealism examine the assumptions and factors that influence states’ behavior toward one another from an international systems standpoint, the perceptual approach considers state-to-state interaction from a psychological perspective. This approach enhances our understanding of why Russia deemed some types of cooperation with Japan in its interest. In doing so, it complements the neorealist and neoliberal perspectives on Russian relations with Japan.

Despite the end of the Cold War, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, a significantly diminished post-Soviet Russian military presence in the Russian Far East and Northeast Asia, and a noticeable reduction in the scope and size of Japanese armed forces on Hokkaido, Russia and Japan continue to regard one another as threats to their respective security and economic interests in the region. The level of suspicion, enmity and mistrust between Russia and Japan in the last ten years, however, was markedly less intense and debilitating than those levels that characterized the two countries’ relationship from 1895-2000. That Kremlin leaders qualified Russian-Japanese relations since 2000 as the best in over 100 years is testament to the extent to which the two states’ mutual lack of trust in each other attenuated from 2000-2010. The emergence of more immediate threats in the region, particularly the ongoing North Korean nuclear crisis, undoubtedly has encouraged Russia and Japan to modify their past emphasis on negative historical experiences and their portrayal of each other as having malevolent intentions. This has provided an improved political and psychological environment that has allowed greater Russian-Japanese cooperation on many levels.

Misperception routinely occurs as a result of one state’s wrongful or inaccurate interpretation of another’s behavior, intentions, or statements. Misperception also occurs
because of one state’s inability to understand and predict the manner in which another may interpret and react to its own behavior;\textsuperscript{50}

because governments fail to communicate their intentions to one another in an effective, transparent manner;\textsuperscript{51}

because government leaders do not understand another country’s stated ambitions;\textsuperscript{52}

and because of uncertain knowledge among policymakers of the motives underlying another state’s actions.\textsuperscript{53}

Chapters 3-8 in this study demonstrate that uncertain knowledge and the historical experience of Russian policymakers played significant roles in shaping Russia’s relations with Japan from 2000-2010.

\textit{The Roots of Threat Perception and Misperception in International Relations}

Government leaders and policymakers are often plagued by perceptions and misperceptions about threats to state security. This is usually because they distort or exaggerate the immediacy and scope of danger that other countries pose.\textsuperscript{54} One reason for this distortion is that state leaders either underestimate or overestimate the military capability and hostilities of other countries toward their own.\textsuperscript{55} The anxiety of the Russian government over continued and unapologetic Japanese claims to the Southern Kuriles – as the historic, primordial, inviolable, illegally occupied and sovereign territory of Japan –have provoked it to vilify Japan as revanchist and militarily irredentist. Chapters 4, 5 and 8 provide extensive treatments of this matter.

Another reason is that state leaders overestimate the extent to which their country is the focus of another government’s political-military ambitions. This results in a propensity among leaders to magnify the general importance of their country in the foreign policy considerations of other governments. Consequently, statesmen tend to discount the very likely possibility that
perceived adversaries may have political-military priorities in the international arena that are more pressing than expanding power, security and prestige at the expense of their country. Furthermore, state leaders exaggerate the extent to which other governments’ defensive and offensive actions are based on their country’s previous conduct in the international community. In respect to the Russian-Japanese relationship from 2000-2010, the Russian government likely was aware that Japanese government concerns over two more immediate threats in Northeast Asia superseded any misgivings that it may have had regarding Russian activity in the region.\(^56\)

The first of these more immediate threats was North Korea’s nuclear weapons program and increasingly aggressive military behavior in the region. The second immediate threat, albeit far less urgent than that of North Korea, was China’s expanding political-military and economic presence and prowess in Northeast Asia. Public commentary to this effect by high-ranking Japanese military personnel, as well as within the annual Japanese Defense White Paper, should make the Russian government more aware of Japanese national security priorities in the region; but as realists, Russian foreign policy decision-makers would unlikely dismiss the possibility that Japan could one day reprioritize its security concerns. At the same time, they may be overestimating the extent to which Japan regards Russian military activities in the region since 2007 as a threat to its strategic interests in Northeast Asia.\(^57\)

Still another reason that state leaders perceive threats from other countries is that they routinely refer to potential adversaries’ past behaviors to predict how these countries may act in the near and distant future.\(^58\) State leaders continue to take very seriously the historical behavior of potential adversaries as a critical point of reference. In the context of this case-study, Russia and Japan’s military aggression against one another in the first half of the 20\(^{th}\) century
established an important historical context for Russian threat perceptions of Japan from 2000-
2010 and vice-versa.

Although Russian-Japanese tensions have diminished considerably in the post-Cold War
era, intense mutual suspicion and distrust between the two countries remain. Consequently,
Russia and Japan continue to regard one another as a potential threat, but not to the extent that
one could argue credibly or successfully for the qualification of the two states’ relationship as
one commensurate with a “perpetual security dilemma.” Chapter 8 addresses this matter.

Threat Miscommunication and Misrepresentation

Threat miscommunication concerns the effectiveness with which government leaders
convey warnings to other countries. This concept further involves the degree to which these
state leaders understand that other countries may regard said state’s conduct in international
politics as a great, potential danger to their domestic and global security interests. Unfortunately,
government leaders are not necessarily as proficient in communicating threats to perceived
adversaries as their constituents would hope.59

Threat miscommunication by one country typically foments threat misperception by
another. Indeed, this lack of proficiency is a potential source of significant instability in an
anarchic international system. Russian threat miscommunication to Japan regarding the latter’s
claims to ownership of the Southern Kuriles and its security alliance with the U.S. over the past
decade fomented this type of negative, mutually reinforcing relationship between the two
countries. In particular, Russia reserved for itself in the beginning of 2010 the right to pre-
emptive and retaliatory nuclear strikes against states threatening – or engaged with – Russia in a
conventional conflict in which Russia finds itself at a distinct disadvantage and its territorial
security is at stake. Russia also reserved for itself at this time the right to deploy its military

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forces abroad to protect vital interests, including the territorial security of the state. According to Russia’s 2010 military doctrine and national security concept through 2020, Russia has threatened Japan, albeit indirectly and implicitly, with nuclear attack and occupation if it were to attempt to retake the Southern Kuriles by conventional military force. Notwithstanding Russia’s undoubted commitment to territorial security, especially in the highly vulnerable Russian Far Eastern maritime regions, it remains questionable as to whether Russia would actually respond to such an instance of Japanese aggression with either strategic option. The likelihood that Russia would not respond in either manner is attributable to the excessiveness of these options.

The analysis of Russian relations with Japan from 2000-2010 in chapter 8 of this study demonstrates that the Russian government has failed to directly and explicitly notify its Japanese counterpart of the exact consequences should the latter seek to retrieve militarily the Southern Kuriles. Russian allusions to pre-emptive and retaliatory nuclear strikes and military occupation, though provided for in official Russian government documents and laws concerning the defense and territorial security of the state, nonetheless remain ambiguous.

Appropriateness is an additionally important aspect of threat miscommunication. If a government advances a threat that is either excessively or insufficiently punitive, leaders of the target-state may not believe the issuer’s commitment to act on it. In this instance, one can observe a correlation between a threat’s appropriateness and credibility: the less fitting the threat, the less credible it will appear to the target. The credibility of the issuer’s threat is therefore paramount to its effectiveness; the success of a strategy of deterrence “is not the threat itself,” but the target-state’s perception of the threat, particularly its belief that the threat is real and that the issuer intends to implement the threat if the target does not comply with the issuer’s request.60
Formulating a credible threat is, however, a difficult endeavor for any country’s leadership. This task proved especially difficult for Russia in its attempts to deter continued Japanese territorial claims to the Southern Kuriles and strategic enmeshment with the U.S.. The credibility of Russia’s threats to use nuclear and conventional responses to a potential Japanese military occupation of Iturup, Kunashir, Shikotan and the Habomai Islets is highly questionable.

One distinct form of threat miscommunication that merits special consideration is threat misrepresentation. Threat misrepresentation occurs when the leaders of a government neither regard nor recognize their state’s behavior in the international arena as bellicose and provocative toward other countries. More specifically, threat misrepresentation takes place when countries view the posture or conduct of another as threatening when it is not intended to be so. Indeed, it is often the case that governments interpret the actions of other states differently. While one government may see the policies of another as antagonistic, other governments may view them as inconsequential or even benevolent. When leaders fail to entertain the possibility that other countries may understand their state’s foreign policy as hostile, there is a good chance that these countries may come to misperceive said foreign policy as a threat to their security. Threat misrepresentation has hindered the resolution of the Southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues between Russia and Japan since the turn of the millennium. Chapters 4 and 5 explore in detail the statements and actions of the Russian and Japanese governments regarding ownership of the Southern Kuriles and the necessity of a peace treaty that perpetuated threat misrepresentation between the two countries from 2000-2010.

Ultimately, threat misperception by one country is the final result of threat miscommunication or misrepresentation by another and portends a significant chance of military
conflict between them and perhaps their allies. Such is the case of Russian relations with Japan over the past ten years.

Perceptions and misperceptions do not necessarily predetermine conflict or lack of cooperation among countries in the international arena. Nevertheless, their impact on state-to-state relations is generally more detrimental than beneficial and such that they usually create political-military tension between governments and sometimes result in the severance of diplomatic, economic and military ties. This study demonstrates that Russian threat perceptions of Japan have had an incredibly negative impact on overall bilateral relations and have rendered virtually impossible the emergence or cultivation of the “full-blown partnership” with Japan to which Russia aspired from 2000-2010.

The effect of perception and misperception on interactions between states is perhaps most pronounced and harmful in international relationships where suspicion, distrust and enmity are already present and likely have been for quite some time, such as has been the case in Russo-Japanese relations. In the case of Russian relations with Japan from 2000-2010, the spheres of interaction that predominantly display these characteristics of rivalry are those of the Southern Kuriles dispute and peace treaty impasse. The extensiveness of the Russian-Japanese competition in these two areas is detailed in chapters 3, 4 and 5.

The deeply entrenched psycho-historical biases of rival states influence their governments’ views of one another in a disproportionately negative manner. In this respect, negative perceptions based on historical experience often continue to have a particularly deleterious impact on the likelihood of cooperation between states. Indeed, rival states often fail to cooperate despite “compatible preferences” in political, economic and military spheres of interaction. The inability of rival states to cooperate in these areas arises principally from each
government’s historically entrenched perceptions of the other as a threat to its security and survival. To be certain, their perceptions sometimes prompt state leaders to make “inaccurate inferences” about the motives and incentives shaping their rivals’ desire to coordinate policy and action toward equally advantageous ends. Inaccurate inferences foment and exacerbate distrust between the leaders of rival governments and increase the likelihood that policymakers on both sides will dismiss the other’s proposals for, or signals of interest in, cooperation.

Although Russia and Japan have not been intense rivals since 1991, their mutual distrust of one another has made it difficult, but certainly not impossible, for the two governments to cooperate in substantive areas of bilateral interaction conducive to the development of a “full-blown partnership” – particularly the resolution of the Southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues. In order for the two countries to realize such a partnership they must work diligently to minimize mutual distrust arising from historical experiences. The key to minimizing mutual distrust arising from historical experiences lies in Russia and Japan’s commitment to, and continued participation in, confidence-building measures (CBMs).

In general, CBMs comprise multiple forms of collaboration in various spheres of state-to-state interaction. In the political sphere, CBMs may include inter-parliamentary visits, relatively informal executive- and cabinet ministerial-level meetings on the sidelines of international fora, regional gubernatorial get-togethers, and cultural, educational, youth, tourist and sports exchanges. CBMs in the economic sphere may consist of low-interest loans, debt restructuring or forgiveness, technical training and instruction in the banking and finance sectors, and assistance in the location, extraction, refinement and transportation of raw materials and energy resources. Military CBMs may involve logistical assistance, military-technical cooperation,
intelligence sharing, high-ranking military personnel exchanges and troop inspections, and joint-military training and exercises.

Since 1991, Russia has engaged Japan in a host of political, economic and military CBMs, but these CBMs flourished most in spheres of cooperation where neither side had much at stake. These CBMs did not include collaboration and confidence-building in more important and substantive areas such as joint military exercises, military-technical cooperation, diversification and deepening of economic ties (i.e., trade and investment), and the settlement of the Southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues. Analyses of Russian political, economic and military relations with Japan during this period in Chapters 6, 7 and 8 discuss this trend in the two countries confidence-building activities.

Perception, Territorial Disputes and Cooperation Between Rival States

Perceptions in the form of historically entrenched conceptions can play a detrimental role in adversarial state-to-state relationships involving unresolved territorial disputes. Due to their mutually exclusive territorial claims, and ingrained nationalistic sentiment surrounding these claims, policymakers in rival governments find it difficult to accept their counterparts’ interpretation of historical events in support of a different position on territorial disputes. The longer these disputes remain unresolved, the more divergent and hardened the rivals’ stances tend to become and the more intolerant each government becomes of the other’s position. Moreover, the longer a territorial dispute drags on, the less likely those contesting ownership of the land are to arrive at a mutually acceptable resolution. Because territorial disputes constitute perhaps the most psychologically and strategically sensitive types of conflict between countries, they often preclude or hinder cooperation in other areas of bilateral collaboration.
For these very reasons, the ongoing Southern Kuriles dispute has undermined Russia’s relationship with Japan since late 1945 when Stalin ordered the Soviet invasion and occupation of Iturup, Kunashir, Shikotan and the Habomai Islets. Although the Russian and Japanese governments since 1997 have expressed their genuine desire keep the territorial and peace treaty issues from affecting other spheres of interaction, particularly the economic sphere, this has remained a difficult if not, at times, seemingly impossible task for the two sides. Chapters 4, 5 offer evidence that the most contentious perception-related issues in Russian-Japanese relations, the Southern Kuriles dispute and the continuing absence of a World War II peace treaty, remain inextricably linked and unresolved. The inability of the Russian and Japanese governments to negotiate a settlement to both matters stems from their unwillingness to resolve either on any terms but their own. This intransigence is, arguably, attributable to historically entrenched perceptions that are replete with suspicion and mistrust for each other.

Nevertheless, as this study shows, the Russian and Japanese governments have since 1997 become increasingly committed to maintaining a separation of the territorial and peace treaty issues from other aspects of their relationship. There is evidence of limited success in de-linking the territorial and peace treaty issues from other spheres of interaction; particularly in respect to the expansion of economic and political ties, and to a much lesser extent military-defense and international-strategic relations. Oddly enough, it is Russian and Japanese leaders’ awareness of their tendencies to project historical mistrust and animosity concerning the Southern Kuriles and peace treaty questions onto other areas of bilateral interaction that accounts for mutual efforts to avoid recurrences of this behavior.
THE PRISONER’S DILEMMA IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Several theoretical bases for the study of Russian relations with Japan from 2000-2010 in international relations literature exist beyond the neorealist-neoliberal debate and the perception-psychoanalytic method. One such basis with particularly remarkable explanatory power in regard to the Russian-Japanese case study is the prisoner’s dilemma “game-theoretical” approach. Like the neorealist-neoliberal debate and misperception-psychoanalytic method, the prisoner’s dilemma game-theoretical approach to understanding international relations and the foreign policy decision-making process seeks to illuminate why states choose to cooperate in some instances and not in others. The neorealist-neoliberal debate and psychoanalytic methods find their theoretical roots in “international-systems” and “psychological” understandings of international relations, respectively. The prisoner’s dilemma game-theoretical method, on the other hand, is rooted in the strategic-games analysis of international relations.

The game-theoretical approach to international relations analysis perceives dealings between governments as “games,” in which states compete with one another as rational actors seeking to either “maximize gains or minimize loss” – more often than not in terms of security, particularly territorial, military, economic, or energy security – under conditions of “uncertainty and incomplete information.” These circumstances encourage players to prioritize foreign policy preferences and objectives, based on their strategic interests and available information, and subsequently estimate the probability of achieving their goals. These circumstances also compel players to “discern” other players’ intentions and envision how these intentions may translate into policy and action. The highly logical approach of game theory to international relations analysis helps simplify significantly the otherwise complex process of investigating the causes
and consequences of cooperation and competition between countries. As such, game theory proves especially useful in studying the tortuous development and trajectory of Russian relations with Japan from 2000-2010. In particular, it is useful in explaining why a “full-blown partnership” between Russia and Japan failed to emerge over this period.\(^67\)

The key to exploring the strategic logic of state-to-state interactions is also one of the central assumptions of game theory as it pertains to international relations analysis: the rational choice of individual actors.\(^68\) Indeed, the common, fundamental factor among all models and game-types is the theoretical assumption that each player is a rational actor. The centrality of rational choice and the rational-actor model underscores the dominance of the neorealist perspective among those experts advocating a game-theoretical approach to the study of international relations.\(^69\) Yet, neither the supposition of rational choice nor the application of the rational-actor model to the study of interstate politics is unique to game-theoretical analyses of international relations.

What distinguishes the game-theoretical approach from other methods of international relations analysis is its extrapolation of the rational-actor model and its expansion of the concept of “rationality” in international relations analysis, by incorporating the notion of “strategic thought.” “Strategic thought,” as it pertains to the rational-actor model, suggests that the interests and potential reactions of other states factor into and shape governments’ decisions concerning foreign policy. Thus, the consideration of partners’ and rivals’ priorities abroad in addition to its own, constitutes an integral part of a state’s strategy to maximize gains and minimize losses in international relations. As a result, scholars specializing in the game-theoretical analysis of international relations established “strategic thought” as the real-world basis for, political interaction among governments at the international level.\(^70\) Because “strategic
“strategic thought” approximates very closely the manner in which states formulate and implement foreign policy, game theory is an especially effective method for studying Russian relations with Japan from 2000-2010. Chapters 4 and 5 demonstrate how the game-theoretical conception of “strategic thought” helps to explain Russian policy toward Japan concerning the Southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues from 2000-2010.

At the center of most game-theoretical analyses of international relations lies the same problem: in many instances in which there exists great promise for collaboration between states toward a mutually beneficial end, such as in trade and military security, a state’s individual rationality often leads it to “defect” and “go it alone” as opposed to risk some type of political, economic or military loss through cooperation with another state. Notwithstanding the rather obvious incentives for cooperation in these issue-areas, not least economic and defensive gains, a host of factors encourage states to “defect” and go-it-alone. These factors comprise four formative state characteristics: inherent self-interest, non-strategic rationality, profound distrust of other states, and fear of other states cheating on and defecting from bilateral collaborative endeavors. The evidence presented in chapters 4-8 suggests that these characteristics and circumstances seriously undermined Russian cooperation with Japan from 2000-2010 in certain spheres and areas, but not in others.

On one hand, chapters 4-8 confirm that the abovementioned characteristics and circumstances of game-theoretical analysis assumed a particularly influential role in slowing the expansion of Russian relations with Japan from 2000-2010 in more substantive areas of political, economic and military cooperation. The more substantive areas of Russian-Japanese political cooperation in which progress was either absent or extremely limited during this period included the resolution of the Southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues. The main such area in economic
cooperation was the diversification of trade beyond Russian natural resources (and raw materials) and Japanese high-technology. In the military sphere such progress was either absent or limited in more substantive areas like strategic military exercises (i.e., land-, air- and sea-based, non-search-and-rescue operations implicitly or explicitly directed toward third-countries) and military-technical cooperation.

On the other hand, chapters 4-8 show that these characteristics and circumstances did not preclude the expansion of Russian-Japanese relations from 2000-2010 in less substantive areas of political, economic and military cooperation. Indeed, there were a number of less substantive areas of cooperation in which Russian-Japanese relations expanded during this period. In the political sphere, these areas comprised intergovernmental, educational and cultural exchange as well as collaborative environmental preservation efforts. In the economic sphere, bilateral cooperation experienced impressive growth in trade turnover and investment – although each country’s trade with and investment in the other accounted for only a small percentage of their overall annual trade and foreign investment. In the military sphere, these areas include senior-ranking defense personnel exchanges, anti-terrorism collaboration and naval search-and-rescue exercises.

The concept behind prisoner’s dilemma is that “each player gains when both cooperate.” However, if only one player cooperates, then the player who defects will gain more. Should both defect though, both lose (or gain very little), albeit not as greatly as the “cheated” player whose cooperation the defector did not reciprocate. The difficulty with prisoner’s dilemma is that the individual rationality of the players all but guarantees a perpetual absence of cooperation between them. Indeed, rational choice prompts players to select a course of action that coincides with their best individual interests regardless of one another’s decisions. If it is likely that one
player will defect, then it is entirely rational for the other to follow suit: the latter will not gain anything, but if it does not defect, then it will incur a loss. Conversely, if it is likely that one player will cooperate, then the other will gain regardless of its choice, but will gain more if it chooses not to cooperate. In both instances, defection is the rational choice for both players. Prisoner’s dilemma thusly demonstrates that mutual rationality leads to mutual defection—a circumstance in which neither player gains anything. The prisoner’s dilemma model proves especially useful in game-theoretical analyses of Russian relations with Japan from 2000-2010. Chapters 4 and 5 concerning the Southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues confirm this argument. Although this model is particularly informative in respect to these two highly sensitive issues, the prisoner’s dilemma also helps to understand how and why cooperation between Russia and Japan during this period expanded in certain areas of political, economic and military relations, but not in others. Chapters 6-8 address this point.

Under the conditions of prisoner’s dilemma, particularly the lack of communication, individual rationality fails to facilitate optimal outcomes for the players involved. Instead, the result is suboptimal. In order to generate individually and mutually optimal outcomes in the prisoner’s dilemma, players must make the “irrational” decision to cooperate. Accordingly, the crux of the prisoner’s dilemma is that the game’s design compels rationally minded players to defect when it is, in fact, in their best individual and mutual interest to cooperate.

In single-shot format, prisoner’s dilemma occurs as a one-time, non-zero-sum and non-cooperative interaction between two distrustful, rational states devoid of communication and established patterns of behavior on which to base their decisions whether to cooperate with one another. Because the two states engage in this interaction only once, neither need fear retribution from the other for cheating or defecting. Player rationality in single-shot games is therefore non-
strategic in that each state’s foreign policy choices take into consideration neither the other’s interests nor previous actions nor potential reactions. In international relations scenarios replicating the conditions of the single-shot prisoner’s dilemma format, states’ available foreign policy strategies do not extend beyond “defecting” and going-it-alone.

The “single-shot” game-type has limited analytical capability in the study of Russian relations with Japan from 2000-2010. It is not an approach that can provide either effective analytic or comprehensive commentary on Russian-Japanese relations in one or multiple spheres of interaction over an extended period of time. If the Russian and Japanese governments truly wish to break through the territorial and peace treaty impasses, then they must both be willing to generate and embrace new, innovative formulas for reconciliation that will put aside at least some of their mutual perceptions of the negotiation and resolution processes as a zero-sum and single-shot encounter. The severe lack of substantive, consistent and in-depth communication between the highest levels of government in Russia and Japan regarding the territorial and peace treaty issues, however, does not inspire confidence that these perceptions will change for the better in the near or distant future. Chapters 4 and 5 draw attention to this matter.

Thus, the iterated prisoner’s dilemma (IPD) proves more effective as an analytic template in the study of Russian cooperation and competition with Japan from 2000-2010. IPD in international relations begins in a manner relatively similar to the single-shot format. In IPD, states’ interaction begins as non-zero-sum and non-cooperative. Unlike its single-shot counterpart though, prisoner’s dilemma in iterated format occurs numerous times and affords players opportunities to develop a “correlated strategy” contingent on one another’s past behavior a given sphere over a certain period.75 Player rationality in iterated games is therefore strategic76 in that each state’s foreign policy choices take into consideration the other’s actions in
previous cycles or rounds. The notion that states can observe their counterparts’ behaviors over greater intervals of interaction and can thus formulate, adopt and apply a “correlated strategy” based in the latter’s choices in previous game is critical to the notion of IPD. Depending on the correlated strategy that a state adopts in an IPD-type relationship with another state, however, “reputation effects and retribution” can have a potentially very destabilizing and dangerous impact on the nature of the two states’ association. One such correlated strategy that helps explain Russian relations with Japan from 2000-2010 is “tit-for-tat.”

Tit-for-tat is a strategy, typically used in IPD games, in which one player responds in one round of interaction with the same move that its counterpart used in the immediately preceding round. The problem with each player using tit-for-tat in IPD stems from the outcome of the single-shot prisoner’s dilemma game. In the single-shot prisoner’s dilemma format, both players are rational and thus, in the absence of communication, choose to defect in order to maximize their individual interest. As this same outcome surely would occur in the first round of an IPD game, mutual defection would “echo through the game permanently.” In the context of IPD as it pertains to international relations, states would find themselves continuously defecting in response to, and in retaliation for, one another’s defection in their previous exchange. Consequently, if two states engaged in an IPD-type relationship – comprising ongoing and repeated interactions in important spheres such as trade and military security – simultaneously employ tit-for-tat against one another, then they run the risk of becoming irremovably immersed in a cycle of confrontation and competition in these and other issue-areas.

Tit-for-tat and defection constitute strategies that neither create nor facilitate opportunities for sustained cooperation between states involved in IPD-type relationships. Instead, tit-for-tat and defection foment conflict in such situations. And, although widely used in
game-theoretical analyses of IPD, tit-for-tat and defection are by no means the only available, realistic and viable strategies that states employ toward one another under circumstances approximating IPD. Indeed, many strategies for IPD encourage ongoing cooperation between the two players. A particularly notable strategy in this regard is that of “tit-for-tat-with-forgiveness.”

When applying “tit-for-tat-with-forgiveness” in IPD, players sometimes cooperate even if their counterpart defected in a previous round of interaction – thus forgiving the latter’s earlier betrayal. After one retributive defection, the player employing “tit-for-tat-with-forgiveness” essentially lets “bygones be bygones.” This strategy proves especially effective in two respects. First, it encourages ongoing cooperation between players in IPD games. Second, it mitigates the impact of mutual defection and its “echo-effect” on the prospects for cooperation in two-player IPD games. In an international relations context, “tit-for-tat-with-forgiveness” seems to hold great promise for sustained cooperation between states in a bilateral relationship that approximates IPD. Because they approximate so closely the reality of IPD-comparable relations between Russia and Japan from 2000-2010, it makes sense to embrace “tit-for-tat” and “tit-for-tat-with-forgiveness” as appropriate strategies for the game-theoretical analysis of this relationship as it existed and evolved over this period.

Accordingly, tit-for-tat exhibits exceptional explanatory capacity in virtually all instances of recurring cooperation in Russian-Japanese relations, especially in the economic sphere. Nevertheless, tit-for-tat fails to explain the continued efforts of both Russia and Japan to find consensus on the territorial and peace treaty issues and to expand military ties. Despite the highly sensitive nature of the Southern Kuriles dispute and peace treaty impasse – and the persistence of mutually exclusive views on these matters as well as antagonistic official
statements and legislation regarding ownership of the Southern Kuriles – each government remains committed to the resolution of these issues and confirms to the other its dedication to realize this objective. It is “tit-for-tat-with-forgiveness” that best explains Russian and Japanese behavior in this delicate and complex area of their relationship from 2000-2010. The evidence in chapters 4-8 confirms the explanatory capacity of both models in their application to Russia’s relationship with Japan over the past decade.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has demonstrated that the neorealist-neoliberal debate, the psychoanalytical approach, and game theory, particularly the prisoner’s dilemma model, wield considerable and impressive explanatory power in the analysis of Russian relations with Japan from 2000-2010. Each paradigm provides insights into Russia’s relationship with Japan as it existed in the past decade. Notwithstanding the explanatory capacity of these theoretical approaches, it is ultimately the neorealist tenets of rational choice, fear and competitive self-interest that are the dominant trends in Russian-Japanese relations since the turn of the millennium. This by no means concedes exclusivity in explanatory power or characterization of this bilateral relationship to neorealism. Nevertheless, there remains much more to be accomplished in its cooperation with Japan before Russia can sincerely boast advancement toward a “full-blown partnership” and the neoliberal paradigm can become the dominant construct for understanding Russian relations with Japan.
NOTES


4 Glaser, “Realists as Optimists,” pp. 50-51, 56-58, 60, 70, 72-73.

5 Ibid., p. 50.


14 Ibid., p. 9.

15 Keohane and Nye, Power and Interdependence, p. 27.


22 Baldwin, “Neoliberalism, Neorealism, and World Politics,” pp. 8-9; Jervis, “Realism, Neoliberalism, and Cooperation,” pp. 43, 45, 47.


26 Ibid., p. 9.

27 Ibid., pp. 8-9.


29 Baldwin, “Neoliberalism, Neorealism, and World Politics,” pp. 4-5.
31 Ibid., pp. 486, 490, 492-493.
34 Ibid., pp. 51-52.
37 Ibid., p. 18.
42 Ibid., p. 254.
43 Ibid., pp. 24-25.
44 Ibid., pp. 23-35.
48 Ibid., p. 27.
49 Ibid., pp. 24-25, 27-29.
The treatment of the concept of “threat misrepresentation” in literature concerning perception and misperception in international politics is very limited. For the most part, the studies that do address this topic qualify “threat misrepresentation” as an intentional strategic action that a government uses purposely to deceive rivals, perceived and actual, into believing that its capabilities are either limited or substantial and its motives are either peaceful or antagonistic. (See Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*, p. 142; Gerard Alexander, “Strategic Misrepresentation of Security Dilemmas,” pp. 2-10, 20 (paper presented at the annual meeting for the American Political Science Association in 2006)) Alexander mentions, however, the important need for more scholarly attention to the evaluation of other states’ perceptions, particularly how they perceive that other states perceive them. (See Alexander, p. 5.) The qualification of “threat misrepresentation” in my discussion of misperception in international politics as it applies to the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of Russian relations with Japan from 2000-2010 is markedly different from that of main focuses of Jervis and Alexander. My treatment does not understand “threat misrepresentation” as a purposeful action designed strategically to mislead other countries into false perceptions. Rather, my qualification of this concept draws upon Alexander’s call for greater scholarly attention to states’ misperceptions of other states’ perceptions of them. Specifically, my application of “threat misrepresentation” to the Russian-Japanese case-study considers how leaders overlook mistakenly or are oblivious to the manner in which their behavior comes across to other states and how such developments could foment conflict between states.
gains and minimize losses in international politics. To a certain extent, non-strategic rationality explains the behavior of Russia and Japan towards one another. Specifically, the non-strategic rationality of the Russian and Japanese government accounts for their mutual inability and unwillingness to resolve the Southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues, as well as their lack of significant military cooperation. (For further reading on non-strategic rationality as it pertains to game-theoretical analysis in international relations, please see: Fricks and Majeski, “Conflict and Cooperation in International Relations,” pp. 622-645; Snidal, “The Game Theory of International Politics,” pp. 25-37.)


Strategic rationality acknowledges the importance of cooperation and consultation between states as a vital means through which states can accomplish objectives of mutual interest. Strategic rationality therefore explains the aspects of the Russian-Japanese relationship for which non-strategic rationality fails to account, namely the promulgation of the 2003 Japan-Russia Action Plan, the expansion of economic and political relations, and the implementation of confidence-building measures such as cultural and educational exchanges. (For further reading on non-strategic rationality as it pertains to game-theoretical analysis in international relations, please see: Fricks and Majeski, “Conflict and Cooperation in International Relations,” pp. 622-645; Snidal, “The Game Theory of International Politics,” pp. 25-37.)


Ibid.


Axelrod, The Evolution of Cooperation, p. 36.

Ibid., pp. 36-37, 186.
CHAPTER 3

RUSSIAN POLICY TOWARD JAPAN FROM 2000-2010: HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND CURRENT INFLUENTIAL FACTORS
The process of identifying and analyzing the factors influencing Russian policy toward Japan from 2000-2010 is at once complex and intriguing, much like the Russian-Japanese relationship itself. When engaged in this process, one comes to empathize with the argument that predicting Russian conduct in the international community is tantamount to deciphering “a riddle wrapped inside a mystery inside an enigma.” Relations between Russia and Japan over the last decade, though cumulatively competitive, nevertheless have evinced an increasingly cooperative trajectory. As the nature of Russian-Japanese interaction becomes more dualistic in this regard, so too does the riddle-mystery-enigma metaphor become more reflective of Russian policy toward Japan in the Putin-Medvedev era. Despite the critical, rather discouraging tone of this metaphor, there is indeed a “key” to discerning the complex motives behind Russian policy toward Japan: national interest.

The primary national interest of the Russian government is security, specifically territorial security – a consequence of Russia’s vast, yet sparsely populated, geographic expanse. Russia’s anxiety over maintaining its current international borders dominates its relations with states in neighboring regions. Accordingly, concern for territorial security is a principal factor shaping Russian policy toward Japan. To be certain, this fixation pervaded and influenced virtually all other factors shaping Russian policy toward Japan from 2000-2010, including those dealing with Russia’s increasingly important secondary national interest: economic security. A deeper analysis of the factors influencing Russian policy toward Japan in the Putin-Medvedev era confirms the priority status of territorial and economic security in Russia’s relations with Japan during this period; that concern for territorial and economic security accounts for Russia’s competitive, as well as conciliatory, postures and actions toward Japan; that competitive and self-interested tendencies dominate Russian behavior toward Japan, but that incentives for
cooperation may yet temper or diminish these more aggressive tendencies; that many of Russia’s traumatic political-military encounters with Japan in the Czarist and Soviet eras provided strong historical precedent for the current trajectory of Russian relations with Japan in the Putin-Medvedev era; and, that these traumatic political-military encounters are partially responsible for Russia’s continued perception of Japan as a threat to its territorial and economic security.

This chapter examines the major factors influencing Russian policy toward Japan in the Putin-Medvedev era and establishes concern for territorial and economic security as recurring and dominant themes among them. Toward this end, this chapter divides its treatment of Russian policy toward Japan from 2000-2010 into two parts. The first deals exclusively with the major events and experiences in Russian-Japanese relations from 1855-2000 that shaped the context of Russian policy toward Japan over the past decade. The second part discusses the psychological, strategic, economic and political factors that shaped Russian policy toward Japan from 2000-2010.

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF RUSSIAN RELATIONS WITH JAPAN

Several events and experiences shaped the historical context of Russian policy toward Japan from 2000-2010. They comprise various actions, confrontations, treaties, bilateral agreements and ideological perspectives from the Czarist, Soviet and early post-Soviet eras. This section divides and analyzes these events and experiences according to the regime era with which each is associated – Czarist, Soviet and early post-Soviet.

THE CZARIST ERA

A number of events and experiences from the Czarist era shaped the historical context of Russian policy toward Japan from 2000-2010. These include the 1855 Treaty of Shimoda and

**The 1855 Treaty of Shimoda and 1875 Treaty of St. Petersburg**

The 1855 Treaty of Shimoda established formal diplomatic ties between the Czarist regime in Russia and the Tokugawa Shogunate in Japan; it is the primary historical basis for the two countries’ present relationship. This inaugural accord cultivated bilateral trade relations and, more importantly, provided for a partial demarcation of the Russian-Japanese maritime border in the southern rim of the Sea of Okhotsk. Specifically, Article 2 of the Treaty of Shimoda designated Russian and Japanese sovereignty over the Kurile Archipelago in the following manner: the islands north of, and including, Urup up to the Kamchatka Peninsula belonged to Russia whereas the islands south of, and including, Iturup down to Hokkaido (i.e., the southern Kuriles) belonged to Japan.³

Because the ownership of Sakhalin was a far more sensitive and divisive matter at the time of the treaty’s signing, the two sides essentially postponed its resolution by claiming shared dominion over the island.⁴ Indeed, Russia and Japan did not resolve the Sakhalin question until two decades later in the 1875 Treaty of St. Petersburg – an agreement in which Japan forfeited its rights and claims to Sakhalin to Russia in exchange for ownership of the entire Kurile Archipelago and Czarist Russian acknowledgement of exclusive Japanese dominion over Hokkaido.⁵

**The First Sino-Japanese War and the Triple Intervention**

The First Sino-Japanese War lasted from early August 1894 until mid-April 1895. The formal casus belli was competition between the Qing and Meiji governments in China and Japan, respectively, for control of Korea.⁶ The strategic subtext of the First Sino-Japanese War,
However, intimated a far different, indeed nested, motive for Japanese intervention on the Korean Peninsula in 1894: preventing Russian domination of the Korean, and to a lesser extent, Liaodong, Peninsulas and thusly preemption of the subsequent, direct threat that such a prevailing Russian presence on the continent would pose to the territorial security of Japan. To be certain, Japan found particularly alarming the rate at which Russia had expanded its imperial domain and influence on the Northeast Asian mainland from the late 1850s to the mid-1890s.

The Japanese government knew very well that the southerly direction of Russian territorial aggrandizement resulted from Qing China’s increasing inability to control and defend these regions. It also was aware that China’s growing weakness only would encourage Russian ambition regarding Korea and enable Russia to absorb the peninsula into its sphere of influence, if not annex it completely. The First Sino-Japanese War occurred partially in Japanese anticipation of this looming Russian threat; it constituted the first instance in which Japan took significant military action abroad both to challenge and limit Russian power in Northeast Asia. The Meiji government believed that its only chance to maintain the Korean and Liaodong peninsulas as strategic buffers between itself and Russia was to wrest them from Qing China before Russia could seize the opportunity to do so itself.

When Japan accomplished this goal in its military victory over Qing China in mid-August 1895, however, Russia intervened with France and Germany almost immediately thereafter and stripped Japan of these hard-won territorial acquisitions. The Triple Intervention proved highly demoralizing and frustrating to Japan. Adding insult to injury, and revealing its motives for participating in the Triple Intervention, Russia quickly moved to lease from China and occupy the Liaodong Peninsula and Port Arthur. Japan’s extreme humiliation in the Triple Intervention and the Russian actions that preceded it created a strong desire for revenge among
the Japanese elite and public and perpetuated Russian-Japanese competition in southern Manchuria, Korea and the Liaodong Peninsula from 1895-1904.¹⁰

*The Russo-Japanese War and the Treaty of Portsmouth*

The Russo-Japanese War occurred as a consequence of the First Sino-Japanese War, the Triple Intervention and the competing imperial ambition between Czarist Russia and Meiji Japan for strategic and economic dominance in Manchuria and Korea. Russia’s resounding defeat in this conflict, particularly at the battles of Mukden and Tsushima, determined the regional balance of power in Northeast Asia in favor of Japan for the next 40 years. Japan’s victory in the Russo-Japanese War shocked both Russia and the West. The long-term psychological trauma that Russia has incurred as a consequence of this conflict remained a source of national humiliation and resentment toward Japan and the West in the Soviet and post-Soviet eras. More traumatic for Russia than its defeat in the Russo-Japanese War however, were the unjust terms to which it acquiesced in the 1905 Treaty of Portsmouth, particularly the forfeiture of southern Sakhalin to Japan.¹¹

Russians regarded the terms to which their delegation acceded at Portsmouth in September 1905 as demeaning, excessive and unfair. Accordingly, the Czarist government and citizenry shared two views of the peace conference at Portsmouth, New Hampshire in the summer of 1905. First, the Czarist delegation had conceded too much, too soon in the peace negotiations. Second, the U.S. government, specifically President Theodore Roosevelt, had not sufficiently considered Russian interests due to his personal aspiration for Japan to balance Russian power in Northeast Asia.¹² The desire to reclaim southern Sakhalin from the Japanese for emotional and strategic reasons resonated strongly in the Russian national psyche. This relatively bitter Russian sentiment persisted in the Soviet era and became most visibly manifest
The Siberian Intervention involved a concerted military effort on behalf of American, Japanese, Czech, British, French, Chinese and Canadian governments to assist the White “movement” – comprising Russian monarchists, nationalists and socialists – in defeating the Bolsheviks in the Russian Civil War. Approximately 100,000 Allied troops participated in this predominantly Western enterprise to “strangle Bolshevism in its cradle” via the cultivation of the White Army and its political counterpart, the Provisional Siberian Government (PSG). Japan contributed nearly 73,000 personnel to this sizable Allied troop contingent and thusly had the
most widely dispersed military presence throughout Siberia and the Russian Far East over this four-year period.\textsuperscript{17} The Siberian Intervention lasted from August 1918 – October 1922, though all participants except Japan had withdrawn from Russia by June 1920; roughly one year after the military defeat and collapse of the Allied-backed PSG in the summer of 1919.

The extensive, indeed excessive, nature of its involvement in the intervention betrayed Japan’s relatively obvious imperial designs on Siberia and the Russian Far East. Toward these ends, Japan remained in the Transbaikal region until October 1922 supporting various remnants and factions of the White Army against Soviet military forces and those of the Soviet puppet state in Siberia, the Far Eastern Republic (FER). Japan went so far as to foment White secessionist sentiment within the southeastern region of the FER and even occupied northern Sakhalin in April 1920. This resulted in the establishment of the Japanese puppet state, and White political-military enclave, the Provisional Priamur Government (PPG) in May 1921.\textsuperscript{18} Under substantial political pressure from the West, however, particularly the U.S., Japan evacuated the Russian Far Eastern mainland in October 1922.\textsuperscript{19} Soon thereafter, the Soviet and FER armies quickly overran the PPG and effectively eradicated the remaining pockets of predominantly Japanese-backed White resistance in the region by June 1923.\textsuperscript{20} Japan did not withdraw from northern Sakhalin until January 1925.

Notwithstanding the Soviets’ success in recovering these resource-rich and strategically valuable territories, the excessiveness of Japan’s participation in the Siberian Intervention nevertheless yielded devastating effects on the Soviet psyche. The strategic vulnerability of Siberia and the Russian Far East to Japanese occupation and partition posed a very direct and immediate threat to the survival of the Soviet regime. Consequently, the Soviet government transformed its Far Eastern region into the largest, most heavily militarized buffer state – internal
though it may have been – in history\textsuperscript{21} so as to preclude future recurrence of Japanese encroachment on Soviet territory in Northeast Asia. The Soviet Far East quickly became considered, and treated in domestic and foreign policy as, the Soviet Union’s “military bulwark in the Pacific.”\textsuperscript{22} Beyond the intense, sustained militarization of the Soviet Far East, the Soviet government also sought to deflect Japanese imperial ambition in Siberia prior to World War II by cultivating peaceful relations with China and Japan and creating buffer states on its Far Eastern border, specifically the Mongolian and Tuvan People’s Republics.\textsuperscript{23} The Soviet government maintained a heavily militarized posture in the Soviet Far East to deter Japanese aggression in the region until its collapse in the early 1990s.

\textit{Resurgent Japanese Expansionism in Northeast Asia in the 1930s}

Another historical determinant from the Soviet era that influenced Russian policy toward Japan from 2000-2010 was resurgent Japanese expansionism in Northeast Asia in the 1930s. Despite the establishment of formal Soviet-Japanese relations in January 1925 and the evacuation of Japanese troops from northern Sakhalin shortly thereafter, Soviet leaders in the latter half of the 1920s had very little reason, given the following circumstances in Northeast Asia, to doubt Japanese efforts to annex Soviet territory in the Russian Far East at some point in the near future: Chinese and Soviet military weakness, the extension of Japan’s sphere of influence to Soviet borders in the Russian Far East, and recent historical precedent for such Japanese behavior in the 1904-1905 Russo-Japanese War and the 1918-1922 Siberian Intervention. Not surprisingly, the resurgence of Japanese expansionism in Northeast Asia in the 1930s became a matter of immediate and lasting concern to the Soviet leadership.

Japan’s first great expansionist thrust in Northeast Asia in the 1930s occurred in September 1931 with the Japanese invasion of Manchuria. Soon afterwards in March 1932 the
Japanese created the puppet state of Manchukuo.\textsuperscript{24} The establishment of Manchukuo proved very alarming to the Soviet government for two reasons. First, the establishment of Manchukuo placed a sizeable, militarily powerful Japanese puppet state directly adjacent to Soviet Far Eastern Territory. Second, the Soviet leadership was not certain that Japan’s imperial ambitions at the Soviet Far Eastern border would stop indefinitely. Soviet leaders became more skeptical of Japanese intentions in Northeast Asia in November 1936 when Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan signed, and mutually endorsed the Anti-Comintern Pact, a de facto alliance between the two governments against the Soviet Union. Japan’s full-scale invasion of China less than a year later in July 1937 provoked further concern among the Soviet leadership over Japanese strategic motives in Northeast Asia.\textsuperscript{25}

Soviet fears that the Japanese harbored imperialist designs on the Soviet Far East came to fruition in the Soviet-Japanese border conflicts at Lake Khasan and Khalkin Gol in July 1938 and May 1939, respectively.\textsuperscript{26} The Soviets were victorious in both engagements. The Soviet defeat of the Japanese at Khalkin Gol, however, was far more significant than at Lake Khasan because it discouraged any further serious consideration among the Japanese military elite of invading and annexing territory from the Soviet Far East. Soviet-Japanese military engagement at Lake Khasan and Khalkin Gol convinced the Soviet leadership that maintaining a militarized and defensive posture in the Soviet Far East was critical to Soviet territorial security in Northeast Asia. Moreover, Soviet repulsion of the Japanese at Lake Khasan and Khalkin Gol had demonstrated the Soviet Union’s renewed military capabilities in the region and thus served as effective deterrents against any such acts of aggression in the future.
**Soviet Abrogation of the 1941 Soviet-Japan Neutrality Pact**

Japanese military expansion in Northeast Asia and limited bilateral military engagement in the late 1930s did not provoke war between Japan and the Soviet Union. That the two governments managed to avoid seemingly inevitable full-scale conflict with one another in May 1939 is testament not to a shared capacity for political-military caution and restraint, but rather to the presence of more pressing mutual strategic priorities than the threat that each posed to the other. The Soviets’ overriding priority at this time was the rising Nazi menace in the West, whereas Japan’s was its deepening, enduring war with China. The two countries’ growing unease over these matters underscored the following mutual concern: renewed conflict between the Soviet Union and Japan would distract each from its respective priorities in national security during the onset of World War II. In short, strategic necessity dictated peace. Accordingly, the two sides negotiated and signed the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact in April 1941.

The Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact immediately became valuable to both signatories. In June 1941, approximately two months after the Soviet government promulgated the pact, Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union. Hitler’s unilateral revocation of the August 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact – also known as the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact – was a strategically and psychologically devastating experience for the Soviet Union, and for Stalin in particular. However, as per the Soviet-Japan Neutrality Pact, the lack of an urgent Japanese threat in Northeast Asia exempted the Soviets from fighting a two-front war in Europe and the Pacific. More importantly, the Soviets’ pact with Japan allowed them to focus all of their efforts on repelling the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The neutrality pact afforded Japan the opportunity and capacity to more effectively prosecute its war for empire against the U.S. and British in Southeast Asia. As the tide of war in Europe turned decidedly in favor of the
Allies, however, Stalin began to question the continuing necessity of the Soviet-Japan Neutrality Pact.\textsuperscript{28}

Allied victory in Europe and American need for Soviet assistance to end its war with Japan in the Pacific provided great strategic prospects for the Soviet Union in Northeast Asia. As a result, Stalin repudiated the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact in early April 1945 – a year before its formal expiration.\textsuperscript{29} Allied victory in Europe followed roughly one month later in May 1945. In keeping to his February 1945 pledge to U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt at Yalta, Stalin entered the war against Japan three months after Allied victory in Europe.\textsuperscript{30} And, on August 8, 1945 the Soviet Union declared war on Japan and the next day launched Operation August Storm – also known as the Manchurian Strategic Offensive.\textsuperscript{31} Operation August Storm lasted from August 9 – September 5, 1945.\textsuperscript{32} In this campaign, the Soviet and Mongolian armies defeated Japanese forces in Manchuria, occupied large parts of Manchuria and northern parts of the Korean peninsula, and invaded and reclaimed Sakhalin Island and the Kurile Archipelago.\textsuperscript{33} In a very short period of time, the Soviet Union had succeeded in regaining most of the influence in Northeast Asia that it and its Czarist predecessors had lost over the years to Japanese efforts to contain Russian power in the region. Soviet abrogation of the 1941 neutrality pact in the closing days of World War II greatly distressed the Japanese government. Beyond fomenting acute Japanese distrust of the Soviets throughout the Cold War era, the Soviets’ unilateral and premature dissolution of the neutrality pact precipitated the territorial dispute and peace treaty impasse that have hindered the normalization of Russian-Japanese relations since the end of World War II.\textsuperscript{34}
Soviet Refusal to Sign the San Francisco Peace Treaty and the 1951 U.S.-Japan Basic Security Treaty

The Soviet era are the Soviet refusal to sign the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty and the promulgation of the 1951 U.S.-Japan Basic Security Treaty laid the foundation for the dysfunctional relationship that existed between the Soviet Union and Japan for the duration of the Cold War. Specifically, the Soviet decision not to endorse the San Francisco Peace Treaty resulted directly in the absence of a post-World War II Soviet-Japanese peace accord. The promulgation of the U.S.-Japan Basic Security Treaty essentially created a military alliance of the two countries against the Soviet Union in Northeast Asia. The lack of formal peace between Russia and Japan and the persistence of the U.S.-Japan security alliance in the Putin-Medvedev era continue to impact Russian policy toward Japan in a generally negative manner.

That American foreign policy in Northeast Asia was so actively engaged in limiting Soviet power in the region from 1945-1951 simultaneously agitated and distressed the Soviets. American cultivation of vehemently anti-communist governments in South Korea, Japan and Taiwan effectively created a maritime cordon sanitaire in Northeast Asia and halted the expansion of communism and Soviet influence beyond the water’s edge in Asia-Pacific. Consequently, the Soviet Union viewed American containment of its power in Northeast Asia as a direct threat to its territorial security in the Soviet Far East. Of particular concern to the Soviet government were the 1951 San Francisco Treaty and U.S.-Japanese Basic Treaty. The San Francisco treaty drew substantial criticism from the Soviets for a variety of reasons, ranging from the lack of Western consultation with the Soviet Union over the treaty’s provisions to the failure to invite the People’s Republic of China (PRC) to the peace negotiations. Ultimately, the Soviets’ main reason for abstaining from the treaty was its improper and insufficient
consideration of Soviet strategic interests in Northeast Asia – the most prominent of which was the limitation of American military presence in the region.\textsuperscript{37}

The 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty not only provided for the long-term projection of extensive U.S. military power into Northeast Asia, it also served as the basis for a lasting military alliance between the U.S. and Japan that would help to realize this objective. Because the U.S. military presence in the region was in large part designated against the Soviet Union, Soviet leaders came to regard Japan as a strategically ideal off-continent maritime base for future American campaigns to expel the Soviets from Northeast Asia. As a result, Soviet opposition to the U.S.-Japan Basic Security Treaty was particularly fierce. Further Soviet hostility to the treaty arose from the understanding that it created a military alliance against the Soviet Union and its then-ally the PRC. The Soviet Union feared that U.S. responsibility for the defense of Japan in the post-World War II era would provide the U.S. an opportunity to balance Soviet influence in Northeast Asia by Japanese proxy.\textsuperscript{38} The Soviet response to the U.S.-Japan Basic Security Treaty consisted of two strategies: a radically defensive military posture in the Soviet Far East and the cultivation of the PRC and North Korea as Soviet satellites in Northeast Asia.


Notwithstanding its refusal to sign the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty and its fierce opposition to the 1951 U.S.-Japanese Basic Security Treaty, the Soviet government engaged in normalization negotiations with its Japanese counterpart in June 1955.\textsuperscript{39} After three rounds of failed, yet formative, normalization talks, the Soviet and Japanese governments finally signed the Soviet-Japanese Joint Declaration in mid-October 1956.\textsuperscript{40} This agreement reestablished relations between the Soviet Union and Japan, noting an end to the two countries’ World War II
hostilities. It did not claim, however, to have instituted a formal Soviet-Japanese peace. To be certain, their inability to resolve entirely the territorial dispute over the southern Kuriles precluded the full normalization of bilateral relations at this time. Nevertheless, the 1956 Joint Declaration was an incredibly significant event in postwar Soviet-Japanese relations because Article 9 of this accord provided the first formula, albeit vague and rudimentary, for the resolution of the territorial and peace treaty issues. The Japanese renewal of its security alliance with the U.S. in late May 1960 virtually stunted the momentum that this declaration had inspired in postwar Soviet-Japanese ties in 1956.\(^{41}\)

Soviet-Japanese reconciliation in the mid-1950s occurred as a direct, although delayed, result of Stalin’s death in March 1953. Having consolidated his political power as leader of the Soviet Union by late 1955, Khrushchev denounced Stalin – his predecessor and mentor – in his famous “Secret Speech” at a closed-session of the 20\(^{\text{th}}\) Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in late February 1956. Beyond criticizing Stalin’s abhorrent domestic policy, Khrushchev also contested Stalin’s confrontational foreign policy vis-à-vis Western capitalist states. Essentially, Khrushchev discarded Stalin’s worldview of imminent war between Western capitalist and Eastern communist countries in favor of a far more conciliatory general foreign policy approach: peaceful coexistence. A key component of this new, pragmatic and constructive direction in Soviet foreign policy under Khrushchev was the reestablishment or cultivation of bilateral relations – especially in the economic sphere – with the U.S. and U.S.-aligned capitalist governments. That the Soviet Union signed the Joint Declaration with Japan in October 1956, approximately seven months after the 20\(^{\text{th}}\) Party Congress, intimated Khrushchev’s consolidation of political power in the Soviet Union, the emergence of a new direction in Soviet foreign policy, and Khrushchev’s determination to see “peaceful coexistence”
succeed. Political conditions in Japan from 1955-1956 also were highly amenable to the normalization of Soviet-Japanese relations.\textsuperscript{42}

Perhaps the most significant provision in the 1956 Soviet-Japanese Joint Declaration was Article 9. This article addressed the issue of greatest contention between the two countries: mutually exclusive territorial claims to the southern Kurile Islands (Iturup, Kunashir, Shikotan and the Habomai Islets). It stipulated the transfer of the two southernmost Kuriles, Shikotan Island and the Habomai Islets, from the Soviet Union to Japan at some point \textit{after} the signing of a peace treaty. To be certain, rightful ownership of the southern Kuriles remained the central focus of Soviet-Japanese peace negotiations from June 1955 – October 1956. The inability of Soviet and Japanese governments to resolve the territorial issue in these talks was the primary reason why the agreement reached in Moscow in October 1956 constituted a type of graduated armistice instead of a formal peace treaty. And, although Article 9 demonstrated compromise and willingness on both sides to settle the territorial dispute, it was and remains an insufficient formula for the resolution of this matter. Moreover, Article 9 established a mutually defeating linkage between the resolution of the territorial dispute and the conclusion of a peace treaty. Despite its shortcomings in regard to the southern Kuriles issue, the 1956 Joint Declaration was nevertheless a “milestone” in post-World War II Soviet-Japanese reconciliation and intimated notable promise in the two countries’ future relations.\textsuperscript{43}

Another factor that greatly undermined the successful negotiation of a full peace settlement between the Soviet and Japanese governments in October 1956, besides the territorial issue, was America’s staunch, yet subtly expressed opposition to these Soviet-Japanese efforts to mend relations.\textsuperscript{44} Naturally, the Japanese government had to balance its desire to cultivate more stable, functional ties with the Soviets with its undeniable and immediate need for a strong
economic and political-military relationship with the U.S. for protection from the very real threats that the Soviets and Communist Chinese posed to Japan’s national security. Consequently, the Japanese government renewed its defense agreement with the U.S. in mid-June 1960. The U.S. government reciprocated Japan’s good faith by working within the provisions and guidelines of Article 3 of the San Francisco Peace Treaty for the return of the Bonin and Ryukyu Islands from the U.S. to Japan in an expedited manner. Not surprisingly, the decision of the Japanese government to renew its military alliance with the U.S. simultaneously alarmed and infuriated the Soviets, who viewed this alliance as a direct threat to its territorial security in the Soviet Far East and strategic interests in Northeast Asia. In response to this Japanese slight, the Soviet government issued a unilateral revision of Article 9, which stipulated that it would return Shikotan and the Habomais to Japan only after the withdrawal of all “foreign” – read: American – military forces from its territory. As expected, the Japanese government recognized neither the validity nor legality of this Soviet action.


In 1960, the economic and political-military closeness of Japan to the U.S. was not the only threat to Soviet strategic interests, particularly the territorial security of the Soviet Far East, in Northeast Asia. Indeed, the expanding ideological and strategic rift between the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China (PRC) posed an increasingly serious challenge to the territorial security of the Soviet Far East at this time as well. As Sino-Soviet relations continued to deteriorate throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s, a long-held Soviet fear concerning its position in Northeast Asia came to fruition. Specifically, the schism in Soviet and Chinese worldviews that had prompted the PRC to pursue a path in foreign policy independent of, and
often in aversion to, Soviet priorities and interests had culminated in the normalization of Sino-Japanese and Sino-American relations in 1978 and 1979, respectively.

Most alarming to the Soviets was the driving force behind this rapprochement: the common American, Japanese and Chinese desire to isolate and contain Soviet power in Northeast Asia. The Soviet response to the Sino-Soviet split, 1978 Sino-Japanese Peace Treaty and U.S. diplomatic recognition of the PRC was a sustained, dramatic military build-up in the Soviet Far East and Mongolia of some 650,000 Soviet defense personnel,\(^49\) including an increase in Soviet military personnel on the southern Kuriles to 10,000 in 1978\(^50\) and potentially the invasion of Afghanistan in October 1979.

Although indicators of a rift were present in the Soviet Union’s alliance with the PRC prior to March 1953,\(^51\) it was Stalin’s death at that time and Khrushchev’s subsequent denunciation of Stalinism at the 20\(^{th}\) Party Congress in February 1956 that accelerated the Sino-Soviet split from the late 1950s to the mid-1960s.\(^52\) The latter development did not bode well with Mao Zedong because his virtually absolute political authority in the PRC derived from Stalinist tactics and policies.\(^53\) Khrushchev’s condemnation of Stalinist domestic political repression and promotion of “peaceful coexistence” in Soviet foreign policy undermined Mao’s political power at home and China’s influence abroad, respectively. Despite Khrushchev’s efforts to keep Sino-Soviet diplomatic fences in good repair, the two countries’ relationship became more and more dysfunctional and antagonistic.

Some of the more critical developments in the Sino-Soviet split included: Soviet refusal to assist the PRC in its development of nuclear capacity for strategic rather than domestic, peaceful purposes in 1960;\(^54\) Soviet ambivalence toward China in the 1962 Sino-Indian War;\(^55\) Mao’s condemnation of Khrushchev’s backing down in the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962;
Chinese acquisition of nuclear weapons in 1964; Soviet expulsion of all Chinese students attending Soviet universities in 1966; Soviet and Chinese deployment of sizeable troop contingents to Sino-Soviet border areas in 1967; Chinese Red Guard seizure of the Soviet embassy in Beijing in 1967 during the Chinese Cultural Revolution; the limited but highly significant Sino-Soviet military conflict on Damansky Island in the Ussuri River in 1969; the Soviet request for U.S. neutrality in the event of a Soviet first nuclear strike against the PRC in 1969; and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. The Damansky Island conflict was the pinnacle of the Sino-Soviet split.

Formal Sino-Japanese and Sino-American reconciliation in 1978 and 1979, respectively, only compounded Soviet anxiety over the increasing threat that its rivalry with the PRC posed to its territorial security in the Soviet Far East. Of particular concern to the Soviet government was Article 2 of the Sino-Japanese Peace Treaty – a provision declaring the two sides’ mutual commitment to oppose an attempt by any other Asia-Pacific power to establish hegemony in the region, especially in Northeast Asia. Kremlin leaders interpreted this “anti-hegemony” clause as implicitly, yet unmistakably directed against the Soviet Union and “contemplated with dismay the prospect of a Sino-Japanese political alignment that might later include the United States.” Despite the normalization of diplomatic relations between the PRC and U.S. a year after the Sino-Japanese Peace Treaty, an “anti-Soviet entente” in Northeast Asia of this type did not materialize. To be certain, Mikhail Gorbachev’s rise to power in the Soviet Union and his application of perestroika at home and “new thinking” in Soviet policy abroad resulted in an impressive, efficient thaw in Soviet relations with the PRC, Japan and the U.S. beginning in the mid-1980s. Moreover, the incompatible economic and strategic priorities in regional and global affairs of the PRC, Japan and the U.S. precluded the possibility of Sino-Japanese and Sino-U.S.
reconciliation in the late 1970s from developing into a triangular partnership against the Soviet Union. Soviet ties with all of these countries improved consistently until the dissolution of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991.59

Perestroika and “New Thinking”

Perestroika and “new thinking” proved especially effective strategies in facilitating Soviet-Japanese reconciliation in the mid-1980s. Indeed, Gorbachev’s efforts to expand economic and political interaction with Japan under perestroika and “new thinking” marked an important turning point in Soviet-Japanese relations that remains evident in the post-Soviet era. Perestroika reinvigorated Soviet-Japanese economic relations and established a basis for post-Soviet Russian economic exchange with Japan.60 “New thinking” inspired Soviet efforts to reconcile politically with Japan and ultimately laid the diplomatic foundation for transitional Russian-Japanese relations under Yeltsin. Gorbachev regarded improved economic and political relations with Japan as a key factor in the success of perestroika,61 especially in regard to the socio-economic development and territorial security of the Soviet Far East62 – as well as in regard to the integration of the Soviet Far Eastern economy into the flourishing East and Northeast Asian regional markets.63

In implementing perestroika in 1985, Gorbachev aspired to restructure and reinvigorate a beleaguered and sluggish Soviet economy that had experienced substantial stagnation and recession during the latter half of the Brezhnev period. Perestroika consisted of domestic and international components and agendas. The domestic component and agenda included gradual privatization and modernization of the Soviet economy as well as greater individual economic opportunities for Soviet citizens. The domestic agenda also sought to streamline the unsustainable burden that the Soviet military industrial complex had put on the Soviet economy.
The international component promoted the cultivation of economic ties with non-communist countries and the integration of the Soviet economy into emerging and increasingly dynamic regional and world markets. Gaining access to more extensive lines of credit and advanced technology from wealthy, developed Western countries were principal aims of the international agenda. The overall objective of perestroika was to transform the Soviet command economy into a market economy. “New thinking” played an important role in Gorbachev’s grand, albeit ultimately failed, strategy to realize the Soviet Union’s transition to a market economy under perestroika.

Essentially an expanded and adapted version of Khrushchev’s “peaceful coexistence,” “new thinking” called for renewed Soviet détente with the U.S. and its allies⁶⁴ – the purposes of which were to reduce the burden of military spending on the then-heavily strained Soviet economy and create an international environment conducive to domestic political and economic reform. Gorbachev sought specifically to ease political-military tensions with the Soviet Union’s estranged, if not hostile, neighbors – the U.S., Western Europe, NATO, China and Japan – so as to allow the Soviet government to direct the necessary attention and resources toward the successful implementation of perestroika at home and abroad. In this respect, Gorbachev designed “new thinking” to both complement and facilitate the international component and agenda of perestroika. In particular, he enlisted a new, more conciliatory approach to Soviet foreign policy that would diminish U.S., Western European, Chinese and Japanese suspicion of Soviet intentions, and at the same time encourage Western governments to grant the Soviets access to the finances and technology required to liberalize and modernize the Soviet economy.

Gorbachev designated Japan a principal target of perestroika for many reasons. First, Japan presented to Gorbachev and his progressive regime an attractive alternative to American
and Western European sources of capital, investment and advanced technology. Second, Japan had become the greatest economic power in East Asia by the end of the 1980s and consequently wielded significant economic and increasingly remarkable political influence in the region. As a result of its expanding economic and political prowess in East and Northeast Asia, Japan also had become a power-broker in important regional economic organizations to which the Soviet government hoped to accede and solicit desperately needed funding to develop the Soviet Far East. Moreover, as an economic superpower in the region, Japan could ease the Soviet Union’s political and economic entrance and integration into the Asia-Pacific market – a market that would prove pivotal in the revival of the socio-economically underdeveloped Soviet Far East.

Third, Japan was the only country in Northeast Asia that possessed the abundant resources necessary to develop and modernize the economy and industrial infrastructure of the Soviet Far East. Fourth, Gorbachev also looked to Japan for experience and direction. Specifically, the Japanese model of economic liberalization and modernization differed distinctly from the industrialized, capitalist West and could serve as an invaluable and insightful template for the transformation of the Soviet command economy into a market economy. In order to enlist Japanese support in the liberalization and modernization of the Soviet economy, particularly that of the Soviet Far East, Gorbachev adopted a conciliatory approach to Soviet relations with Japan from March 1985 – December 1991. To be certain, the type of economic commitment to the Soviet Far East that Gorbachev desired from Japan could not come to fruition without convincing Japan that the Soviet government could be trusted politically. Accordingly, Japan was a central focus of “new thinking” in Soviet foreign policy. Conciliatory Soviet overtures to Japan became almost immediately apparent when Gorbachev assumed leadership of the Soviet government.
In his landmark speeches in Vladivostok in July 1986 and Krasnoyarsk in September 1988 concerning the need for change in Soviet domestic and foreign policy in the Far East, Gorbachev praised Japan as an “economic superpower,” an important actor in global affairs and a natural partner for the Soviet Union in Northeast Asia. Further efforts on Gorbachev’s part to implement “new thinking” and renew Soviet ties with Japan in the mid-1980s included replacing the vehemently anti-Japanese Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko with a more progressive and pragmatic diplomat, Edouard Shevardnadze, who made in mid-January 1986 the first official visit of a Soviet Foreign Minister to Japan in roughly 10 years; appointing Japanese-speaking career diplomat, Nikolai Soloviev, as the new Soviet ambassador to Japan; accepting the U.S.-Japanese security alliance as an international reality and a “fait accompli,” while at the same time continuing to disapprove of the significant, if not excessive, influence that it afforded the U.S. over Japan; reactivating joint economic and trade regimes such as the USSR-Japan Economic Commission; signing multiple bilateral political and economic agreements; conceding the existence of a territorial dispute between the Soviet Union and Japan over the southern Kuriles and admitting a need to resolve the issue within the terms of a peace treaty; and making the first ever official state visit by a Soviet leader to Japan in mid-April 1991.

Notwithstanding the extent of Gorbachev’s efforts to forge a new, more trusting and interactive relationship with Japan under the auspices of “new thinking,” three primary obstacles continued to hinder reconciliation between the two countries. First and foremost, the Soviet Union and Japan had a highly antagonistic, conflictual and distrusting history of interaction in Northeast Asia that the deep diplomatic freeze during the Brezhnev era simultaneously reinforced and exacerbated. Due to its profound and historically entrenched distrust of the
Soviet Union, the Japanese government remained highly suspicious as to the sincerity of Gorbachev’s “smile diplomacy.” Of the many East Asian governments to which Gorbachev’s 1986 Vladivostok and 1988 Krasnoyarsk speeches were directed, Japan was the least receptive to their praise, propositions and aspirations.

Japan’s hesitation in this regard was largely attributable to its recognition of the fact that “new thinking” constituted a far greater change in the style of Soviet foreign policy toward Japan than it did in substance. Specifically, the Japanese government and citizenry greatly disliked the fact that the Soviets had done very little to exhibit a strong desire to compromise and resolve the southern Kuriles dispute in a fair and expedited manner beyond Gorbachev’s signing of the 1991 Soviet-Japan Communiqué – a bilateral accord in which the Soviet government agreed that the two sides would conclude any resolution to the territorial dispute within the terms of a peace treaty. Indeed, the lack of substantive progress on the territorial dispute impacted negatively the expansion of relations in other spheres of interaction, especially in the economic sphere, and thusly served as the second obstacle to more extensive Soviet-Japanese reconciliation during Gorbachev’s tenure.

The third and final obstacle to more extensive reconciliation between the Soviet Union and Japan from March 1985 – December 1991 was Japan’s longstanding security alliance with the U.S. Despite the growing Japanese rift with the U.S. over trade barriers and other disruptive experiences in the two countries’ economic relations in the 1980s, their mutual defense commitment remained solid. Japan’s strategic enmeshment with the U.S., particularly in the Northeast Asian theatre, encouraged it to regard with great skepticism Soviet promises to “never” attack Japan. The Soviet Union continued to carry out a sizeable military build-up in the Soviet Far East – begun under Brezhnev as a response to the Sino-Soviet split, the 1978 Sino-
Japanese Peace Treaty and U.S. recognition of the PRC in 1979 – into the late 1980s, while attempting to reassure Japan of its peaceful intentions in the region.\textsuperscript{86} The two strategies seemed highly contradictory to the Japanese and, as a result, exacerbated Japanese suspicions as to the actual motives behind Soviet actions and ambitions in Northeast Asia. To be certain, the extensive Soviet military presence in the Soviet Far East compelled the Japanese to enlarge its own military presence in the region and more deeply ingratiate itself with the U.S. by agreeing to participate in joint endeavors such as the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) in 1987.\textsuperscript{87}

The general consensus among scholars regarding Gorbachev’s policy toward Japan is that it enjoyed only moderate success in accomplishing its objectives.\textsuperscript{88} Perestroika and “new thinking” renewed political dialogue and, to a lesser extent, economic interaction between the Soviet Union and Japan, but failed to elicit significant Japanese investment in the Soviet Far East and exploit weaknesses in the U.S.-Japanese relationship. Nevertheless, Gorbachev’s efforts to expand economic and political interaction with Japan under perestroika and “new thinking” marked a turning point in Soviet-Japanese relations that remains evident in the post-Soviet era. Perestroika reinvigorated Soviet-Japanese economic relations and established a basis for post-Soviet Russian economic exchange with Japan. Like Gorbachev, Yeltsin encouraged greater economic cooperation between Russia and Japan. “New thinking” called for renewed Soviet détente with the U.S. and its allies. Accordingly, “new thinking” inspired Soviet efforts to reconcile politically with Japan and ultimately laid the diplomatic foundation for transitional Russian relations under Yeltsin. In large part, Yeltsin mimicked Gorbachev’s conciliatory foreign policy towards Japan, expanding and retracting on themes and issues as needed.
THE YELTSIN ERA

The continued influence of perestroika and “new thinking” over Russian relations with Japan remained evident in the immediate post-Soviet era. Like his predecessor and former political arch-rival Mikhail Gorbachev, first Russian President Boris Yeltsin sought to reconcile and eventually normalize the Russian-Japanese relationship for many of the same reasons – especially the encouragement of expansive Japanese assistance in the socio-economic development and industrial modernization of the Russian Far East. Notwithstanding Yeltsin’s efforts to attract substantial Japanese investment in the Russian Far East and create an atmosphere of stable political relations with Japan, many of the same obstacles that undermined Soviet-Japanese reconciliation during Gorbachev’s tenure frustrated the process during Yeltsin’s tenure as well, specifically the southern Kuriles dispute. The bulk of Russian relations with Japan in the Yeltsin era therefore comprised interactions geared toward the establishment of a sound political basis for the resolution of the territorial dispute, the signing of a peace treaty and the expansion of economic relations. Accordingly, the events and experiences from the Yeltsin era that shape the historical context of current Russian policy toward Japan include the 1993 Tokyo Declaration, the separation of economic and political relations, Yeltsin’s strong personal rapport with Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto, and Yeltsin’s resignation.

The 1993 Tokyo Declaration

The governments of Russia and Japan designed the 1993 Tokyo Declaration to serve as the basis for bilateral relations in the post-Soviet era. By all accounts, the declaration was a groundbreaking, formative political experience in post-Soviet Russian-Japanese relations. It also demonstrated that Gorbachev’s Japanese policy continued to inform that of Yeltsin in many ways. The negotiation and drafting of the declaration, however, did not occur in the absence of
difficulty and controversy. In fact, the two governments should have signed accord in September 1992 as opposed to October 1993.  

That the conclusion of this first major post-Soviet Russian-Japanese agreement did not transpire until almost two years into Yeltsin’s first presidential term indicated the sporadic nature of Russian-Japanese relations in the early 1990s. More significantly, it revealed the ineptitude with which Yeltsin approached relations with Japan. It further evinced the extent to which Yeltsin’s Japan policy came to reflect that of Gorbachev early on in his presidency, particularly in regard to the southern Kuriles dispute. Interestingly enough, Yeltsin’s relatively haphazard approach to the countries’ relationship impacted current Russian policy toward Japan in both a positive and negative manner.

Despite having assumed the office of President of the Russian Federation in January 1992, Boris Yeltsin did not visit Japan until October 1993. Yeltsin had intended to pay an official state visit to Japan in September 1992. In breaking with diplomatic protocol, however, Yeltsin cancelled the visit four days prior to its commencement. He made the move because he had not yet formulated a coherent policy on the southern Kuriles dispute – an issue that would likely assume primacy in his meetings and dialogue with Japanese government officials, particularly Japanese Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa. Yeltsin likely recognized that his inability to make substantive concessions on the territorial issue during his prospective visit would result in Japanese withholding of financial assistance that was crucial to Russia and Yeltsin’s political survival.

The cancellation of Yeltsin’s September 1992 state visit to Japan also occurred as a consequence of intense political pressure from increasingly powerful conservative forces in the Russian government. Indeed, Yeltsin’s suspected inclination to compromise with the Japanese
in order to resolve the southern Kuriles dispute and fully normalize Russian-Japanese relations became subject to intensive political criticism from conservative and nationalist groups in Russia. These groups included the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, the Liberal Democratic Party of the Russian Federation, military leaders, and the governors of Sakhalin Oblast, Khabarovsk Krai and Primorsky Krai. In an effort to alleviate this political pressure, Yeltsin adopted a perspective on the territorial issue that more closely corresponded to the positions of his conservative and nationalist detractors. By incorporating the positions of these rivals into his approach to the territorial dispute, Yeltsin effectively deprived them of important and valuable political ammunition that they could use to further weaken his standing and influence in Russian government and society.

Yeltsin’s tilt to a more conservative position on the southern Kuriles issue may have assuaged his concerns over political survival at home and thusly impacted in a positive manner his domestic political agenda. However, this seemingly adept maneuver in the domestic political arena precipitated an adverse effect on Russian relations with Japan at the time. Specifically, it resulted in the postponement of Yeltsin’s anticipated state visit to Japan in September 1992 and precluded the resolution of the southern Kuriles dispute when Yeltsin eventually did travel to Japan in this capacity in October 1993. By the end of that visit, the Japanese government had become increasingly skeptical as to the sincerity of his desire to settle the territorial dispute on an expedited basis, if at all.93

That Yeltsin stated during his October 1993 Tokyo visit that Russia and Japan needed to solve the territorial dispute “at some stage,” yet not “all at once,” without specifying a time frame for its resolution seemed to contradict earlier communications that he had made to the Japanese government intimating his willingness to resolve the matter within his generation of
leadership.\textsuperscript{94} Yeltsin further asserted that a settlement to this issue required an extensive development of relations between the two countries – read substantive Japanese investment in the Russian Far East – and the bringing together of their peoples “psychologically.”\textsuperscript{95} These statements, quite understandably, did not inspire Japanese confidence in Yeltsin’s commitment to resolve the southern Kuriles dispute. Essentially, the Japanese government came to regard Yeltsin’s commentary on the matter during this visit “merely as lip service” and scrutinized with great caution and consideration any Russian policy statement concerning the southern Kuriles made during Yeltsin’s tenure.\textsuperscript{96} For all intents and purposes, Yeltsin’s position on the territorial matter – once independent, innovative and decidedly distinct from that of Gorbachev – had become largely congruent with that of Gorbachev.\textsuperscript{97}

To the discontent of the Japanese government, the October 1993 Tokyo Declaration did not accomplish much in terms of facilitating either a short- to medium-term resolution to the southern Kuriles dispute or the signing of a peace treaty. Nevertheless, the declaration was an important factor in Russian policy toward Japan for many reasons during Yeltsin’s tenure and remained a particularly influential document in Russian-Japanese relations from 2000-2010. Among its notable achievements were a mutual affirmation of an existing territorial dispute between the two countries over the ownership of the southern Kurile islands and a need to settle this highly sensitive matter; confirmation of the continued legality and relevance of the 1991 Soviet-Japan Joint Communiqué to post-Soviet Russian-Japanese relations, especially the stipulations that the two sides must resolve the territorial dispute within the provisions of a peace treaty and that the resolution will involve all four islands; and rehabilitation of the 1956 Soviet-Japan Join Declaration in its entirety, including, and in particular, Article 9 – the provision containing the initial Soviet-Japanese formula for the resolution of the territorial and peace treaty.
issues, specifically that the Soviet (now Russian) government would hand over the islands of Shikotan and Habomai to Japan after the conclusion of a peace treaty (italics added). Of additional significance in Yeltsin’s rehabilitation of the 1956 Joint Declaration in its entirety was the implication that the withdrawal of U.S. military forces from Japan was no longer a prerequisite for peace treaty negotiations between the two governments in the post-Soviet era.98

Even though the 1993 Tokyo Declaration did not facilitate a major breakthrough in Russian-Japanese relations under Yeltsin, especially in regard to the settlement of the territorial and peace treaty issues, it nevertheless represented a remarkable and relatively promising departure from Soviet policy on the matter during the Cold War. As a result, the Japanese government utilized the declaration as its primary point of reference in relations with Russia from October 1993 – December 1999.

*The Separation of Economic and Political Relations*

The separation of the two countries’ economic and political relations pertained specifically to Japan’s short-lived, and ultimately unsuccessful, strategy of linking economic assistance and cooperation to the Soviet and post-Soviet Russian governments to Kremlin concessions on the southern Kuriles dispute. Also known as “seikei fukabun,” this Japanese strategy constituted essentially a policy of quid pro quo in which the Japanese government would reward substantive Soviet and, later, Russian efforts to resolve the territorial dispute on terms favorable to Japan with economic aid and lucrative trade opportunities.99 Indeed, “seikei fukabun” amounted to little more than a sustained Japanese attempt from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s to blackmail the Soviet and post-Soviet Russian governments into returning Iturup, Kunashir, Shikotan and the Habomai Islets to Japan in exchange for desperately needed financial support. That Japan’s coupling of financial assistance and progress on the territorial dispute
overlapped a period during which the Soviet Union and Russian Federation were crippled both economically and politically demonstrated the explicitly opportunistic nature of “seikei fukabun.”

This practice, however, had not been the norm in Soviet-Japanese relations for much of the Cold War. Shortly after having reestablished relations with the Soviet government in October 1956, Japan afforded the Soviet Union most-favored nation status. And, despite the temporarily negative impact of Japan’s renewal of the U.S.-Japanese Security Treaty in late May 1960 and the Soviets’ consequent, unilateral revision of Article 9 of the 1956 Soviet-Japan Joint Declaration on political relations between the two countries, bilateral economic interaction continued to expand, albeit it somewhat gradually, in the 1960s. It was not until the late 1960s when the two countries embarked on a series of joint ventures in exploiting the natural resource wealth of the Soviet Far East, particularly raw materials and fossil fuels, that the Soviet-Japanese economic relationship began to develop in earnest. This trend continued and accelerated throughout the 1970s into the early 1980s. During this period, the Japanese government maintained a policy of “seikei bunri” – a separation of economic and political relations – in its cooperation with the Soviet Union.

In the early 1980s, however, Soviet-Japanese economic relations experienced a downturn as a result of three developments. First, many of the joint ventures that the Soviet government and Japanese private sector “keiretsu” – business conglomerates – had begun in the 1970s, with the exception of oil and gas exploration in the Sakhalin continental shelf, were nearing completion. Second, the Japanese government became the subject of intensive U.S. political pressure to enact economic sanctions against the Soviet Union in response to, and retribution for, its invasion and occupation of Afghanistan beginning in December 1979 and endorsement of the
December 1981 imposition of martial law in Poland. Third, it became exceedingly apparent to the Japanese government that it could exploit the Soviet Union’s growing economic need as leverage in an effort to extract territorial concessions from the Soviet government in regard to the southern Kuriles dispute. The Soviet Union’s growing economic weakness and political degeneration in the latter half of the 1980s only encouraged hawkish elements in the Japanese government – including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Defense Agency and right-leaning factions of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party – to pursue a policy of “seikei fukabun” toward Gorbachev’s ailing administration. To be certain, the Japanese government saw an even more promising opportunity to reacquire the southern Kuriles after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the inception of its successor state, the Russian Federation.

Despite having coerced the politically nascent and economically fragile post-Soviet Russian government into conceding the existence of a dispute between the two countries over the ownership of all four southern Kurile islands, Japan’s strategy of linking financial assistance to progress on the unresolved territorial issue merely aggravated tensions over the matter and provoked the criticism of its Western peers. On one hand, the transparency of Japanese motives for withholding economic assistance from Russia only strengthened Yeltsin’s resolve to retain custody of the islands regardless of Russia’s economic need at the time. This transparency in Japanese motives elicited an equally negative response in Russian public opinion toward Japan. On the other hand, Japan’s partners in the G7 did not appreciate the manner in which it sought to capitalize on Russia’s vulnerability to economic influence for strategic gain. As Yeltsin’s power began to erode in 1993, the G7 came to recognize that extensive economic aid to Russia was crucial to Yeltsin’s political survival and subsequently Russia’s fledgling democratic system of government.
The Japanese government eventually capitulated to substantial political pressure from its Western peers, especially the U.S., and all but abandoned “seikei fukabun” in March 1993 in favor of a more balanced approach to relations with Russia. Japan’s decision to separate economic ties from the southern Kuriles dispute at this time intimated an increasingly moderate and conciliatory tilt in Japan’s Russia policy. Like Russia, Japan recognized the need to create conditions for the settlement of the territorial dispute as a necessary prerequisite to its resolution. The Japanese government deemed, as did its Russian counterpart, the cultivation of trust through expanded relations, particularly in the economic sphere, as the primary and most effective means through which to create these conditions. Japan’s complete abandonment of “seikei fukabun” occurred in January 1997 as a result of then Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto’s new “Eurasian Doctrine” – the initiatives of which provided for an expansion of bilateral relations while continuing to negotiate a settlement to the territorial dispute. Hashimoto’s plan did not make the expansion of economic relations with Russia contingent on rapid progress toward a resolution to the southern Kuriles dispute.105

Yeltsin’s Strong Personal Rapport with Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto

Yeltsin’s strong personal rapport with Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto. The trust that emerged from the Yeltsin-Hashimoto friendship proved a catalyst for significant, sincere Russian-Japanese economic, as well as defense, cooperation during this period. To be certain, Yeltsin’s personal relationship with Hashimoto from June 1997 – July 1998 played a pivotal role in bringing to an end the controversial Japanese policy of “seikei fukabun.” Yeltsin and Hashimoto’s friendship resulted in landmark, albeit informal and short-lived, agreements concerning the resolution of the territorial dispute and the signing of a peace treaty by 2000.

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Hashimoto took the initiative in cultivating this relationship, hoping that the leaders’ strong personal rapport would establish the trust necessary for the two governments to settle the territorial and peace treaty issues in a timely and mutually beneficial manner. It was Hashimoto’s genuine desire to expand bilateral relations, as well as his initial, concerted effort to develop a personal political camaraderie with Yeltsin, that sustained the relationship in its embryonic stage and eventually encouraged Yeltsin to reciprocate.

Prior to his election as Prime Minister of Japan, Hashimoto had been a staunch advocate of more extensive and balanced relations with Russia. Hashimoto sought to pursue relations with Russia in a manner that addressed, but did not remain hostage to, the need for progress on the territorial and peace treaty issues, while at the same time expanding cooperation in various spheres, particularly the economic sphere. As chief of the Japanese Ministry of International Trade and Industry from mid-1994–January 1996, Hashimoto expressed his strong desire to develop more intensely Japanese trade and investment relations with Russia. Moreover, in the first three months of his tenure as president of the dominant Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in Japan from October 1995 – July 1998, Hashimoto displayed deep interest in expanding political ties with Russia. Toward this end, he cultivated strong personal rapport with his then de facto Russian political counterpart, First Deputy Prime Minister Oleg Soskovets. Upon his intra-LDP election as Prime Minister of Japan, however, Hashimoto began to focus on establishing a durable and familiar personal and political relationship with Yeltsin.

Shortly after assuming office, Hashimoto dispatched then Japanese Foreign Minister Ikeda Yukihiko to Moscow in March 1996 to meet with the newly appointed Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov and, more importantly, give him a letter to deliver to Yeltsin. In the letter, Hashimoto conveyed his support for Russia’s ongoing processes of democratization.
and economic liberalization. This letter laid the groundwork for Yeltsin and Hashimoto’s first meeting on the sidelines of the Summit on Nuclear Safety and Security in Moscow in mid-April 1996. The last meeting that Yeltsin conducted with a Japanese Prime Minister took place two-and-a-half years earlier at the October signing of the 1993 Tokyo Declaration. Hashimoto made it a point not to broach the topic of the southern Kuriles dispute during this first important meeting with Yeltsin. Instead, the two leaders discussed economic cooperation and confirmed the 1993 Tokyo Declaration as the basis for the negotiation and signing of a peace treaty. It is likely that Yeltsin took notice of, and greatly appreciated, this considerate diplomatic gesture.

In further reaching out to Yeltsin, Hashimoto placed a phone call to him in July 1996 congratulating Yeltsin on his recent, hard-won re-election as President of the Russian Federation. During this conversation, Yeltsin invited Hashimoto to Russia at his earliest possible convenience.

Yeltsin and Hashimoto met for the second time at the G8 summit in Denver in late June 1997. At this meeting, the two leaders did not “discuss the territorial dispute as such.” Instead, they discussed the notion of expanded economic cooperation in and around Sakhalin and the southern Kuriles – particularly in the spheres of energy resource exploration, development and extraction, as well as in the spheres of industrial and transportation infrastructure modernization. It was at the June 1997 Denver G8 summit that Hashimoto initially floated the idea of “regular informal weekend meetings” with Yeltsin in the Russian Far East, a proposition to which Yeltsin responded positively. For his part, Yeltsin posited the setting up of a “telephone ‘hot line’ between Moscow and Tokyo.” Furthermore, when Yeltsin congratulated Hashimoto on his 60th birthday on July 29, 1997, he included in this communication his appreciation of the warm, friendly and sincere environment in which their previous meetings in
April 1996 and June 1997 had taken place. He also expressed his strong desire to “further broaden” their “trustworthy personal contacts” by initiating Hashimoto’s earlier proposed “informal weekend meetings” in the near future.

There is little doubt that Hashimoto’s earlier, concerted efforts to cultivate close personal ties with Yeltsin inspired the kind regards that Yeltsin sent to Hashimoto on his birthday. It is likely, however, that Yeltsin’s endearing sentiments also were attributable to a landmark speech that Hashimoto had presented to the Japan Association of Corporate Executives on July 24, 1997 – five days before his birthday – in which he outlined Japan’s new Russia policy. Specifically, Hashimoto asserted that Japan’s relations with Russia lagged far behind its relations with the two other major Asia-Pacific powers – the U.S. and China – and that this was an urgent matter that both sides needed to resolve on an expedited basis. He further, and perhaps more importantly, emphasized the need for Russia and Japan to build their future relationship on three principles: mutual trust, mutual benefits and long-term perspective. An equally significant policy position that Hashimoto expressed in this speech was his aversion to approaching the southern Kuriles dispute from a zero-sum perspective. By invoking these three principles and taking this position on the territorial issue, Hashimoto effectively broke with the counterproductive and relatively negligent Russia policies of his more conservative predecessors. Needless to say, Hashimoto’s speech describing Japan’s new Russia policy went over very well with Yeltsin.

The emerging Yeltsin-Hashimoto rapport was a first in the history of Russian-Japanese relations. Never before, even prior to the establishment of formal diplomatic relations between Czarist Russia and Tokugawa Japan in 1855, had Russian and Japanese leaders cultivated such a strong personal bond with one another. To be certain, Yeltsin and Hashimoto’s developing friendship also facilitated another historical first in the two countries’ relations: an
informal, consultative meeting between their leaders. Otherwise known in Russia and Japan as
the first “no-necktie” meeting, this informal weekend get-together between Yeltsin and
Hashimoto transpired in Krasnoyarsk from November 1-2, 1997. It took place at the Russian
Presidential “Sosna” Residence in Krasnoyarsk Krai in the town of Divnogorsk – a compound of
two buildings “standing thirty metres apart” in a secluded, wooded area along the Yenisei River
located almost half-way between Moscow and Tokyo. The relatively casual atmosphere of the
“Sosna” estate provided Yeltsin and Hashimoto the opportunity to discuss at length and with
candor, as well as with mutual respect and understanding, the territorial and peace treaty issues
alongside matters of economic relations, particularly Japanese assistance in the development of
the Russian Far East. Indeed, recreation in the forms of boating and fishing on the Yenisei River
added to relaxed environment of the November 1997 Krasnoyarsk “no-necktie” meeting.

Five significant results emerged from that meeting. First, the two leaders agreed to do
their utmost to sign a peace treaty by the year 2000. Much to the surprise and approval of the
Japanese delegation, it was Yeltsin who had suggested this timeframe to Hashimoto for
consideration. Second, the two sides confirmed that the 1993 Tokyo Declaration would serve
as the basis for the negotiation and conclusion of a peace treaty. Implicit in this confirmation
was Russia’s acknowledgment that a definitive resolution to the southern Kuriles dispute would
be a fundamental provision in any such accord. Couched though it may have been, the Japanese
welcomed this acknowledgment with great fanfare and enthusiasm.

Third, the two leaders drafted and approved the Yeltsin-Hashimoto Plan – an extensive
program designed to strengthen cooperation in six areas of Russian-Japanese economic relations.
These areas of economic cooperation included the encouragement and legal protection of
expanded Japanese investment in the economic, industrial and infrastructural rehabilitation of the
Russian Far East; promotion of the “deeper integration of the Russian economy into the world economic system;” “rendering” intensive Japanese assistance to the Russian economic reform process; collaboration in training Russian business and civil servant managerial personnel; strengthening the Russian-Japanese energy dialogue; and “cooperation for the peaceful use of nuclear power.” Fourth, the November 1997 Krasnoyarsk summit further consolidated the Yeltsin-Hashimoto relationship as a trusting, genuine friendship. Fifth, it laid the diplomatic groundwork for the second “no-necktie” summit in Kawana, Japan from April 18-19, 1998. Another indirect positive outcome of the Krasnoyarsk summit was Hashimoto lobbying for Russian accession to APEC at the organization’s summit in Vancouver in late November 1997.129

Building on the momentum of the Krasnoyarsk summit, Yeltsin met Hashimoto in Kawana, Japan in mid-April 1998 for another “no-necktie” weekend. That the summit took place at all was a diplomatic feat that fell just short of a miracle. Three weeks prior to the Kawana summit, Yeltsin had abruptly fired then Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin and dismissed the entire Presidential cabinet in late March 1998. Russia teetered on the edge of political catastrophe as a result and Yeltsin’s political survival hung in the balance; exacerbating the situation was Yeltsin’s ailing health. Understandably, the Japanese did not expect Yeltsin to attend the Kawana summit under such burdensome domestic political conditions and personal health issues. Despite all of these seemingly prohibitive factors however, Yeltsin made the trip and the outcome was far more lucrative than the Japanese had initially anticipated. Yeltsin’s determination to attend the Kawana Summit in the face of such adversity was testament to the profound importance that he placed on Russian relations with Japan, not to mention the great personal stock that he had invested in his friendship with Hashimoto.130
The highlights of the April 1998 Kawana summit included the leaders’ confirmation of their pledge to sign a peace treaty by the year 2000 based on the 1993 Tokyo Declaration, as well as on the understanding that the treaty would contain a resolution to the territorial dispute that involved all four islands; Yeltsin expressed his desire to expedite the peace process and communicated his commitment to see that the Russian government take the necessary steps to facilitate the settlement of all outstanding issues in Russian-Japanese relations – read territorial dispute; and, Yeltsin’s securing of the release of some USD $600 million of a USD $1.5 billion Japanese loan to Russia, under the aegis of the Yeltsin-Hashimoto Plan, “untied” from progress on the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues. The Japanese were particularly appreciative of the great political and personal risks that Yeltsin took in order to attend the April 1998 Kawana Summit and maintain the momentum in Russian-Japanese relations that had started, in large part, as a benefit of friendly personal ties between himself and Hashimoto. The Kawana meeting also facilitated the November 1998 Moscow Summit during which Yeltsin and newly elected Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi signed the Moscow Declaration – an accord that officially reaffirmed the informal oral agreements that Yeltsin and Hashimoto had made regarding the territorial and peace treaty issues at Krasnoyarsk and Kawana in November 1997 and April 1998, respectively.

Notwithstanding the great political and personal lengths to which Yeltsin and Hashimoto had gone to cultivate strong rapport with one another and the seeming promise of the November 1998 Moscow Declaration, the Kawana Summit proved the zenith of Russian-Japanese relations in the Yeltsin era. Three factors precipitated a major contraction in Russian-Japanese political and economic relations after the Kawana Summit. First and foremost, Hashimoto resigned as Prime Minister on July 30, 1998 after the Liberal Democratic Party lost its majority in the Upper
Hashimoto’s friendship with Yeltsin no longer retained the executive political dimension that it once had and therefore ceased to play a central role in political reconciliation between the two countries, as well as in the expansion of Russian-Japanese economic relations. Second, Yeltsin’s health continued to deteriorate throughout 1998 and 1999 to the point that he essentially relinquished the day-to-day running of the country in order to “concentrate on revising the constitution to ensure a stable transition to his successor.” Yeltsin did not possess the political influence or psycho-physical stamina to unilaterally force the complete normalization of Russian-Japanese relations. Third, in August 1998, the Russian ruble collapsed and fomented an economic crisis in Russia of epic proportions. The political and economic fallout of the Russian economic crisis in late 1998 deterred Japanese investors from injecting money into the beleaguered and highly unstable Russian economy. It also exposed to Japanese businesspersons and politicians alike the still very limited and problematic nature of the Russian-Japanese relationship.

Ultimately, the absence of the Yeltsin-Hashimoto relationship from bilateral ties fomented the major contraction in Russian-Japanese relations that occurred after late July 1998. That relations between the two countries thawed and expanded so quickly after both leaders had committed themselves to forging close personal ties and contracted so rapidly in the absence of this rapport demonstrates the significant, positive impact that Yeltsin and Hashimoto’s friendship had on an otherwise historically antagonistic bilateral relationship. In terms of yielding long-term, substantive outcomes in Russian-Japanese relations, especially in respect to the settlement of the territorial and peace treaty issues, the Yeltsin-Hashimoto rapport was not successful. Nevertheless, the short-term economic and political benefits of their relationship were especially
noteworthy and groundbreaking and thus served as an incentive, and effective template, for future personal ties between Russian and Japanese leaders.

To be certain, the Yeltsin-Hashimoto relationship established that personal rapport between Russian and Japanese leaders has a positive impact on Russian-Japanese relations. In the absence of effective institutional mechanisms and guidelines for regular, bilateral interaction, personal rapport between Russian and Japanese leaders has served as the political anchor, and, at times, catalyst, for progress in Russian-Japanese relations. To a great extent, personal rapport between Russian and Japanese national political executives accounts for the expansion of Russian-Japanese cooperation in multiple areas, particularly in the economic sphere, despite the ongoing impasse over the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues. Indeed, the friendship of Yeltsin and Hashimoto set the precedent for personal rapport between Russian and Japanese political leaders in Russian-Japanese relations. Specifically, the Yeltsin-Hashimoto relationship facilitated impressive breakthroughs in Russian-Japanese economic and political cooperation in a relatively short period of time – thus demonstrating to future Russian and Japanese leaders the importance of cultivating close personal ties with their respective counterparts.¹³⁴

Yeltsin’s Resignation

Yeltsin’s decision to leave office unexpectedly in late December 1999 was partially responsible for the precipitation of a major, albeit gradual setback in Russian-Japanese relations. Specifically, Yeltsin’s elevation of then-Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin – a shrewd, conservative former KGB foreign officer – to the position of acting president of the Russian Federation enabled, to a certain extent, an almost complete reversal in Russian policy toward Japan in regard to the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues. Soon after having won election to the Russian presidency in his own right in late March 2000 and having been inaugurated as
such in early May 2000, Putin effectively overturned Yeltsin’s somewhat vague and relatively conciliatory policies on these two important bilateral issues. In particular, Putin rehabilitated the 1956 Soviet-Japan Joint Declaration at the March 2001 Russia-Japan summit in Irkutsk, most notably Article 9 which obligated Russia to “hand over to Japan” Shikotan Island and the Habomai Islets, the two smaller of the four islands, after the conclusion of a peace treaty (italics added).

This new approach stood in stark contrast to Yeltsin’s positions that a settlement to the territorial dispute necessitated consideration of the political fate of all four islands and that the two governments must articulate this settlement officially within the provisions of a peace treaty. Since the March 2001 Irkutsk summit, Article 9 of the 1956 Soviet-Japan Joint Declaration has remained the Russian government’s official formula for the settlement of the territorial and peace treaty issues. In addition to fully embracing this policy position, the Russian government, in the years following the March 2001 Irkutsk summit, consistently discounted any bilateral agreements from the Yeltsin era concerning the resolution of the territorial and peace treaty issues as non-binding statements of political purpose – not mutually ratified and internationally legal binding documents like the 1956 Joint Declaration.

**FACTORS INFLUENCING RUSSIAN POLICY TOWARD JAPAN FROM 2000-2010**

The events that shaped the historical context of Russian policy toward Japan over the last decade were arguably more competitive and confrontational than cooperative and conciliatory. When taking this experiential background into consideration, it is somewhat understandable that many of the factors influencing Russia’s Japan policy from 2000-2010 shared characteristics typically associated with international competition and conflict: fear, greed, opportunism and
distrust. At the same time, it is not entirely surprising that several of these factors had in common themes associated with cooperation and conciliation as Russian-Japanese interaction from 1855-2000 had been by no means dysfunctional and intermittently offered notable, mutual gains in political, economic and military spheres. These common themes included the desire for intergovernmental communication and exchange, economic and strategic pragmatism, a certain level of trust, and a willingness to forgive rivals for past offenses. In this respect, the historical analysis of Russian-Japanese relations provided above helps to understand – and partially accounts for – current Russian policy toward Japan and the complex trajectory of Russian-Japanese relations since the turn of the millennium. Accordingly, this section discusses the psychological, strategic, economic and political factors that shaped Russia’s Japan policy from 2000-2010.

PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS

Four psychological factors influenced Russian policy toward Japan from 2000-2010. These factors include Putin’s personality, “loss of empire” complex, fear of strategic encirclement and non-Asian identity. To be certain, “loss of empire” complex, fear of strategic encirclement and non-Asian identity account for the profound mistrust, if not paranoia, that Russia harbors for Japan. The pervasive suspicion that stems from this intense mistrust foments and perpetuates negative Russian perceptions of Japan, primarily as a threat to the territorial security of the Russian Far East. As a result, these three psychological factors currently influencing Russian policy toward Japan are largely responsible for the lack of cooperation and communication between the two governments in critical spheres of interaction, specifically the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues. At the same time, however, these factors, including Putin’s personality, encourage Russia to overcome its negative perceptions of – and biases
toward – Japan so as to avoid the consequences of iterated competition and conflict and reap the benefits of cooperation in as many spheres as possible.

*Putin’s Personality*

Putin’s personality remained one of the most influential factors in Russian foreign policy toward Japan from 2000-2010. After their first meeting in April 2000, then Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori observed that Putin was “smart” and “warm-hearted,” but at the same time was a “tough negotiator” and had a mind “like a razor blade.”\textsuperscript{135} Mori’s description of Putin continues to provide insight into current Russian foreign policy toward Japan. On one hand, Putin’s love and life-long practice of judo,\textsuperscript{136} a Japanese martial art, and affinity for Japanese culture likely influence his genuine interest in expanding relations between Russia and Japan, in cultural as well as other spheres of interaction. On the other, Putin’s experience as a KGB foreign intelligence officer likely accounts for his colder, more calculating behavior in Russian-Japanese relations, particularly his strategic use of the southern Kuriles as leverage to extract greater Japanese investment in Russia.

*Loss of Empire Complex*

In the transition from empire to nation-state, post-Soviet Russian government and society have struggled psychologically to accept the loss of territory and superpower status that accompanied Soviet collapse.\textsuperscript{137} The rather unforgiving process of adjustment has fomented a “loss of empire” complex among Russian elites and citizens. The principal symptoms of this complex include hypersensitivity to Russia’s territorial security and an aspiration for Russia’s resurgence as a great power in the international community.\textsuperscript{138} Indeed, the “loss of empire” complex influences Russian policy toward Japan in the Putin-Medvedev era both in a negative and positive manner. On one hand, concern for territorial security has become negatively
manifest in Russia’s steadfast opposition to Japanese claims to, and demands for, the return of the southern Kurile Islands. On the other, however, the desire for Russia’s resurgence as a great-power in the international community has become positively manifest in Russian-Japanese strategic cooperation in global affairs.

*Fear of Strategic Encirclement*

Fear of strategic encirclement is deeply embedded in the Russian national psyche, particularly among the Russian political and military elite. One region in which the Russian political and military elite are particularly fearful of strategic encirclement is Northeast Asia. Indeed, Russian history is rife with instances in which Japanese political-military encroachment in territories adjacent to Russia’s Far Eastern borders diminished Russian influence in Northeast Asia and undermined territorial security in the Russian Far East. As a result, Czarist, Soviet, and post-Soviet Russian leaders have consistently protested Japanese, and more recently U.S.-Japanese, efforts to minimize and contain Russian influence in Northeast Asia. Since 1992, Russian presidents Yeltsin, Putin, and Medvedev have sought to discourage U.S.-Japanese strategic encirclement of Russia in Northeast Asia by expanding political, economic and military ties with China and the Koreas, and continuing efforts to normalize relations with Japan.

*Non-Asian Identity*

Russians have long asserted a European identity at the expense of their territories, peoples and cultures lying to the east of the Urals. This practice has made Russians psychologically very remote from Asians. Moreover, it has fomented among Russians a perception of Asia as alien and hostile. On the one hand, Russia’s non-Asian identity has made its government and citizens fearful and distrustful of its neighbors in Northeast Asia, particularly China and Japan. On the other, Russia’s non-Asian identity has caused its Northeast
Asian neighbors to regard Russia with suspicion and to doubt Russia’s potential as either a long-
term ally or partner for cooperation. Indeed, Russia’s non-Asian identity has impacted its
perception of and foreign policy toward Japan more negatively than positively. As a result of
Russia’s non-Asian identity, Russia and Japan harbor distrust for one another that perpetuates
their territorial dispute over the southern Kurile Islands and inability to conclude a peace treaty.
To their credit, however, both countries recognize that overcoming their mutual distrust is crucial
to realizing the full potential of normalized Russian-Japanese relations. Therefore, the Russian
and Japanese governments seek to build trust and better understand one another’s priorities and
interests via frequent high-level political-military exchange and dialogue, joint naval search-and-
rescue exercises, intelligence sharing and cooperation against international crime and terrorism,
and cultural and educational exchanges and events.

**STRATEGIC DETERMINANTS**

Since the turn of the millennium, four strategic factors have wielded significant influence
over Russian policy toward Japan: concern for territorial security in the Russian Far East, the
U.S.-Japan security alliance, China’s growing influence in regional and global affairs, and the
need to cooperate with Japan for international stability and security. It is in the analysis of these
particular factors that the primacy of neorealist “high policy” concerns – military capability,
territorial security and state survival – becomes clearly manifest in Russian policy toward Japan
from 2000-2010. These factors were forces for both cooperation and competition in Russian-
Japanese relations from 2000-2010.

*Concern for Territorial Security in the Russian Far East*

The territorial security of the Russian Far East has long been a source of strategic anxiety
and concern for Russian political elite. Historically, the Russian Far East has constituted the
most vulnerable region of Russia. Indeed, the Russian Far East has experienced multiple instances of invasion and occupation at the hands of Russia’s Northeast Asian neighbors, particularly Japan. Currently, however, a recurrence of Japanese invasion, occupation, or annexation of any Russian territory in the Russian Far East remains highly unlikely. Nevertheless, there is abundant historical precedent for Russian concern for territorial security in the Russian Far East vis-à-vis Japan. Moreover, a territorial dispute between Russia and Japan over ownership of the southern Kuriles still exists and exacerbates Russia’s fears of Japanese geopolitical ambition in Northeast Asia. It is over the ongoing southern Kuriles’ dispute that Russia’s concern for territorial security in the Russian Far East continues to influence its foreign policy towards Japan. Specifically, Russia asserts “unquestionable” sovereignty over the southern Kuriles, staunchly opposes signing a disadvantageous peace treaty, and refuses to entertain any territorial concessions to Japan beyond the return of the two smallest islands. Russia remains principally concerned that conceding the southern Kuriles to Japan will encourage further Japanese, as well as Chinese and perhaps North Korean territorial claims to other parts of the Russian Far East.

The U.S.-Japan Security Alliance

The United States’ chief incentive for establishing a security alliance with Japan after World War II was the containment of Soviet power in Northeast Asia. From 1951-1992, Japan served as the beach head for a vast U.S. military presence in the region – the purposes of which were to discourage Soviet and Chinese geopolitical ambitions in the region and deter the Soviet threat to Japan. The Soviets, however, perceived this alliance as a direct threat to the territorial and military security of the Soviet Far East. Although less intense than it was during the Cold War, this perception has been very strong in Russia since the dissolution of the Soviet
Union, particularly among the Kremlin and Russian military elite. That the U.S.-Japan security alliance remains intact in the post-Cold War era, and has become increasingly powerful and integrated, in the absence of a Soviet threat, is especially alarming to Russia. Indeed, Russia feels very much the same about the persistence of the U.S.-Japanese security alliance in Asia as it does about the continued existence and expansion of NATO in Europe: confused, offended, and threatened. Interestingly enough, Russia has developed an extensive strategic partnership with China to offset both NATO expansion and the persistence of the U.S.-Japan security alliance in the post-Cold War era.

China’s Growing Influence in Regional and Global Affairs

Russia and China have forged sound political, strategic, economic, and military relations since the late 1980’s. The depth and extensiveness of these relations indicate a significant strategic partnership between the two countries. Even so, Russia still harbors great fear and suspicion of China. The history of Russian-Chinese relations has been characteristically more adversarial than amicable. Indeed, Russia’s close relationship with China is part of its overall strategy to mitigate the threat that China poses to Russian interests in Central and Northeast Asia\textsuperscript{147}, as well as in Africa and Latin America. Russia cannot counter China on its own in any of these regions, particularly in Northeast Asia. No other country in Northeast Asia besides Japan is strong enough to counter China’s economic and growing political-military power on a regional or global level.\textsuperscript{148} Specifically, Japan has advanced technology and expertise, abundant financial resources, and the capacity to become a large, modernized, and efficient military force in a short period of time – all of which would prove invaluable in a Russian-Japanese balance-of-power partnership vis-à-vis China.
Furthermore, Japan, like Russia, China, and the U.S., has been actively involved in expanding its political, economic, and strategic presence in Central Asia, Africa, and Latin America since the end of the Cold War. Coordination in Russian-Japanese policy and strategy in these regions would likely restrain China’s influence and recovery of raw materials and energy resources therein. Moreover, coordinating policy and strategy to restrain China’s recovery of raw materials and energy resources in these regions is crucial to Russian and Japanese security interests in Northeast Asia. Indeed, the financial benefit from Chinese exploitation of resources in the developing world strengthens the Chinese economy which, in turn, and somewhat indirectly, strengthens Chinese military capabilities and political clout in the international community. Such developments would likely translate into an increasingly domineering Chinese economic and political-military presence in Northeast Asia – a scenario unfavorable to both Russian and Japanese regional interests.

The Need to Cooperate with Japan for Stability and Security in the International Community

Multiple issues of mutual strategic concern account for Russia’s need to cooperate with Japan for international stability and security at regional and global levels. Six issues of mutual strategic concern encourage Russian-Japanese cooperation at the regional level in Northeast Asia. These issues include the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, piracy in the sea lanes of Northeast Asia, poaching in the Sea of Okhotsk and the waters surrounding the southern Kuriles, transnational organized criminal enterprises such as the smuggling of drugs, weapons, and other international contraband, international terrorism, and environmental care for the vast Russian-Japanese maritime border areas, particularly via jointly scrapping decommissioned Russian nuclear submarines stationed in the Russian Far East. Seven issues of mutual strategic
concern encourage Russian-Japanese cooperation at the global level. These issues include non-proliferation of nuclear and bio-chemical weapons and technological expertise, disarmament, international terrorism, transnational organized crime, conflict resolution and development in Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, South Asia and Latin America, climate control, and the promotion of “greater democracy” in international affairs.

**ECONOMIC FACTORS**

Although issues of high priority in international politics such as territorial security and global strategy remained the principal factors influencing Russian policy toward Japan from 2000-2010, they were by no means the only factors shaping Russian relations with Japan during this period. To be certain, issues of lesser priority such as economic relations assumed an especially influential role in the formulation of Russia’s policy toward Japan over the last decade as well. More specifically, economic capacity and economic need served as powerful neoliberal and neorealist incentives for the Russian government to engage Japan both cooperatively and competitively from 2000-2010, respectively. Russian and Japanese officials have long cited their countries’ complementary economies as one of the most promising potential bases for cooperation. Historically, however, economic relations between Russia and Japan have proven more problematic than not – with their respective, often competing economic interests the source of this tension and catalysts for military confrontation. In the Putin-Medvedev era, though, Russian economic capacity and need have inspired a conciliatory and cooperative Russian attitude toward Japan. As such, Russian-Japanese collaboration expanded significantly in the economic sphere and became a positive factor in bilateral relations from 2000-2010.
Economic Capacity

Russia has abundant natural resources, particularly in Siberia and the Russian Far East. These natural resources include raw materials such as timber, valuable mineral and ore deposits, substantial proven and estimated oil and gas reserves, and abundant fisheries in the Sea of Okhotsk. Moreover, Russia has an expansive, yet somewhat outdated and dilapidated, infrastructure for the extraction, refinement, and transportation of these resources, particularly oil and gas, to the Northeast Asia market. The infrastructure for the transportation of natural resources from the Russian interior to outlets in Northeast Asia consists of an extensive network of roads, railways, and pipelines. Russia’s eastern regions also have competent workforces for the operation and maintenance of this infrastructure. Indeed, Russia’s desire to utilize these industrial and human assets to export its commodities to the resource-deficient and resource-hungry, yet prosperous, economies of Northeast Asia greatly influences Russian foreign policy in the region, especially towards Japan.

Economic Need

Notwithstanding its ambition to provide Japan with oil, gas, and other natural resources, Russia’s outdated and poorly maintained infrastructure limits its capacity to extract, refine, and export these commodities to Japanese markets. Consequently, economic need dictates Russian requests for Japanese assistance – in the form of financing, advanced technology, and technical expertise – to update and expand this infrastructure as well as train Russian workers to properly operate and maintain it. Beyond its need for Japanese assistance to improve its industrial base in the Russian Far East, Russia also seeks Japanese financial and technical support in the socio-economic development of the region. Specifically, Russia encourages Japanese assistance in building schools, apartment housing, and hospitals. Russia further encourages Japanese
participation in creating economic opportunities for residents in the Russian Far East such as employment in joint Russia-Japanese business ventures and skills training in financial and engineering sectors. Moreover, Russia promotes Japanese participation in the maintenance and expansion of civilian transportation infrastructure such as roads, highways, airports, railways, and seaports. Furthermore, Russia needs Japan’s endorsement as a responsible economic partner in the international community. Russia hopes that Japanese endorsement in this regard will facilitate Russian accession to the World Trade Organization as well as attract third-country foreign direct investment in Siberia and the Russian Far East.

**POLITICAL FACTORS**

Political factors were yet another major grouping of variables that influenced Russian policy toward Japan from 2000-2010. The political factors of Russian policy toward Japan during this period comprised the need for stable political relations with Japan, the 1956 Soviet-Japan Joint Declaration, the 2003 Japan-Russia Action Plan, Russian nationalist sentiment and the southern Kuriles dispute, Japanese nationalist sentiment and the Southern Kuriles dispute, center-periphery relations in Russian domestic politics, and the Foreign Policy Concepts of the Russian Federation. To be certain, these political factors were a source of both competition and cooperation in Russian-Japanese relations over the last decade. More often than not, the perspectives and bilateral agreements that constitute these factors exacerbated existing tensions between the two countries. As a result, the Russian-Japanese relationship in the Putin-Medvedev era has experienced more instances of competition than cooperation. Notwithstanding this increasingly competitive trend, a review of these factors demonstrates the priority that Russia has continued to place on the cultivation of stable political relations with Japan since the turn of the millennium. A principal reason for Russia’s cultivation of stable political ties with Japan has
been to maintain communication and open dialogue over crucial issues that historically fomented competition and military confrontation when neglected, such as the southern Kuriles dispute and peace treaty impasse.

The Need for Stable Political Relations with Japan

Post-Soviet Russia can ill-afford strained political relations with Japan. Indeed, strained political relations with Japan would come at great economic and strategic cost to Russia. In the absence of stable political dialogue, the Russian-Japanese relationship would likely reflect the overall stagnancy of the Soviet-Japan relationship from 1960-1985. On the one hand, strained political ties would undermine Russian efforts to secure Japanese investment and economic interest in Russia, particularly the Russian Far East. On the other, they would likely perpetuate the specter of a Japanese military threat in the Russian Far East. The need for stable political relations therefore constitutes a principal factor influencing Russian policy towards Japan in the post-Cold War era. For Russia, stable political relations with Japan create opportunities for Russian financial gain and a positive, profitable atmosphere for continued bilateral economic interaction. Furthermore, stable political relations with Japan mitigate a significant, potential threat to the territorial security of Russia’s vulnerable far eastern flank. In order to maintain and expand a constructive political dialogue with Japan towards these economic and strategic ends, Russia will have to take sincere steps to address Japanese concerns over the southern Kuriles’ and peace treaty issues, while at the same time keeping these two matters separate from other areas of bilateral interaction to the extent that it is possible.

The 1956 Soviet-Japan Joint Declaration

The southern Kuriles’ dispute and peace treaty impasse remain the most contentious and salient political issues in Russian-Japanese relations in the post-Cold War era. Indeed, resolving
these two issues would raise Russian-Japanese relations to the “highest level”. At the unofficial Russia-Japan summit in Irkutsk in March 2001, Putin invoked Russia’s status as the legal successor to the Soviet Union and reinstated the 1956 Soviet-Japan Joint Declaration, particularly Article 9, as the supreme legal document governing the resolution of the territorial and peace treaty issues. Article 9 of the 1956 Joint Declaration stipulates that Russia “hand over” Shikotan Island and the Habomai Islets to Japan “after the conclusion of a peace treaty”. Putin’s reinstatement of the 1956 Soviet-Japan Joint Declaration as the supreme legal document governing the resolution of the territorial and peace treaty issues in March 2001 made the Joint Declaration the principal political agreement in Russian-Japanese relations. Indeed, the provisions of Article 9 continue to inform Russia’s position on the southern Kuriles’ dispute and peace treaty impasse. Consequently, the 1956 Soviet-Japan Joint Declaration remains one of the most significant factors influencing current Russian foreign policy towards Japan.

The 2003 Japan-Russia Action Plan

The 2003 Japan-Russia Action Plan constitutes the most important and comprehensive bilateral agreement in Russian-Japanese relations in the post-Cold War era. The plan’s significance to, and impact on, post-Soviet Russian-Japanese relations ranks second only to the 1956 Soviet-Japan Joint Declaration. Russian President Vladimir Putin and Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi signed the Japan-Russia Action Plan in January 2003. The Russian and Japanese governments adopted the 2003 Action Plan in order to develop the “latent potential” of Russian-Japanese relations in a more effective, future-oriented manner. The two governments specifically designed the 2003 Action Plan as a “comprehensive package approach” to the resolution of the southern Kuriles’ and peace treaty issues.
Essentially, the 2003 Action Plan seeks to resolve the southern Kuriles’ dispute in a peace treaty while concurrently addressing a host of other important bilateral issues.\textsuperscript{153} Towards this end, the 2003 Action Plan encourages intensive cooperation between Russia and Japan in six areas: expanded political dialogue, peace treaty negotiations, strategic relations in the international community, trade and economic matters, defense and security, and cultural and interpersonal exchange.\textsuperscript{154} Since 2003, the Russian and Japanese governments have concluded virtually all major bilateral agreements according to the guidelines of the Action Plan. Moreover, the bilateral agreements pertain to almost all six areas of cooperation.

Indeed, peace treaty negotiations remain the only area in which Russian-Japanese cooperation has experienced no “noticeable” progress under the 2003 Action Plan.\textsuperscript{155} Notwithstanding Japan’s increasing frustration over Russia’s aversion to peace treaty negotiations, the benefits of the Action plan have nevertheless been substantial for both Russia and Japan. Even in the continued absence of progress on peace treaty negotiations, it is likely that the 2003 Japan-Russia Action Plan will continue to inform Russian foreign policy towards Japan in all areas of cooperation well into the future.

\textit{Russian Nationalist Sentiment and the Southern Kuriles Dispute}

Nationalist sentiment is a valuable source of political power in Russia. Perhaps the most effective manner in which to exploit nationalist sentiment for political gain in Russia is to foment popular resentment towards territorial disputes with other countries. Indeed, the Russian public has become extremely sensitive to issues relating to Russia’s territorial integrity since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Over the years, Russian officials, particularly at the regional level, have become increasingly adept at harnessing negative public sentiment in this regard to advance their own political ambitions. Such ambitions include election or re-election to office,
appointment to higher regional or federal posts, or extracting greater political attention or financial assistance from the federal government. This has certainly been the case with Russian Far Eastern politicians and the southern Kuriles’ dispute since the end of the Cold War, especially with former and current governors of Primorsky Krai and Sakhalin Oblast. Russian Presidents Yeltsin and Putin have also exploited nationalist sentiment over the southern Kuriles’ dispute to expand their political constituencies and curry favor with Russian Far Eastern regional officials.

The same nationalist sentiment that enables Russian officials to expand and maintain political power at home ultimately constrains Russian influence abroad. Almost 80% of Russians oppose any territorial concessions to Japan. Neither Putin nor Medvedev can disregard this overwhelming statistic. Russian nationalist sentiment therefore constrains Russia’s maneuverability in negotiating with Japan over the southern Kuriles’ and peace treaty issues. Consequently, Russian nationalist sentiment over the southern Kuriles’ undermines the development of Russian-Japanese relations. Moreover, the data suggests that Russian public opinion will only become more opposed to the prospect of territorial concessions to Japan. Therefore, Russian nationalist sentiment will continue to influence Russian foreign policy towards Japan in a particularly negative manner.

Japanese Nationalist Sentiment and the Southern Kuriles Dispute

As in Russia, nationalist sentiment in regard to the Southern Kuriles dispute in Japan is a powerful political force at local, regional and national levels of government. Accordingly, Japanese governmental leaders, like their Russian counterparts, sought to exploit nationalist sentiment over the Southern Kuriles dispute to their political advantage from 2000-2010. This practice was most common and visible among Japanese Prime Ministers, particularly when they
began to experience low public approval ratings. In order to boost their popularity with the electorate, Japanese Prime Ministers Obuchi, Mori, Koizumi, Abe, Fukuda, Aso and Hatoyama swiftly took up the mantle of the Northern Territories cause. Toward this end, these leaders issued statements in which they asserted Japanese ownership of the islands, condemned Russia’s “illegal” occupation of them and promised to negotiate their complete and timely return to Japan. Beyond the politically opportunistic rhetoric of Japanese Prime Ministers, there existed genuine nationalist sentiment over the Northern Territories in both Japanese government and society from 2000-2010. The Office of the Prime Minister of Japan actively cultivated such emotion among Cabinet-level policymakers, national legislators and the public by creating a Cabinet-level post for the purpose of securing the return of the islands, supporting National Diet legislation proclaiming Japanese sovereignty over the islands, and helping to organize, fund and administer citizens’ groups promoting awareness of the dispute among the Japanese public, respectively.

That the Japanese government assumed such an extensive role in encouraging nationalist sentiment over the Southern Kuriles from 2000-2010 was especially offensive to the Russian government. The Kremlin’s responses to the behavior of the Japanese government in these many instances typically took one of two forms: counter-statements asserting Russian ownership of the Southern Kuriles or “suggestions” in which it reminded Japan that its actions were not conducive to creating the atmosphere of trust necessary to resolve the territorial or peace treaty issues. The impact of Japanese nationalist sentiment concerning the Southern Kuriles on Russian policy toward Japan over the past decade was overwhelmingly negative and unquestionably undermined bilateral confidence-building measures in other areas. To a great extent, the manifestations of this sentiment perpetuated – but did not necessarily exacerbate – Russia’s
historical mistrust of Japan from 2000-2010 and affected Russian policy toward Japan accordingly.

The Foreign Policy Concepts of the Russian Federation

The Foreign Policy Concepts of the Russian Federation from 1993, 2000, and 2008 identify and discuss Russia’s political, strategic, economic, and military priorities in the international community. More specifically, these documents express Russia’s official foreign policy interests in particular regions and countries and describe the manner in which they factor into Russian strategy in international affairs. In their treatment of Japan these concepts’ commentary is generally brief, but positive. Indeed, each version of the foreign policy concept essentially states Russia’s interest in developing stable neighborly relations with Japan in hopes to resolve the territorial and peace treaty issues. That the 2008 Foreign Policy Concept reiterated Russia’s commitment to these objectives and added the Russian government’s desire to formulate a creative partnership with Japan suggests continued, fundamentally positive aspirations for Russia in its relations with Japan.158

CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed the historical context of Russian relations with Japan and identified the psychological, strategic, economic and political factors that influenced Russian policy toward Japan from 2000-2010. It confirmed that concern for territorial and, to a lesser extent, economic security in the Russian Far East were principal factors in policy formulation during this period. It further confirmed that these predominantly neorealist concerns, particularly the former, pervaded and influenced virtually every other factor influencing Russian relations with Japan at this time. To be certain, these factors – especially those in the psychological and strategic groupings – accounted for the cumulatively competitive and self-interested nature of
Russia’s behavior and actions vis-à-vis Japan in the Putin-Medvedev era. At the same time, however, many of these experiences, perspectives and agreements encouraged conciliatory and cooperative Russian gestures and policies toward Japan despite concerns for territorial and economic security. What is more, this chapter demonstrated the utility of both the neorealist and neoliberal paradigms in explaining how and why these factors influenced Russian policy toward Japan from 2000-2010 in the way that they did. And, even though these factors generally suggest the continuation of Russia’s neorealist, competitive and self-interested behavior toward Japan into the distant future, they nevertheless intimate an increasing neoliberal desire on Russia’s behalf to engage Japan in a more conciliatory manner so as to reap the benefits of cooperation in otherwise highly contentious issue areas such as the southern Kuriles dispute and the peace treaty impasse.
NOTES

2 Ibid.
14 Ibid.


Ibid., p. 130.


The Japanese government has consistently contended the legality of these Soviet actions in asserting its claims to the southern Kuriles. It argues that the legal discontinuation of the neutrality pact required the consent of both the Soviet and Japanese government. Soviet abrogation of the pact occurred independently of Japanese consent and therefore did not render the pact terminated in April 1945. It further argues that, as per its terms, the pact did not expire formally until April 1946. Consequently, the Japanese maintain that the Soviet declaration of war and annexation of the southern Kuriles transpired in breach of the neutrality pact and are thusly illegal according to international law. (“Russia’s New War Anniversary,” *The Japan Times*, August 8, 2010; “G-8 Offers Forum for Territory Dispute,” *The Japan Times*, March 15, 2008; “Improving Japan-Russia Ties,” *The Japan Times*, June 4, 2007; “No Rush to Divide the North,” *The Japan Times*, December 25, 2006; “A Return to Northern Basics,” *The Japan Times*, January 24, 2005; and, “EDITORIAL; New WWII Perspective Needed,” *The Daily Yomiuri*, August 15, 2008.) The Russian government in the Putin-Medvedev era has countered by claiming that Soviet notification of the Japanese government prior to these controversial actions was sufficient to make the annexation of the southern Kuriles a legal endeavor. (Vladimir Radyuhin, “Putin Hardens Stand on Disputed Islands,” *The Hindu*, November 22, 2005; “Russian Sovereignty over Kurils ‘Unquestionable’ – Foreign Ministry,” *RIA Novosti*, July 3, 2008.)


41 Ibid., pp. 62-63.
45 Specifically, the U.S. threatened to revise its policy on returning the Ryukyu Islands to Japan if the Japanese government abandoned its claims to all four southern Kuriles. The threat worked. The 1956 Soviet-Japan Joint Declaration was sufficiently ambiguous in regard to the southern Kuriles’ and peace treaty issues to assuage U.S. concerns that Japan would not conclude a peace accord with the Soviet Union at any time in the near or distant future. (See Marc Gallicchio, “The Kuriles Controversy: U.S. Diplomacy in the Soviet-Japan Border Dispute, 1941-1956,” *The Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 60, No. 1 (1991), pp. 96-98.)
49 Ibid.
50 Moscow increased the number of Soviet army divisions in the Soviet Far East from 15 in 1967 to 21 in 1969, 30 in 1970 and 45 in 1980. With each division consisting of roughly 10,000 troops, this means that the Soviets tripled their troop numbers in the Soviet Far East over the span of 13 years from 150,000 in 1967 to 450,000 in 1980. This constituted approximately 25 percent of the entire Soviet army. An additional 200,000 well-armed Ministry of Interior border guards in the region bolstered this number to an impressive 650,000 or so Soviet military and paramilitary personnel in the Soviet Far East (excluding Soviet Air Force and Navy personnel) Moreover, the Soviet military alliance with the Mongolian People’s Republic significantly enhanced Moscow’s military prowess in the East. Lastly, the Soviet military build-up on its Pacific Coast during the late 1970s and 1980s, and the redundancy of Moscow’s nuclear umbrella, further reinforced the USSR deterrent against Chinese, Japanese and U.S. threats in Northeast Asia. Although the majority of this force was directed at the Chinese it also proved an incredibly formidable disincentive for any egregious Japanese or U.S. power-jockeying in the region. (See Alvin Z. Rubinstein, *Soviet Foreign Policy Since World War II: Imperial and Global* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1985), pp. 157-158; Masataka Kosaka and Richard H. Solomon (eds.), *The Soviet Far East Military Buildup: Nuclear Dilemmas and Asian Security* (Westport, CT: Auburn House, May 1986.).)


Ibid., p. 125.


Rozman, *Japan’s Response to the Gorbachev Era*, p. 332.


Ibid., p. 413.


Ferguson, “Japanese Strategic Thinking Toward Russia,” p. 207.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Zagorsky, “Three Years on a Path to Nowhere,” p. 75; Andrei Kirillov and Andrei Varlamov, “Yeltsin, Hashimoto Establish Friendly Relations – Premier,” *ITAR-TASS*, April 20, 1996. Interestingly, it was at the added suggestion of then U.S. President Bill Clinton, a close personal friend of Boris Yeltsin, that Hashimoto also sought to establish friendly personal ties with Yeltsin.

“Yeltsin, Hashimoto Didn’t Discuss Territorial Dispute as Such,” _ITAR-TASS_, June 20, 1997.

Ibid.


Ibid.


Ibid.

Kimura, _Japanese-Russian Relations_, p. 211.

Ferguson, “Japanese Strategic Thinking Toward Russia,” p. 207.


Yeltsin’s announcement of this deadline also surprised his staff as he had not informed them of decision before arriving at the Sosna retreat. Yeltsin aside, the Russian delegation did not welcome this timeframe proposal with as much fanfare as their Japanese counterparts. It is speculated that Yeltsin, notorious for his impulsiveness, came to this conclusion by himself on the flight to Krasnoyarsk.


Watanabe, “Engaging Russia,” p. 68.

Ibid.

Ibid., p. 69.


Since Yeltsin’s resignation in late December 1999, Russian and Japanese leaders have emulated the Yeltsin-Hashimoto rapport. With the exception of Putin’s strong personal relationship with former Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori from April 2000 – April 2001, however, Russian and Japanese leaders have not been able to establish a level of rapport comparable to, or as effective as, that of Yeltsin and Hashimoto. After two years in office, current Russian President Dmitry Medvedev had only limited interaction with Japanese Prime Ministers Fukuda, Aso, Hatoyama and Kan – all on the sidelines of international forums – and has yet to pay an official visit to Japan.


Besides Japan, the U.S. is the only other country in Northeast Asia and the world that could effectively assist Russia in countering China’s economic and growing political-military influence in regional and global affairs. A strained relationship with Russia and its own strategic interest in maintaining sound diplomatic ties with China, not least expansive U.S.-China economic cooperation and continued Chinese support in denuclearizing the Korean peninsula, however, preclude the U.S. from assuming this role. Moreover, the U.S. is actively involved in expanding its political, economic, and strategic presence in the same regions of the world in which Russia finds itself in competition with China for the same reasons.


Ibid., p. 139.

Ibid., pp. 125, 139.


Ibid.

CHAPTER 4

RUSSIA, JAPAN AND THE SOUTHERN KURILES:
HISTORY, PERSPECTIVES, STRATEGIES AND
OBSTACLES
The territorial dispute over the Southern Kuriles was a source of constant tension in Russian-Japanese relations during the Putin era. Not only did the two governments’ inability to resolve this sensitive matter preclude the negotiation and signing of a peace treaty, it hindered a consistent expansion of bilateral ties from 2000-2008 as well. Russia and Japan’s mutually exclusive claims to the Southern Kuriles remain unreconciled in the Medvedev era and perpetuate this debilitating tension in their relationship. As a result, the territorial row has continued to obstruct the peace process and impede a more substantive expansion of Russian-Japanese relations since Medvedev assumed the Russian presidency in May 2008. A careful, comprehensive analysis of the Southern Kuriles dispute does not suggest its resolution in the near or distant future. Instead, it indicates the past and future primacy of the neorealist concern for territorial security in Russian-Japanese relations. Accordingly, this chapter explores the historical and conceptual bases of the Southern Kuriles dispute – and uses the neorealist-neoliberal debate, as well as the prisoner’s dilemma game-theoretical model, to explain how and why they continue to frustrate Russia and Japan’s timely and mutually beneficial settlement of this complex issue. In particular, this chapter confirms a long tradition of Russian-Japanese conflict and competition over the Southern Kuriles that has fomented a seemingly permanent atmosphere in which each country distrusts and perceives the other as a potential threat. This atmosphere proceeds primarily from Russian and Japanese neorealist concerns for territorial security.

THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF THE SOUTHERN KURILES DISPUTE

The Southern Kuriles dispute finds its historical roots in a rivalry between Russia and Japan for control over Sakhalin Island and the Kurile Archipelago that predates the two
countries’ inauguration of formal diplomatic relations in 1855. Indeed, a principal reason for establishing formal ties at this time was the urgent need to demarcate the Russian-Japanese border in these areas so as to settle competing jurisdictional claims over these valuable maritime territories and avoid the provocation of military conflict. Despite this and subsequent diplomatic efforts to resolve the issues of border demarcation and sovereignty over Sakhalin and the Kuriles, Russia and Japan’s imperial ambition in Northeast Asia fueled a competition between the two governments for exclusive dominion over these islands that lasted from 1855-1945. During this 90-year period, Russian and Japanese ownership of these islands took multiple forms, having changed seven times as a result of numerous instances of coercion, conflict and betrayal. It is the purpose of this section to establish the present controversy regarding ownership of the Southern Kuriles – Iturup, Kunashir, Shikotan and the Habomai Islets – as the latest phase of this contest. More importantly, this section identifies and summarizes the many incidents of coercion, conflict and betrayal that have perpetuated this rivalry. These incidents account for much of the two countries’ distrust and perception of one another as a potential threat. This sentiment has permeated virtually all areas of Russian-Japanese relations since the end of World War II, especially in the post-Cold War era.

THE CZARIST ERA

Russia and Japan first established official diplomatic relations in 1855 in the Treaty of Shimoda – following decades of intense diplomatic pressure from successive Czarist governments. Among other aspects of the nascent Russian-Japanese relationship, the treaty determined Russian and Japanese sovereignty over the Kurile Islands. It designated the islands south of, and including, Iturup, to Japan, while designating the islands north of, and including, Urup, to Russia. The 1855 Treaty of Shimoda also acknowledged joint Russian-Japanese
sovereignty over Sakhalin Island. Twenty years later in the 1875 Treaty of St. Petersburg, however, Japan ceded its rights to Sakhalin Island to Russia in exchange for sovereignty over the entire Kurile archipelago. Separate Russian and Japanese dominion over Sakhalin Island and the Kurile archipelago, respectively, remained intact until Russia’s defeat in the Russo-Japanese War in 1905. Shortly after the two-sides declared a temporary cease-fire to begin peace negotiations, Japan invaded and seized the whole of Sakhalin in July 1905. In compliance with the Article 9 of the 1905 Treaty of Portsmouth, the peace accord that formally ended the hostilities of the Russo-Japanese War, however, Japan evacuated its forces from Sakhalin and Russia ceded the southern half of the island to Japan in September 1905.4

THE SOVIET ERA: 1917-1960

Japanese control of southern Sakhalin and the entire Kurile archipelago persisted throughout the Russian Civil War and into the Soviet era until 1945. From April 1920 – January 1925, however, Japan occupied northern Sakhalin in retaliation for the March 1920 Bolshevik massacre of hundreds of Japanese soldiers and civilians in Nikolayevsk-on-Amur that were operating as part of the Japanese contingent of the Allied Siberian Intervention during the Russian Civil War. Upon establishing official relations with the Soviet Union in 1925, though, the Japanese returned northern Sakhalin to the custody of the Soviet government. Despite having twice acknowledged Japanese sovereignty over southern Sakhalin and the Kuriles in the 1925 Soviet-Japanese Basic Treaty and the 1941 Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact, Soviet leader Josef Stalin ordered the invasion and occupation of these territories at the end of World War II in August 1945. From 1946 to 1948, the Soviet government issued unilateral decrees providing for the integration of southern Sakhalin and the Kurile archipelago into the Soviet Union.5
Notwithstanding the extent of Soviet control over southern Sakhalin and the Kuriles, the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty, the accord that formally ended World War II hostilities in Asia-Pacific, did not recognize Soviet sovereignty over these territories. Specifically, Article 2 of the treaty obliged Japan to renounce all rights and claims to southern Sakhalin and the Kuriles, but it neither specified which islands constituted the Kurile archipelago nor identified to which country Japan had relinquished them.\(^6\) Whereas this lack of clarity undermined the validity of Soviet claims to sovereignty over these territories, it reinforced Japanese claims that the southern Kuriles were not part of the Kuriles’ chain, but rather a natural, historical extension of Hokkaido. In protest to the many shortcomings of the peace treaty, particularly those of Article 2, the Soviet delegation left San Francisco in September 1951 without signing the accord.\(^7\) In the four years following the San Francisco Peace Conference, Soviet-Japanese relations were virtually non-existent.\(^8\) During that same time the territorial dispute continued unabated and unaddressed.

It was not until Stalin’s successor, Nikita Khrushchev, had consolidated power in 1955 that the Soviet and Japanese governments began negotiations to normalize relations in the postwar period. Predictably, the territorial dispute over the southern Kuriles assumed a central role in these negotiations. In October 1956, the Soviet and Japanese governments signed the 1956 Soviet-Japanese Joint Declaration. After a decade of virtually non-existent relations, the Soviets and Japanese had finally managed to devise a working formula, albeit vague and rudimentary, to resolve the most contentious issue between them: the territorial dispute. Specifically, in Article 9 of the 1956 Soviet-Japanese Joint Declaration, the Soviet government agreed to “hand over to Japan the Habomai Islands and the island of Shikotan” only after the conclusion of a peace treaty between the Soviet Union and Japan.\(^9\) Indeed, the 1956 Joint Declaration was a “milestone” in postwar Soviet-Japanese reconciliation.\(^10\)
THE SOVIET ERA: 1960-1985

The diplomatic euphoria surrounding the Soviet-Japan Joint Declaration and its role in restoring Soviet-Japanese relations was, however, short-lived. Relations between the Soviet Union and Japan became severely strained in 1960 when the latter signed a revised, expanded version of the 1951 U.S.-Japan Basic Treaty – a defense agreement concluded nine years earlier on the sidelines of the San Francisco Peace Conference. Soviet leaders perceived the 1951 U.S.-Japan Basic Treaty as an anti-Soviet military alliance between Washington and Tokyo. Consequently, the Soviets interpreted Japan’s decision to renew this alliance in 1960 as an indication of Tokyo’s continued commitment to assist the U.S. in undermining Soviet security in Northeast Asia.

In response, the Kremlin issued to Japan a unilateral revision of Article 9 of the 1956 Soviet-Japanese Joint Declaration. According to the Soviets’ modification, Habomai and Shikotan would be transferred to Japan only if all “foreign troops” were withdrawn from Japan and a Soviet-Japanese peace treaty was signed thereafter.11 The Japanese government, however, did not intend to trade the security of its total land mass for minimal territorial gains in the southern Kuriles by abandoning its security alliance with the U.S. Naturally, it neither entertained this ultimatum nor recognized the legality of the Soviets’ unilateral revision of Article 9.12 The Khrushchev administration, in turn, reverted to the Stalinist position that no territorial dispute existed between the two countries. For its part, the Japanese government claimed continuing, rightful ownership of the islands. As a result, Soviet-Japanese negotiations over the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues stagnated for the next 25 years – as did Soviet-Japanese relations in general.
Khrushchev’s removal from office in October 1964 resulted in the tenure of three conservative Soviet leaders from 1965-1985: Brezhnev (1964-1982), Andropov (1982-1984), and Chernenko (1984-1985). Over these 20 years, the Soviets continued to claim and administer the southern Kuriles as the sovereign territory of the Soviet Union. All three leaders adhered to the traditional Soviet argument that no territorial issue existed between the Soviet Union and Japan. Brezhnev and longtime Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko set the tone for Andropov and Chernenko in contending that the territorial issue had been “resolved once and for all” and “no longer” existed. During this time period, the continued presence of U.S. military forces in Japan remained a primary determinant of the Soviet government’s scornful attitude toward Japan. Indeed, it was not until after the deaths of Brezhnev, Andropov, and Chernenko in 1982, 1984, and 1985, respectively, that Soviet-Japanese dialogue over the southern Kuriles and peace treaty talks recommenced in earnest.

THE GORBACHEV-YELTSIN TRANSITION ERA

Gorbachev’s election to General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in March 1985 had a positive impact on Soviet-Japanese relations. In particular, the application of “new thinking” – Gorbachev’s policy calling for renewed détente with the U.S. and its allies – to Soviet foreign relations with Japan resulted in renewed Soviet-Japanese dialogue over the territorial and peace treaty issues. From January 1986 to January 1991, the Soviet and Japanese foreign ministries held multiple, consultative meetings concerning these two issues. These exchanges culminated in Gorbachev’s historic visit to Tokyo in April 1991 and the signing of the Soviet-Japan Joint Communiqué.

The Joint Communiqué established: the existence of a territorial dispute between the Soviet Union and Japan, that future negotiations over the southern Kuriles would include all four
islands (not just Shikotan and the Habomai Islets), that the territorial dispute would be resolved in the framework of a Soviet-Japan peace treaty, and Gorbachev’s desire to reduce Soviet military presence, some 10,000 troops strong, on the disputed islands.\textsuperscript{16} Notwithstanding the positive impact of the 1991 Joint Communiqué on Soviet-Japanese relations, both sides still came away from the summit maintaining mutually exclusive claims to the southern Kuriles. Nevertheless, the momentum in Soviet-Japanese relations from 1986 to 1991, particularly in regard to the territorial and peace treaty issues, continued into the post-Soviet era.

Under Yeltsin, four major breakthroughs concerning the territorial and peace treaty issues occurred between the Russian Federation and Japan in the 1990s: the 1993 Tokyo Declaration, the two “no-necktie summits” in 1997 and 1998, and the 1998 Moscow Declaration. The 1993 Tokyo Declaration acknowledged the existence of a territorial dispute between Russia and Japan over all four southern Kuriles. Furthermore, it confirmed that the two sides would resolve the dispute in the terms of a Russian-Japanese peace treaty. At the first “no-necktie” summit in Krasnoyarsk in November 1997, Yeltsin and Japanese Prime Minister Hashimoto pledged to conclude a peace treaty by the end of 2000. At the second “no-necktie” summit in Kawana in April 1998, Yeltsin confirmed his commitment to the peace treaty pledge made at Krasnoyarsk. The 1998 Moscow Declaration confirmed in writing Yeltsin’s and Hashimoto’s oral agreements and pledges at the two “no-necktie” summits. Yeltsin’s resignation on December 31, 1999, however, diminished considerably the prospect of peace between Russia and Japan.

**THE PUTIN-MEDVEDEV ERA**

In the Putin-Medvedev era, the Soviet position on the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues has essentially come full circle. After Yeltsin’s resignation, Putin quickly embraced the 1956 Soviet-Japan Joint Declaration as the supreme legal document governing the resolution of
the territorial and peace treaty issues. He later denounced the 1991 Soviet-Japan Joint Communiqué and 1993 Tokyo Declaration as mere statements of political will that held no legal role in resolving these issues. Unlike the Soviet government from 1960-1991, however, Putin has upheld Article 9 of the 1956 Soviet-Japan Joint Declaration, in its original form, as the starting point of peace treaty negotiations and as the roadmap to settling the territorial issue. Putin therefore maintains that the Russian and Japanese governments must sign a peace treaty before they settle the territorial issue and that the resolution of the territorial issue will involve the transfer of two instead of four islands.

Putin has also embraced Soviet-era rhetoric in arguing that Russian sovereignty over the southern Kuriles is unquestionable and non-negotiable. This trend continues in the Medvedev era and is becoming more pronounced. In 2009, then Japanese Prime Minister Taro Aso threatened to once again couple Japanese economic cooperation with Russia with progress on the resolution of the southern Kuriles dispute. More recent DPJ Prime Ministers Hatoyama and Kano have since promised to maintain the separation of economic relations from the territorial issue. Nevertheless, it has become evident that Russia and Japan’s reversion to Cold War era rhetoric and strategies vis-à-vis the rightful ownership of the southern Kuriles in the last few years risks Cold War era stagnation in Russian-Japanese relations in these particular spheres.

RUSSIA, JAPAN AND SOVEREIGNTY OVER THE SOUTHERN KURILE ISLANDS

The politically tortuous and militarily traumatic evolution of the Southern Kuriles dispute has had an undoubtedly profound and negative continuous psychological impact on Russian and Japanese governments and societies. Reverberations of this territorial row have become manifest most notably in the deep mutual suspicion and entrenched, powerful threat perceptions that
Russian and Japanese officials, and, to a lesser extent, citizenries, have come to harbor for and of one another, respectively, since its inception 65 years ago. To be certain, the distrust and threat perceptions emanating from the current dispute serve as primary bases for dysfunction in the two countries’ present relationship, especially in military and select strategic spheres. However, it is in the inability of Russian and Japanese governments to settle this contentious matter in a timely and mutually beneficial manner in which the disruptive influence of the two sides’ mutual distrust and threat perceptions – and continued hypersensitivity to territorial security – has made itself principally apparent. This section explains in significant detail the competing perspectives on, claims to, and elite and public attitudes toward the Southern Kuriles controversy, as well as the strategies employed to reinforce mutually exclusive claims to dominion over the four islands, that characterize and perpetuate the distrust and threat perceptions that Russia and Japan have of one another.

COMPETING PERSPECTIVES ON RIGHTFUL OWNERSHIP OF THE SOUTHERN KURILES

Russian and Japanese perspectives on sovereignty over the southern Kurile Islands – Iturup, Kunashir, Shikotan, and the Habomai Islets – are diametrically opposed.20 The Russian government maintains that Russian sovereignty over the southern Kuriles is the result of World War II,21 “duly formalized” in accordance with international law,22 and therefore “unquestionable.”23 Conversely, the Japanese government maintains that the islands constitute part of the sovereign, inviolable territory of Japan and have never belonged to any other country.24 Each government contends that the other’s perspective on this matter stems from inaccurate interpretations of historical outcomes and agreements in Russian-Japanese relations.25
RUSSIAN AND JAPANESE CLAIMS TO THE SOUTHERN KURILES

Russian Claims to the Southern Kuriles

As with their competing perspectives on rightful ownership of the Southern Kuriles, the Russian and Japanese governments base their current, principal claims to the four islands on historical outcomes and agreements in Russian-Japanese relations. The primary argument of the Russian government in this regard is that Russian sovereignty over the southern Kuriles reflects the outcome of World War II. In particular, the Russian government notes that the U.S. and U.K. had promised southern Sakhalin and the entire Kurile archipelago to Stalin in the 1943 Cairo Declaration, at Yalta in February 1945, and at Potsdam in July 1945. In its secondary argument for sovereignty over the southern Kuriles, the Russian government claims that Japan’s agreement to the “transfer,” instead of to the “return,” of Shikotan and the Habomai Rocks in Article 9 of the Soviet-Japan Joint Declaration reflected implicit Japanese recognition of Soviet, now Russian, sovereignty over the two islands. Moreover, the Russian government cites Japan’s willingness to ratify the 1956 Soviet-Japanese Joint Declaration, despite its failure to mention either Iturup or Kunashir Island, as further evidence of Japan’s tacit acknowledgement of Soviet, now Russian, sovereignty over all four southern Kuriles.

Japanese Claims to the Southern Kuriles

In its efforts to refute Russian claims to these territories, the Japanese government utilizes four main arguments to assert its rightful ownership of the southern Kuriles. First, Japan asserts that Russia’s repeated recognition of Japanese sovereignty over the southern Kuriles in bilateral treaties from 1855-1945 establishes Japan’s historical ownership of the islands. Second, Japan contends that Article 2 of the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty, the provision that dispossessed
Japan of southern Sakhalin and the Kuriles, does not preclude continued Japanese ownership of the southern Kuriles. Specifically, Article 2 does not identify which islands constitute the Kurile archipelago. According to the Japanese government, Iturup, Kunashir, Shikotan, and the Habomai Islets are not part of the Kuriles’ chain; rather, these four islands are an extension of Japan’s northernmost island, Hokkaido, and therefore the sovereign territory of Japan. Third, Japan argues that the Soviet Union, now Russia, implicitly acknowledged Japanese sovereignty over all four southern Kuriles in the 1991 Soviet-Japan Joint Communiqué and the 1993 Tokyo Declaration. Finally, according to Japan’s interpretation of Article 9 of the 1956 Soviet-Japan Joint Declaration, Russia has implicitly acknowledged Japanese sovereignty over the four southern Kuriles.

RUSSIAN AND JAPANESE ATTITUDES TOWARD THE SOUTHERN KURILES DISPUTE

Russian and Japanese attitudes toward the Southern Kuriles dispute reflect their governments’ competing perspectives on, and claims to, Iturup, Kunashir, Shikotan and the Habomai Islets. Russian and Japanese attitudes on this matter can be divided into two categories: elite and public opinion. Russian and Japanese elite opinion on the southern Kuriles dispute coincides with their governments’ respective, principled stands on the issue. Russian and Japanese public opinion on the southern Kuriles dispute coincides with elite opinion, albeit less enthusiastically in Japan than in Russia.

Russian Elite Attitudes Toward the Southern Kuriles Dispute

Russian elite attitudes toward the southern Kuriles dispute are essentially variants of Putin’s perspective on the matter. The Russian elite therefore adhere to a conservative, nationalist, and increasingly Soviet-like position on the southern Kuriles issue. More
specifically, the Russian elite maintain that the southern Kuriles are the sovereign territory of Russia and that Russian sovereignty over the islands is unquestionable and non-negotiable. They further maintain that territorial concessions beyond the possible, gradual transfer of Shikotan and the Habomai Islets to Japan, as a “goodwill gesture” after the conclusion of a Russian-Japanese peace treaty, are ill-advised. Some elite attitudes are, of course, more nationalistic than others. Indeed, radically nationalist Russian State Duma deputies belonging to the Communist Party of the Russian Federation assert that there is no territorial issue between Russia and Japan. Moreover, they advocate criminal prosecution for any Russian leader “trying to sell Russian land” to Japan. Notwithstanding the varying levels of nationalism among them, however, the Russian elite overwhelmingly believe that the southern Kuriles’ dispute “must not become an obstacle” in Russian-Japanese relations. Rather, Russian leaders believe that “the unresolved border problem” should “occupy a reasonable place” alongside the other five pillars of Russian-Japanese cooperation specified in the 2003 Japan-Russia Action Plan: expanded political dialogue, strategic relations in the international community, trade and economic matters, defense and security, and cultural and interpersonal exchange.

**Russian Public Attitudes Toward the Southern Kuriles Dispute**

Post-Soviet Russian public opinion has consistently opposed the return of the southern Kuriles to Japan – thusly reflecting elite attitudes toward this matter. Clearly evident during Yeltsin’s tenure, public opposition to this idea became more pronounced under Putin and has continued into the Medvedev era. Public opinion polling confirms this trend. In July 2009, the All-Russian Public Opinion Research Center (ARPORC) conducted and published a national public opinion poll asking respondents about the future political status of the southern Kuriles. The poll included a statistical comparison to an identical survey that ARPORC had conducted in
2005. According to the 2009 poll, 79% of the respondents believed that the islands “should remain a part of Russia,” up from 73% in 2005. Only 3% of respondents in 2009 answered that the islands “should be returned to Japan,” up from 2% in 2005. Respondents favoring some sort of compromise with Japan over the southern Kuriles accounted for approximately 12% of those polled in 2009, down from 19% in 2005. Finally, those who advocated leaving the dispute “for future generations to be resolved” constituted 6% of respondents in 2009, equal to 6% of those polled in 2005. Not only do these statistical trends confirm Russian public opposition to any compromise on the southern Kuriles issue, they also suggest its continued intensification.47

**Russian Attitudes Toward the Southern Kuriles Dispute: Elite versus Public Opinion**

There exists an indisputable confluence in Russian elite and public attitudes toward the southern Kurile Islands. Indeed, the Russian government and citizenry remain firmly opposed to resolutions of the southern Kuriles dispute that call for the transfer of territory to Japan. The inclination of the Russian government, particularly Putin and his inner circle, to settle the territorial issue at the cost of ceding Shikotan and the Habomai Islets to Japan, however, marks a critical distinction between Russian elite and public opinion concerning the southern Kuriles. In the event that Japan accepted the terms of Article 9 of the 1956 Soviet-Japan Joint Declaration, Putin and Medvedev would likely accept the Japanese offer and transfer Shikotan Island and the Habomai Islets to Japan in exchange for a peace treaty – regardless of the decision’s unpopularity among the Russian public and certain circles of the Russian political elite, particularly regional executives in the Russian Far Eastern District.48

Combined with consistently impressive public approval ratings, Putin’s dominant prerogative in the internal and external affairs of the Russian state afford him opportunities to
make unpopular foreign policy decisions. Furthermore, these influential political assets allow Putin to see these decisions quickly implemented and successfully executed. Past examples of such foreign policy decisions include Putin’s renewed cooperation with the West after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the U.S. and the finalization of border demarcation processes with Kazakhstan and China from 2004-2008.49 Strategic necessity largely influenced Putin’s decision to realize these unpopular foreign policy decisions. Indeed, were Putin to deem the normalization of Russian-Japanese relations an immediate strategic priority for Russia, he would likely be able to make and enforce the necessary territorial concessions to Japan. In this respect, Russian elite opinion on the southern Kuriles issue will almost always have a greater bearing on Russian foreign policy toward Japan than that of the Russian general public.50

**Russian Attitudes Toward the Southern Kuriles Dispute: Public Opinion as an Asset in Russian Relations with Japan**

Since 1992, the Russian government has consistently noted that Russian public attitudes must be amenable to any resolution of the southern Kuriles dispute involving territorial concessions to Japan before Russia and Japan could effectively settle the issue.51 In order for the Russian government to deem Russian public attitudes sufficiently amenable to any such territorial concessions, public opinion throughout Russia, the Russian Far Eastern Federal District, Sakhalin Oblast, and the southern Kuriles must approve of the agreement and view Japan in a generally positive manner. The Russian government would likely measure the receptiveness of public opinion to a southern Kuriles settlement by means of national, regional, and local referenda. In this case, regional and local referenda voting would apply only to the Far Eastern Federal District (and Sakhalin Oblast) and the southern Kuriles, respectively. Indeed, the Russian Constitution entitles Russian regions to referenda when a region’s territorial integrity
comes into question in Russian relations with neighboring states. If presently conducted, national, regional, and local referenda would exhibit the Russian public’s overwhelming and staunch resistance to any settlement obligating Russia to make territorial concessions to Japan. Russian political leaders have further remarked that a “qualified majority” in the Russian Federal Assembly – the legislative actions of which should hypothetically reflect public sentiment – must pass a law enacting a resolution to the southern Kuriles dispute.

It is likely that Putin and the Russian elite are exploiting the Russian public’s aversion to compromise on the southern Kuriles issue to Russia’s advantage in its relations with Japan. Putin has proven his capacity to realize foreign policy initiatives that do not resonate particularly well with the Russian citizenry. If he so desired, Putin could force a settlement of the southern Kuriles’ dispute on an unreceptive Russian public and elite. That Putin has not utilized this capacity to resolve the territorial impasse suggests that the Russian government may be using public opposition as an excuse – or rather an asset – to prolong indefinitely Russian-Japanese negotiations over the southern Kuriles.

Invoking public opposition as a strategy to prolong negotiations over the southern Kuriles provides the following benefits to the Russian government: continued extraction of Japanese economic investment in the Russian Far East absent territorial concessions to Japan and sustained pressure to conclude a peace treaty prior to the resolution of the territorial issue. In this regard, it is also in the Russian government’s long-term interest to continue stoking Russian nationalist fervor over the southern Kuriles dispute. Additionally, Putin could present Russian public opposition to a territorial settlement as an incentive for Japan to conclude a peace treaty with Russia prior to resolving the southern Kuriles dispute. Indeed, Putin could promote Japan’s willingness to sign a peace treaty as a critical trust-building gesture on the part of the Japanese
government – one that would enable the Russian public to perceive the transfer of southern
Kuriles island territory to Japan more positively.

Japanese Elite Attitudes Toward the Southern Kuriles Dispute

Like their Russian counterparts, the Japanese elite are unified in their attitudes toward the
southern Kuriles dispute. In particular, they perceive Iturup, Kunashir, Shikotan, and the
Habomai Islets as constituting integral parts of the sovereign territory of Japan. The Japanese
elite also believe that Russia’s continued occupation of the southern Kuriles is illegal under
international law. Moreover, Japanese elite demand the return of all four islands at once in as
short a time as possible – though some have more patiently advocated the islands’ gradual or
partial return in the past. Indeed, Japan’s two major political parties, the Liberal Democratic
Party (LDP) and the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), regard the southern Kuriles dispute as the
“biggest issue” in Russian-Japanese relations and “a key pillar of Japan’s diplomatic agenda with
Russia.” LDP and DPJ leaders argue, however, that progress toward a resolution of the southern
Kuriles dispute “has not advanced one millimeter” in the Putin era.

Nevertheless, the Japanese elite remain committed to the normalization of Russian-Japanese
relations despite the lack of progress and “considerable gaps” that remain between
Russia and Japan over this matter. To be certain, they understand that unresolved territorial
issues and the absence of a peace treaty are “not normal” for two neighboring countries with
“international authority” such as Russia and Japan. Japanese leaders therefore will not reinstate
the Cold War practice of binding large-scale economic investment in the Russian Far East with a
settlement to these matters; reinstating this policy would only prolong the status quo. Instead,
as per the 2003 Japan-Russia Action Plan, the Japanese elite seek to expand relations and
cooperation with Russia while simultaneously attempting to normalize Russian-Japanese relations.

**Japanese Public Attitudes Toward the Southern Kuriles Dispute**

Japanese public attitudes toward the southern Kuriles dispute reflect those of the Japanese elite. In particular, the Japanese public regards the southern Kuriles as the sovereign territory of Japan, condemns Russia’s continued occupation of the islands as illegal under international law, and strongly advocates the return of all four islands. The intensity of Japanese public sentiment in this regard, however, generally varies according to age. Specifically, the older generations of the Japanese population that lived through or grew up after World War II demonstrate more interest in the southern Kuriles dispute than younger generations. For younger generations the territorial dispute is historically distant and therefore less significant psychologically and politically. As a result, younger Japanese citizens are not as passionate about this matter as their elders. Indeed, the Japanese government has been “hard-pressed” to combat “a decline in public interest” on the territorial issue among Japan’s younger generations in the post-Cold War era. Anonymous sources in the Japanese government have further admitted that in the 60 years since the Soviet occupation of the islands, the Japanese public, as a whole, has grown “rather indifferent” to the southern Kuriles dispute.

**Japanese Attitudes Toward the Southern Kuriles Dispute: Public Opinion as a Liability in Japanese Relations with Russia**

Despite a confluence in Japanese elite and public attitudes toward the Southern Kuriles dispute, widespread public enthusiasm to champion the cause of the Northern Territories and advance the Japanese case for ownership of the islands is severely lacking in Japan. Recent Japanese government surveys indicate that apathy, as opposed to a lack of awareness, among the
Japanese public poses the greatest threat to the continued validity of Japanese claims to the southern Kuriles. Specifically, an October 2008 Japanese Cabinet Office poll established that 80% of the respondents were relatively well-informed on the territorial issue. At first glance, this seems a promising statistic for the Japanese political leadership. However, when asked if they wanted to “participate in activities requesting the return of the Northern Territories,” approximately 60% of the surveyed responded that they were not interested in such activities. Only 35% of those polled expressed interest in participating in such activities – 33% remarked that they would take part if there was an opportunity to do so, yet only 2% sought to participate “proactively.”

Public apathy to the southern Kuriles dispute has become an issue of increasing concern for Japanese government. Indeed, public interest plays a crucial role in reinforcing the legitimacy of claims to Iturup, Kunashir, Shikotan, and the Habomai Islets. The Japanese government depends on substantial public support for its mandate to claim ownership of the southern Kuriles. Moreover, it also depends on public support to present a unified, national front vis-à-vis Russia when asserting Japanese sovereignty over the islands. Consequently, public apathy to this issue undermines the Japanese government’s mandate to assert sovereignty over the southern Kuriles and therefore discredits the legitimacy of such claims; in time, Japanese public indifference could reinforce Russian ownership of the islands by default. To maintain this mandate and the legitimacy of these claims, Japanese political leaders must then continue to facilitate confluence in government policy and public opinion on the southern Kuriles issue. Toward this end, the Japanese government has engaged in an extensive public relations campaign to bring this matter to the attention of its citizenry. For all of its efforts and
persistence, however, the Japanese government has been losing its campaign to keep the public aware of and passionate about the territorial dispute.

Japanese public apathy to the southern Kuriles dispute is primarily a result of the generational shift that has been occurring in Japan since the 1990s. The last two decades have witnessed the aging and passing of Japan’s World War II generation – the generation most attuned to Stalin’s expropriation of the southern Kuriles at the end of World War II. In the growing absence of this generation, the Japanese government will begin to lose its most valuable base of support in its campaign to regain the southern Kuriles. Elder generations in Japan generally comprise the most enthusiastic and active participants in government efforts to recover the four islands – as they experienced the dispossession of southern Sakhalin and the Kurile Archipelago first-hand. Their support lends a great deal of legitimacy to the Japanese government’s claim to the southern Kuriles. As the elder generations pass on, however, it is likely that their zeal for regaining the southern Kuriles will pass with them and overall public interest in the territorial dispute will diminish. It is further likely that the younger, more apathetic generations replacing them will not champion the cause of the Northern Territories in their stead. The resultant diminution in public support could severely undermine the legitimacy of the government’s ongoing claims to the southern Kuriles.

Japan will continue to experience a notable decline in public interest in the southern Kuriles issue over the next few decades. As its younger population, increasingly apathetic to the territorial dispute, begins to replace its older population, the Japanese government will likely incur a deficit not only in public interest in this matter, but in public awareness as well.

Combined, public apathy to, and lack of awareness of, the southern Kuriles dispute could have a toxic effect on future government efforts to regain the four islands from Russia. Indeed, the
Japanese government could find itself in a predicament in which it continues to challenge and question Russian sovereignty over the southern Kuriles in a resolute manner, yet the Japanese public does not.\textsuperscript{65} Such a situation would play to Russian interests in “waiting out” the Japanese to solidify Russian claims to the islands. To avoid this scenario, the Japanese government must make some sort of tangible, significant gain from its efforts to recover the Northern Territories so that it can convince its younger population that this issue merits elite and public attention.

**RUSSIAN AND JAPANESE STRATEGIES FOR REINFORCING CLAIMS TO THE SOUTHERN KURILES**

The governments of Russia and Japan have employed a variety of strategies to reinforce their respective claims to the Southern Kuriles. These strategies also assume a central role in acknowledging and managing elite and public attitudes toward the Southern Kuriles dispute in both countries. They further demonstrate the priority that each government assigns to the important issue of territorial security. Russian strategies for reinforcing claims to the Southern Kuriles include maritime border surveillance, socio-economic and military-industrial development, and repopulation of the islands. Japanese strategies for reinforcing claims to the Southern Kuriles include enacting domestic legislation claiming sovereignty over the islands, attempting to persuade island residents of the benefits of unification with Japan, internationalizing the dispute, and officially recognizing the Ainu – the islands’ indigenous peoples.

**Russian Strategies**

Kremlin strategies to reinforce Russian claims to Iturup, Kunashir, Shikotan and the Habomai Islets became increasingly more effective, pragmatic and innovative during Putin’s presidency than they had been during that of Yeltsin. To a great extent, Russia’s economic
rebound from 1999-2008 enabled Putin to aggressively, and somewhat definitively, assert Russian sovereignty over the Southern Kuriles, especially in his second term. This trend, though more positive in some respects than in others, continues in the Medvedev era.

By far, the most controversial of these strategies has been border surveillance. Since 1992, Russian naval and coast guard vessels, helicopters and planes have patrolled the maritime border between the southern Kuriles and Hokkaido, frequently shadowing their Japanese counterparts in the waters surrounding the four contested islands. Russian naval and coast guard detachments also began repelling, intercepting, and detaining unauthorized Japanese fishing vessels poaching in the vicinity of the islands in the early 1990s. These border patrols and additional enforcement practices persisted and expanded under Putin. Although these tactics have played an integral role in the successful implementation and prosecution of this strategy, one tactic in particular constitutes an excessive use of force: the Russian navy and coast guard’s firing of live machine-gun rounds at Japanese boats suspected of poaching in Russian territorial waters surrounding the Southern Kuriles. This tactic has resulted in the deaths of multiple Japanese fishermen since the end of the Cold War and only exacerbates tensions between the two governments in regard to the already sensitive matters of fishery agreements and the territorial dispute.

A far less controversial and more promising Kremlin strategy for reinforcing Russian claims to the Southern Kuriles than border surveillance has been the repopulation of Iturup, Kunashir, Shikotan and the Habomai Islets with ethnic Russians. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the populations of Siberia and the Russian Far East contracted significantly for two reasons. First, the strictures of Soviet internal migration policy no longer bound Russians to their areas of residence in the east. Second, the sizeable economic incentives and privileges that
drew and kept ethnic Russians in the east during Soviet era, respectively, disappeared under the government of the post-Soviet Russian government. Taken together, the discontinuation of Soviet-era territorial confinement and subsidized living arrangements in Siberia and the Russian Far East created an encouraging impetus for out-migration from the region to European Russia. Consequently, the southern Kuriles constituted one of the most neglected, deprived, and under-populated regions of post-Soviet Russia until late 2006.68

The population of the southern Kuriles at the end of 2006 was approximately 19,000 and was diminishing at a rate of 100 residents annually.69 After intensive lobbying from 2000-2005, Putin finally heeded the advice of federal and regional subordinates regarding the demographic crisis in the Southern Kuriles.70 In May 2005, he ordered the Russian federal government to draft a plan that would facilitate repopulation of the islands.71 By early August 2006, the Russian Federal Assembly had approved and begun implementing a plan for these exact purposes.72 The Russian government expects this plan to increase the population of the southern Kuriles some 50% – from 19,000 to approximately 28-30,00073 – by 2015. As early as April 2007, Sakhalin regional authorities noted that the four islands’ birth rate exceeded the death rate74 and that more Russians had begun settling in the southern Kuriles.75

In addition to encouraging the repopulation of the Southern Kuriles, the Federal Assembly’s August 2006 plan for the islands also provided for their socio-economic, military-industrial and infrastructural development – a third, critical and innovative strategy that the Kremlin has utilized to reinforce its claims to these territories. Shortly after Putin ordered the Russian federal government to formulate a plan for the development and repopulation of the Southern Kuriles in May 2005, the Kremlin and Federal Assembly had earmarked significant federal funds for these important tasks, particularly the former as it would undoubtedly facilitate
the latter. By November 2005, the Russian federal government had allocated millions of dollars for the development of the islands.\textsuperscript{76} The full extent of the federal government’s financial commitment to the development of the Southern Kuriles became more clearly evident after the approval and implementation of the August 2006 plan. Russian federal officials estimated total expected government funding for the development of the islands from 2007-2015 at roughly 17 billion rubles or $670 million.\textsuperscript{77} This funding equates to approximately 1 million rubles or USD$38,600 per island resident.\textsuperscript{78} Russian federal government spending per capita is greater in the Southern Kuriles than in any other region of Russia.\textsuperscript{79}

Putin had four objectives in ordering the implementation of a plan for the development of the Southern Kuriles such as that which the Federal Assembly approved in August 2006. First, he aspired to develop the local economy and infrastructure of the islands so as to retain and attract current and new residents, respectively. Second, Putin sought to expand Russian federal control over the islands.\textsuperscript{80} Third, Putin wanted to remind the islands’ residents of the Kremlin’s continued commitment to their well-being. Fourth, and rather obviously, he desired to reinforce Russian ownership of the islands vis-à-vis Japan.\textsuperscript{81} Accordingly, the August 2006 development plan provides for the expansion of the islands’ transport, energy, and engineering infrastructures and promotes economic diversification.\textsuperscript{82} It also emphasizes an improvement in the islands’ military significance.\textsuperscript{83} Indeed, the Russian federal government plans to construct many “key facilities” on the islands to be used for joint military-civilian purposes.\textsuperscript{84} Indeed, the development of the Southern Kuriles in these regards has assumed an integral role in expediting the repopulation of the islands. These two strategies prove highly complementary and effective in respect to Russia’s overall objective of reinforcing its claims to Iturup, Kunashir, Shikotan and the Habomai Islets.
Japanese Strategies

Because the Japanese government neither possesses physical custody of the Southern Kuriles nor administers them politically, its strategies for reinforcing its claims to the four islands understandably – and somewhat logically – differ from those of its Russian counterpart. Although not effective in the sense that the islands remain under Russian government control, Japanese strategies nevertheless have been relatively successful in garnering significant international support and sympathy for their position on and claims to the Southern Kuriles issue. These strategies include enacting domestic legislation claiming sovereignty over the islands, attempting to persuade island residents of the benefits of unification with Japan, internationalizing the dispute, and officially recognizing the Ainu – the islands’ indigenous peoples.

The Japanese government has been especially active in implementing its first strategy – the enactment of domestic legislation claiming sovereignty over the Iturup, Kunashir, Shikotan and the Habomai islets. Since the end of World War II the Japanese parliament, the National Diet, has passed 18 bills asserting Japanese historical and continued sovereignty over the southern Kuriles. The Japanese National Diet passed the most recent bill of this kind in June 2009. The bill declared the southern Kuriles “historic territory of Japan” and demanded steps for their swift return. Such legislation is generally intended for domestic consumption and often elicits the Russian elite’s immediate condemnation.

Japan also seeks to strengthen its claims to the southern Kuriles by attempting to persuade the islands’ predominantly Russian residents that Japanese ownership of the islands would be far preferable to that of Russia. The Hokkaido and Okinawa prefecture governments have organized and sponsored multiple trips for southern Kuriles residents, at great cost, from
Hokkaido to Okinawa in an effort to demonstrate the benefit of Japanese administration over island territories. The Japanese government also has displayed its interest in the general welfare of southern Kuriles citizens by building schools, hospitals, and power generators on the islands and providing massive amounts of humanitarian aid as well.

Japanese efforts to internationalize the southern Kuriles dispute at G-7 conferences from 1990–1997 proved successful and gave Japan a critical diplomatic advantage in asserting its claims to the islands. Much to the indignation of the Soviets, and then Russians, the Japanese convinced their G7 peers to include the southern Kuriles dispute on the conference agenda at Houston in 1990, at Munich in 1992, and at Denver in 1997. At the time, Japan’s achievements undoubtedly strengthened and legitimized its claims to the southern Kuriles. Over the last decade, however, Western powers have become increasingly reluctant to pressure the Russians in this regard or address the dispute in international fora. Russia has become a much more powerful country since the mid-1990s and many Western governments, including the U.S., do not wish to jeopardize their relations with Moscow by weighing in on the southern Kuriles dispute.

The Japanese government’s most recent strategy for laying claim to the southern Kuriles is its official recognition of the Ainu – a people indigenous to Hokkaido and surrounding islands, including the southern Kuriles. In June 2008, the Japanese National Diet officially recognized the Ainu as “an indigenous people with a distinct language, religion, and culture.” Only an estimated 24,000 Ainu remain in Japan. Beyond a “moral necessity to live up to its history,” it is likely that the Japanese government perceives the Ainu an asset in future negotiations with Russia over ownership of the southern Kuriles. By officially recognizing the Ainu as a sub-national group within the population of Japan, the Japanese government can co-opt Ainu
ancestral claims to the southern Kuriles and reinforce its own historical, legal claims to the islands. Although the Japanese government has yet to exploit this opportunity, it remains a possibility.  

PROPOSED FORMULAS FOR RESOLVING THE SOUTHERN KURILES DISPUTE

The proposed formulas for resolving the Southern Kuriles dispute reflect the significant, continued impact of Russian and Japanese perspectives on, claims to and attitudes toward the issue on the two governments’ efforts to settle the matter. To a certain extent, these formulas constitute additional Russian and Japanese government strategies – albeit far less obvious than those discussed above – to assert rightful, if not legal, dominion over the four islands. Moreover, each government’s historically entrenched mistrust and misperceptions of the other, as well as both sides’ perennial hypersensitivity to matters of territorial security, have perpetuated Russia and Japan’s intransigence on their respective formula preferences and vehement opposition to entertaining any method that resolves the dispute on terms besides their own. This section examines standard and alternative Russian and Japanese formulas for the settlement of the Southern Kuriles dispute. It also considers the feasibility of separating the resolution of the territorial row from the signing of a Russian-Japanese peace treaty – processes that both governments regard as necessarily fused and incapable of individual diplomatic treatment.

RUSSIAN AND JAPANESE STANDARD FORMULAS

Over the last 20 years, scholars and political leaders from both Russia and Japan have proposed many different formulas for resolving the southern Kuriles dispute. Notwithstanding the many different existing and possible prescriptions for resolution, the governments of Russia and Japan each adhere to their own standard formula. Russia’s invokes Article 9 of the 1956
Soviet-Japan Joint Declaration. Specifically, it calls for the return of Shikotan Island and the Habomai Islets at some point after the conclusion of a Russian-Japanese peace treaty. The current Japanese standard formula demands the transfer of all four islands from Russia to Japan. Furthermore, the Japanese standard demands that the transfer of these islands be included in the terms of a concurrent peace treaty.

**ALTERNATIVES TO RUSSIAN AND JAPANESE STANDARD FORMULAS**

Political leaders and scholars from both countries have proposed several alternative prescriptions to settle the territorial issue. Some of these formats deviate more noticeably from Russia and Japan’s standard formulas than others. Nevertheless, all of the major alternative formulas call for the division of the islands between the two countries. These formulas base the distribution of territory on one of two factors: the number of islands or the percentage of the islands’ total land mass. Formulas dividing the southern Kuriles according the number of islands do not distribute the territory as equally as those that distribute territory according to the percentage of the islands’ total land mass. Russia prefers the former type of formula and rejects the latter, whereas Japan prefers the latter and rejects the former.

The Japanese generally reject alternative formulas calling for the transfer of the two or three southernmost islands because they constitute only 7% and 37% of the southern Kuriles’ total land mass, respectively. Furthermore, the three southernmost islands – Kunashir, Shikotan, and the Habomai Islets – added together constitute only 60% of the land mass of the remaining and largest island, Iturup. Indeed, the Japanese would perceive as unfair any settlement of the southern Kuriles dispute that left Iturup intact and in Russian hands. If ever the Japanese agreed to resolve the territorial issue by means of division they would likely prefer to
distribute the territory of the southern Kuriles according to the percentage of the islands’ total land mass. Moreover, the Japanese would likely prefer a 50/50 distribution.\textsuperscript{92}

Under a 50/50 formula, Japan would receive Kunashir, Shikotan, the Habomai Islets, and the southern 13\% of Iturup Island.\textsuperscript{93} As such, Russia would retain the northern 87\% of Iturup and the Russian-Japanese border in the Kurile archipelago would be drawn at these points on Iturup Island.\textsuperscript{94} Although innovative and equitable, territorial division and distribution in the southern Kuriles according the percentage of land mass are not in Russia’s interest. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that Russia and Japan will enlist any of these alternative formulas to resolve the southern Kuriles dispute.

**RECONSIDERING THE INSEPERABILITY OF THE SOUTHERN KURILES AND PEACE TREATY ISSUES**

Regardless of the formula utilized to resolve the territorial dispute, it is likely that the need for a peace treaty between Russia and Japan will assume a central role in the settlement process. As much as the need for a bilateral peace treaty could encourage an end to the Southern Kuriles dispute, it could also disrupt, if not completely derail, the resolution process. In respect to the latter possibility, several influential commentators argue that the inseparability of the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues continues to preclude the full normalization of Russian-Japanese relations.\textsuperscript{95} To be certain, the intimate linkage of these two matters has had a consistently negative impact on the two countries’ abilities to resolve either one.\textsuperscript{96} The current lack of progress on the territorial and peace treaty issues does not suggest their resolution in the next 20 years. In fact, the nature of the issues’ relationship and its politically toxic effect on Russian-Japanese relations suggests the need to consider the prospect of separating the two issues when trying to resolve them.
In considering the separation of the territorial and peace treaty issues while trying to resolve them, three questions emerge. First, would negotiating territorial and peace treaty issues separately bring about their resolutions and normalize Russian-Japanese diplomatic relations? Second, is the ratification of a peace treaty prior to a southern Kuriles’ resolution likely? Third, given the fairly positive trajectory of Russian-Japanese relations, excepting of course these two matters, is a peace treaty with Japan in Russia’s continued interest?

Were Russian and Japanese governments to engage in negotiation and dialogue over the territorial and peace treaty issues on a separate basis, it is likely that consensus on each would emerge in the absence of the other. Indeed, attempting to resolve each matter individually would likely preclude the one from distorting both parties’ perspectives on, and interests in, the other and could prove very effective in normalizing Russian-Japanese relations. Although the question asked in this instance is hypothetical and the commentary speculative, they are nevertheless constructive in that they presume the separability of the territorial and peace treaty issues and beg a more appropriate, practical question: is the ratification of a peace treaty prior to a southern Kuriles’ resolution likely?

In short, the answer is no. The Russian government has floated this proposition many times to the Japanese. The Japanese have consistently rejected such offers. On occasion, the Russian government has also suggested ratifying an interim peace treaty while the two sides negotiated a permanent peace accord with a resolution to the southern Kuriles dispute. Japan has consistently rejected this proposal as well.97 The Japanese government remains determined to secure the resolution of the territorial issue prior to its signing, or within the terms, of a permanent Russian-Japanese peace treaty. The Russians look upon neither option favorably.
On the one hand, the Russian government believes that signing a peace accord prior to the settlement of the southern Kuriles dispute will afford Russia greater leverage in negotiating the terms of peace with Japan. Moreover, Russia fears that the terms of peace with Japan, particularly in regard to economic cooperation, will be less favorable if it makes territorial concessions to Japan before the ratification, or within the provisions, of a bilateral peace treaty. On the other hand, the Japanese government believes that resolving the southern Kuriles dispute prior to the signing, or within the provisions, of a peace treaty will afford Japan greater leverage in extracting territorial concessions from Russia. The Japanese presume that the more the Russians wish to sign a peace treaty, the more willing they will be to make concessions to Japan over the southern Kuriles. Furthermore, Japan is concerned that Russia will have very little incentive to make territorial concessions to Japan in the event that the two sides sign a peace treaty prior to settling the southern Kuriles dispute.

Notwithstanding their aversion to resolve the territorial and peace treaty issues on any terms but their own, Russia and Japan have nevertheless managed to expand relations, particularly in the economic sphere, at an impressive rate. Given the extent of Russian-Japanese bilateral cooperation in economic, as well as political, strategic, and military spheres of interaction, from 2000-2008, Russian and Japanese experts and officials have recently inquired as to whether a peace treaty is still necessary or in Russia’s continued interest.

Russian and Japanese opinions on the necessity of a peace treaty for Russia naturally vary. The minority opinion in both countries, mostly among members of the Russian and Japanese business communities and intelligentsia, is that a peace treaty would neither change Japan’s perception of Russia for the better nor facilitate a drastic improvement in Russian-
Consequently, minority opinion holders in both countries agree that a peace treaty with Japan is not entirely vital to Russian interests in Northeast Asia.

The majority opinion on this matter, however, is that a peace treaty with Japan is vital to Russian interests in Northeast Asia. This opinion is ubiquitous among Russian and Japanese government officials. The majority opinion is right. A peace treaty with Japan is absolutely vital to Russian interests in Northeast Asia. Although currently favorable to Russia, there is no guarantee that the present state of affairs in Russian-Japanese relations will persist over the long-term, especially in the absence of a bilateral peace treaty. Indeed, it would be particularly dangerous if either Russia or Japan decided to stop working toward a peace treaty. Any peace treaty would likely include a resolution to the territorial issue. Therefore, the lack of a peace treaty would leave the territorial dispute unresolved and unaddressed – a scenario that would continuously threaten the stability and positive trajectory of current Russian-Japanese relations. Ultimately, the perspective that a peace treaty with Japan is not immediately essential for Russia creates an environment that is not conducive to the normalization of Russian-Japanese relations.

**FACTORS PRECLUDING THE RESOLUTION OF THE SOUTHERN KURILES DISPUTE**

Several factors beyond the unattractiveness of alternative formulas for settlement and the inseparability of the peace treaty issue preclude the immediate resolution of the southern Kuriles dispute. These factors include a lack of mutual trust, the strategic importance of the southern Kuriles, nationalist sentiment and the domestic political importance of the southern Kuriles, the lack of strong political leadership and political will to resolve the dispute, missed opportunities for peace, and Japanese efforts to internationalize the dispute. These factors exhibit, perpetuate and account for the Russian and Japanese governments’ mutual suspicion and misperceptions of
one another that contribute to their continuing inability to resolve the Southern Kuriles dispute and its iterated-prisoner’s dilemma-like format. Furthermore, these factors confirm the persistent and pervasive impact of Russian and Japanese concerns for territorial security on their failure to reconcile their views on the territorial impasse in mutually beneficial and timely manner.

**LACK OF MUTUAL TRUST**

The lack of trust between Russia and Japan remains a particularly prohibitive factor in the immediate resolution of the southern Kuriles dispute. The two governments are reluctant to place confidence in one another in regard to settling the territorial issue for a number of political, strategic, and economic reasons. Japan harbors deep-seated suspicions that Russia would not return any of the southern Kuriles in the event that the two governments signed a peace treaty prior to the resolution of the territorial issue. Indeed, Japan would have much to lose if these circumstances came to pass. Beyond its economic and technological assets, the peace treaty constitutes perhaps Japan’s most effective source of leverage in its relations with Russia. Prematurely signing a peace treaty with Russia would dispossess Japan of its ability to pressure Russia into returning the southern Kuriles.

The Russian government is apprehensive to resolve the territorial dispute with Japan because it worries that diminished Japanese interest in cooperation, particularly in the economic sphere, will follow Japan’s acquisition of the southern Kuriles. Putin’s statement in Tokyo in November 2005 that Russia and Japan needed to establish strong ties “on the basis of trade and economics” in order to achieve a level of mutual trust sufficient to resolve the territorial dispute attests to this observation. This statement further suggests that Putin intends to extract as much investment and trade from the Japanese as possible before considering territorial concessions in the southern Kuriles. Additionally, the Russian government is hesitant to cede the
southern Kuriles to Japan because it is likely worried that Japan, or eventually the U.S., may use the strategic location of the islands to undermine Russian power and security in Northeast Asia.

THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THE SOUTHERN KURILES

The lack of trust between Russia and Japan in regard to the resolution of the Southern Kuriles dispute arises in large part from the strategic importance of the islands to both countries. Although small and obscurely situated, Iturup, Kunashir, Shikotan, and the Habomai Islets are of great strategic value to Russia and Japan. Officials from neither country, however, believe that the southern Kuriles are “vitally necessary” to the other.\textsuperscript{103} Despite each government’s difficulty in fully understanding the necessity of the southern Kuriles to the other, Russia and Japan nevertheless retain vital strategic interest in these islands for a variety of reasons.

The Southern Kuriles’ Strategic Importance to Russia

For Russia, the four islands form the southern flank of the Kurile Archipelago – “a natural line of defense for the Russian Far East.”\textsuperscript{104} Moreover, the southern Kuriles provide a secure outlet to the Pacific Ocean for the Russian Pacific Fleet;\textsuperscript{105} the Ekaterina and Friz Straits, situated between Iturup and Kunashir, and Iturup and Urup, respectively, account for two of the three waterways in the Kuriles that stay ice-free all year round.\textsuperscript{106} The southern Kuriles also contribute to Russia’s political monopoly over all maritime territory in Northeast Asia above the 45\textsuperscript{th} parallel and reinforce Russia’s de facto dominion over the Sea of Okhotsk. The southern Kuriles’ role in maintaining Russia’s de facto dominion over the Sea of Okhotsk is important for two reasons. First, the sea has abundant natural resources, including fisheries and mineral, ore, and fossil fuel deposits in its seabed. Second, given Russia’s growing attention to its nuclear arsenal as a means of deterrence, the Kremlin may very well turn the sea into a “lake” for
Russian strategic nuclear submarines, capable of ensuring Russia’s secondary strike capacity, as it did in the Soviet era.¹⁰⁷

Russian retention of the southern Kuriles also plays a crucial role in safeguarding the Rybachiy nuclear submarine base – home to Russian strategic nuclear forces in the Pacific – near the port city of Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky on the southeastern coast of the Kamchatka Peninsula.¹⁰⁸ The Russian Pacific Fleet’s strategic nuclear submarine contingent at Rybachiy is the last in the Russian navy besides that of the Russian Northern Fleet.¹⁰⁹ Indeed, the southern Kuriles establish a significant buffer zone between the Russian Pacific Fleet’s strategic nuclear submarine contingent at Rybachiy and Japanese and Japan-based U.S. air forces to the south.¹¹⁰ The Russian government would put the security and deployment capability of its Pacific strategic nuclear submarine contingent at serious risk if it ceded the southern Kuriles to Japan, particularly the northernmost island, Iturup. In the event that Japan regained the southern Kuriles and established a joint airbase on Iturup, the current distance for Japanese or U.S. airstrikes on Ryabchiy would reduce by approximately 30% and 40%, respectively;¹¹¹ thereby increasing the vulnerability of Russian strategic nuclear forces in the Pacific.¹¹² Moreover, were the Japanese or U.S. navy to establish a base on the northwest coast of Iturup, they would be able to project naval and air power into the Sea of Okhotsk – formerly a bastion of Russian military prerogative.¹¹³

Beyond the southern Kuriles’ advantageous location between the Pacific Ocean and the Russian Far East and their proximity to the Russian nuclear submarine base at Rybachiy on the Kamchatka Peninsula, the strategic value of the islands is measured by their purportedly abundant natural resources. That the waters surrounding Iturup, Kunashir, Shikotan, and the Habomai Islets are replete with fish and crabs is certain. Russian exploitation of these fisheries
raises substantial revenues and contributes significantly to the strength of the Russian Far Eastern regional economy. Additionally, the Russian government has asserted that the southern Kuriles have a “significant, practically non-used potential” in natural resources such as oil, natural gas, gold, silver, titanium, sulfur, and rhenium.

Russian retention of the southern Kuriles also plays a strategically important role in reinforcing the overall territorial integrity of the Russian state. Specifically, Russian officials worry that the international community, particularly Russia’s neighbors, may misinterpret the transfer of the southern Kuriles to Japan as an indication of Russian weakness and manipulability in regard to the inviolability of its international borders. Accordingly, the Russian government is concerned that the transfer of the southern Kuriles to Japan may, at once, embolden Japan to lay further claim to the remaining Kuriles and southern Sakhalin, rouse other Russian border countries’ latent claims to Russian territory, and incite domestic separatist sentiment along the Russian border in the south and east.

The Southern Kuriles’ Strategic Importance to Japan

The southern Kuriles are strategically important to Japan for many of the same reasons that they are important to Russia. In the event of Japanese ownership of the southern Kuriles, the four islands would provide a roughly 400 km-long buffer zone between Hokkaido and Urup. Although Japan claims to no longer regard Russia as a threat, Stalin’s unsuccessful request to the U.S. to establish a Soviet zone of occupation in the northern half of Hokkaido after World War II surely persists as a negative memory in the Japanese national psyche. Moreover, from 1945-1991 the Japanese and American governments were deeply concerned about Hokkaido’s vulnerability to invasion by the significant Soviet military contingent based in the southern Kuriles. Finally, despite Japan’s plans to decrease its military presence on Hokkaido,
Russia has actually increased efforts to fortify its military presence in the southern Kuriles.\textsuperscript{119} Indeed, Japanese custody over the islands would reduce Russian military proximity to Hokkaido and enhance Japan’s overall security.

In addition to the southern Kuriles’ prospective role as a buffer zone between the Russian military and Hokkaido, the islands’ strategic value to Japan also lies in the economic potential of their reportedly vast natural resource base. The proven wealth of the islands’ fisheries could raise substantial revenue and help stimulate the sluggish Japanese economy. Moreover, Japanese exploration of the seabed adjacent to the southern Kuriles could result in the discovery of significant oil and natural gas deposits. Such a discovery would prove particularly advantageous to Japan. Acquiring its own substantial reserves of oil and natural gas in proximity to its shores would allow Japan to reduce its dependence on Middle Eastern and Russian energy resources.\textsuperscript{120} As a result, Japanese economic and military power would not be as vulnerable to energy prices, political instability in the Middle East, or potential Russian efforts to use these assets as leverage in Russian-Japanese relations.

Acquisition of the southern Kuriles could also play a strategically important role in reducing Japan’s high population density.\textsuperscript{121} Japan, with a current population of 127.1 million and land area of 364,485 sq. km, has a population density of approximately 349 persons per sq. km.\textsuperscript{122} This estimate is probably greater given that U.S. military facilities occupy roughly 20% of Japan’s land area.\textsuperscript{123} At only 5,050 sq. km,\textsuperscript{124} (more info on Habomai needed) the land area of the southern Kuriles may seem negligible in proportion to the entire 16.4 million sq. km land area of the Russia Federation.\textsuperscript{125} Indeed, the southern Kuriles account for merely .03% of the total land area of Russia. Moreover, only 19,000 Russians inhabit the southern Kuriles – making the islands’ population density roughly 4 persons per sq. km. For Japan, however, the 5,050 sq.
km. of the southern Kuriles would be more significant. Japan is 45 times smaller than Russia, with only 13 million fewer people. As a result, its population density is 42 times greater than that of Russia.\textsuperscript{126}

Added to Japan’s land area, the southern Kuriles would account for 1.4\% of Japan’s territory.\textsuperscript{127} Although this may not seem significant, let us consider this estimate in the context of the land-area and population density of Japan’s smaller islands, particularly Okinawa. With a current population of roughly 1.4 million and a land-area of merely 2,275 sq. km., Okinawa has a population density of approximately 605 persons per sq. km. According to these statistics, Okinawa is less than half the size of the southern Kuriles with a population that is 68 times larger. Hypothetically, the Japanese government could host roughly 2.75 million Japanese citizens on the southern Kuriles; thereby housing 2\% of its population on 1.4\% of its land.\textsuperscript{128}

The southern Kuriles assume a strategically critical role in reinforcing Japan’s territorial integrity. Japan comprises four major islands – Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku, and Kyushu – and 6,848 adjacent, smaller islands.\textsuperscript{129} Many of the smaller islands rest hundreds of miles to the south, southeast, and southwest of the four main islands. Like Russia, Japan is concerned that the international community, more specifically its neighbors in Asia, particularly China, may misconstrue Japan’s abandonment of its claim to the southern Kuriles as an indication of Japanese weakness and manipulability in regard to the inviolability of its international borders.\textsuperscript{130} Japanese political leaders are likely concerned that abandoning Japan’s claim to the southern Kuriles may inspire China and Taiwan to more vigorously protest Japanese claims to and administration of the Senkaku Islands,\textsuperscript{131} undermine Japanese claims to the South Korean-administered Dodko Islands, rouse other East Asian countries’ latent claims to Japanese maritime territories, encourage China to cultivate relations with and eventually absorb many of
Japan’s distant inhabited and uninhabited islands, renew separatist sentiment in the Ryukyus, and incite separatist sentiment on Japanese islands where it did not previously exist.

NATIONALIST SENTIMENT AND THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SOUTHERN KURILES ISSUE IN DOMESTIC POLITICS

The southern Kuriles dispute is a strategically, as well as psychologically and politically, sensitive issue in Russia and Japan. Beyond more practical strategic and even economic considerations, the southern Kuriles serve as reminders to the governments and citizens of both countries of historically humiliating military defeats and the loss of superpower status in the international community. In many respects, retaining sovereignty over Iturup, Kunashir, Shikotan, and the Habomai Islets is a matter of national pride in Russia and Japan. For this reason, nationalist sentiment in regard to the southern Kuriles dispute in both countries is a particularly powerful political force at local, regional, and national levels of government. Indeed, nationalist sentiment concerning this dispute in Russian and Japanese domestic politics largely determines the two governments’ southern Kuriles policies toward one another.

Officials and critics on both sides allege that national and regional political leaders in Russia and Japan stoke nationalist sentiment over the southern Kuriles for purposes of personal political gain as well as to distract their respective citizenries from domestic socio-economic disadvantages. To be certain, the political leadership in each country exploits nationalist fervor over the territorial dispute to curry favor with its constituents. That Russian governors in Khabarovsk Krai, Primoyie Krai, and Sakhalin Oblast have consistently adopted a hard line vis-à-vis the southern Kuriles issue to expand their political bases and extract greater economic concessions from the national government substantiates these claims. That Japanese Prime Ministers, most recently Yasou Fukuda and Taro Aso, experiencing low approval ratings swiftly
take up the mantle of the Northern Territories cause to boost their popularity with the Japanese electorate further substantiates these allegations.\textsuperscript{133} The cost of such political maneuvering is the continued lack of a resolution to the southern Kuriles dispute and absence of a Russian-Japanese peace treaty.

Notwithstanding Russian and Japanese government manipulation and exploitation of nationalist sentiment over the southern Kuriles for political and economic gain, however, genuine feelings of nationalism concerning the territorial dispute exist organically at the local, grassroots level in both countries. This sentiment is often cultivated, organized, and expressed in citizens organizations like the Slav Brotherhood Movement\textsuperscript{134} and the Association for the Inseparability of the Russian Eastern Territories in Russia,\textsuperscript{135} and the League of Residents of Chisima and Habomai Islands and the National Congress for the Return of the North Territories in Japan. These organizations generally enjoy the support of regional and local governments and public officials.\textsuperscript{136} This is not to suggest, however, that government-sanctioned and government-administered organizations, with the purpose of disseminating government propaganda asserting ownership of the southern Kuriles, do not exist in both countries. A number of such groups operate in Russia and Japan.

One particularly notable Kremlin-sponsored group in Russia is Molodaya Gvardia (Young Guard) – the youth wing of Russia’s ruling political party, United Russia. Rumored to receive subsidies directly from the Kremlin, Molodaya Gvardia has recently established local chapters on Kunashir and Shikotan islands. These chapters plan to promote “patriotic activities” such as celebrating the anniversary of Russia’s victory over Japan in World War II. Molodaya Gvardia leaders are also considering requests by island youths to start a summer camp that would
conduct, among other topics of United Russia doctrine, “patriotic education” in line with
Kremlin policies on the territorial issue.¹³⁷

In Japan, government sponsorship of such groups in far more transparent than it is in
Russia. The Management and Coordination Agency of Japan administers the Northern
Territories Issue Association.¹³⁸ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan oversees the Japan
League for the Return of the Northern Territories in Japan.¹³⁹ Moreover, the territorial dispute is
of such priority that the government has established a cabinet level position for its oversight, the
Minister of State for Okinawa and Northern Territories Affairs. Also, the Hokkaido regional
government consists of two agencies designated to facilitate the return of the southern Kuriles,
the Northern Territories Countermeasures Headquarters and the Hokkaido Commission for
Developing Relations with the Northern Islands.

THE LACK OF STRONG POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND WILL TO
RESOLVE THE DISPUTE

Strong nationalist sentiment concerning the ownership of Iturup, Kunashir, Shikotan and
the Habomai Islets in Russia and Japan has fomented reluctance in the upper echelons of both
governments to settle the territorial impasse. Accordingly, Russian and Japanese governments
have long accused one another of lacking the strong leadership and political will necessary to
resolve the southern Kuriles dispute. Their accusations are only partially accurate. For Russia, a
lack of strong political leadership on the southern Kuriles issue is not a problem. Under the firm
political grip of Vladimir Putin, Russia definitely possesses the strong leadership and absence of
political dissent necessary to resolve the territorial issue.¹⁴⁰ Japan, however, does not possess the
strong political leadership necessary to resolve the southern Kuriles dispute. The tenure of a
Japanese Prime Minister is relatively short. Between November 1987 and August 2009 there
were 14 Prime Ministers of Japan.\textsuperscript{141} With the exception of Junichiro Koizumi’s five-year term, the average tenure of a Japanese Prime Minister is roughly one-and-a-half years. During their tenure, Japanese Prime Ministers do not typically enjoy high approval ratings. These trends do not afford Japanese Prime Ministers enough time to cultivate the political and public support necessary to engage the Russians in a concerted, long-term campaign to resolve the southern Kuriles dispute. Furthermore, unlike Russian foreign policymaking, Japanese foreign policymaking is a democratic process. Therefore, not only must a Japanese Prime Minister fend off his own political mortality during his time in office, he must also attempt to impose his international agenda on multiple actors in the foreign policymaking process.\textsuperscript{142}

Whereas Japan may lack a government structure and domestic political environment conducive to strong leadership on the southern Kuriles issue, it does not lack the political will to resolve the dispute. The desire to regain the Northern Territories is fairly ubiquitous among the Japanese political elite. Since the end of the Cold War, Japanese Prime Ministers have consistently pushed for a quick resolution of the territorial issue. Also, the resolution of the territorial dispute and the return of the Northern Territories to Japan is essentially a non-partisan issue in Japanese politics. That the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) deputies in the Japanese National Diet backed the LDP’s June 2009 bill proclaiming Iturup, Kunahsir, Shikotan, and the Habomai Islets the historic sovereign territory of Japan attests to this fact.\textsuperscript{143} Japan’s new Prime Minister, DPJ President Yukio Hatoyama, and his DPJ parliamentary supermajority seem equally determined as their LDP predecessors to regain the Northern Territories. Moreover, it is likely that Hatoyama’s government will match its LDP predecessors’ commitment to engage the Russians as frequently and constructively as possible over the territorial dispute.
In light of its own persistent interest in resolving the southern Kuriles dispute, the Japanese government often condemns and criticizes the Russian government for its lack of “shared enthusiasm” in settling the territorial issue.\textsuperscript{144} Japanese government condemnation and criticism of its Russian counterpart in this instance is, however, only partially appropriate. Indeed, the tone and frequency of Japanese criticism may lead one to believe that the Russian government is opposed to any and all processes concerning the resolution of the southern Kuriles dispute. This is not at all the case. The lack of Russian enthusiasm to which the Japanese government often refers is, in reality, Russian disinterest in resolving the territorial dispute on predominantly Japanese terms.\textsuperscript{145} To a great extent, the Japanese government is misrepresenting Russian interest in and enthusiasm for a resolution to the southern Kuriles issue. The Russian government, however, is not without its own faults in this regard. The Russian government often condemns and criticizes the Japanese government for lacking the interest and enthusiasm necessary to resolve the territorial issue – often calling the Japanese demand for all four islands at once “radical” and “extreme.”\textsuperscript{146} Much like the Russians though, the Japanese government is understandably disinclined to settle the southern Kuriles dispute on terms favoring the other party.

**MISSED OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEACE**

Missed opportunities for peace between Russia and Japan have also precluded the resolution of the southern Kuriles dispute. From 1951 to the present, history presented the governments of Russia and Japan with three particularly promising opportunities to conclude a bilateral peace treaty – the concurrent or subsequent result of which would have been a settlement to the territorial dispute over the southern Kuriles. These opportunities included the

**1951 San Francisco Peace Conference**

The September 1951 San Francisco Peace Conference presented the first opportunity for reconciliation between Russia and Japan since the Soviets had invaded, occupied, and annexed southern Sakhalin and the Kurile Archipelago in the last days of World War II. For many reasons, however, the 1951 San Francisco Peace Conference and Treaty were not conducive to Russian-Japanese peace at this time. Multiple, vehement Soviet objections to the tone and terms of the U.S.-dominated forum and treaty comprised the bulk of these reasons. Indeed, the majority of the treaty’s provisions were disadvantageous to Soviet interests in Asia-Pacific in the post-World War II era, particularly Article 2. Although Article 2 dispossessed Japan of southern Sakhalin and the Kurile Archipelago, it neither provided a specific geographical definition of the Kuriles nor acknowledged Soviet sovereignty over the island chain. The Soviet government also objected to the simultaneous conclusion of the 1951 U.S.-Japan Basic Treaty – an accord between the U.S. and Japan in which the former enlisted the latter to contain the expansion of Soviet power in East Asia. The Soviet delegation left the peace conference in protest and the Soviet government therefore did not become a signatory to the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty.

**The 1956 Soviet-Japan Joint Declaration**

The second opportunity for peace between the Soviet Union and Japan came in October 1956 with the mutual signing and ratification of the 1956 Soviet-Japan Joint Declaration. Rightfully hailed on both sides as a remarkable breakthrough in Soviet-Japanese relations, the declaration initially held great promise for the conclusion of a peace treaty and the resolution of
the southern Kuriles dispute. At the time, Japan was amenable to a phased or even reduced transfer of the southern Kuriles into its custody.\textsuperscript{152} The U.S., however, wishing to keep Soviet-Japanese relations strained in order to exercise maximum influence over Japan during the Cold War, aggressively dissuaded Japan from concluding a peace treaty with the Soviet Union on such terms.\textsuperscript{153} The U.S. was, to a great extent, responsible for the continued absence of peace between the Soviet Union and Japan at this time. Hopes for Soviet-Japanese peace faded further in 1960 when Japan renewed its defense treaty with the U.S. The Soviet Union quickly issued a memorandum to the Japanese government declaring that Article 9 of the 1956 Soviet-Japan Joint Declaration, the provision stipulating peace between the two countries, void.\textsuperscript{154} Russian-Japanese peace talks were not seriously entertained until roughly 25 years later when Mikhail Gorbachev came to power. The collapse of the Soviet Union, however, derailed Soviet-Japanese reconciliation efforts in the latter half of the 1980s.

\textit{The Yeltsin-Hashimoto Era}

The final opportunity for peace between Russia and Japan came in the Yeltsin-Hashimoto era in post-Soviet Russian-Japanese relations. From January 1996 – July 1998 the trajectory of Russian-Japanese relations developed rapidly in an extremely positive direction. The strong personal rapport between Russian President Boris Yeltsin and Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto facilitated unprecedented momentum in the Russian-Japanese peace process. At their two ground-breaking “no-necktie” summits in Krasnoyarsk in November 1997 and Kawana in April 1998, Yeltsin and Hashimoto pledged to sign a peace treaty by the end of 2000 – the provisions of which would include a definitive resolution to the southern Kuriles dispute based on the 1993 Tokyo Declaration. Hashimoto’s exit from power in July 1998 and Yeltsin’s rapidly deteriorating health and political prowess in Russian domestic politics\textsuperscript{155} drew this productive
and promising stint in Russian-Japanese reconciliation to a somewhat abrupt close. Indeed, the best chance for peace between Russia and Japan since October 1956 emerged during the Yeltsin-Hashimoto era when Russia was “weaker and poorer.” After Yeltsin’s resignation and Putin’s ascension to power, Russian and Japanese positions on the territorial and peace treaty issues “hardened and the moment was lost.”

THE JAPANESE EFFORT TO INTERNATIONALIZE THE DISPUTE

Another factor in Russian-Japanese relations precluding the resolution of the southern Kuriles dispute has been the Japanese effort to internationalize the issue since the end of the Cold War. The Russian government deeply resents Japan’s behavior in this regard because it considers the southern Kuriles dispute to be a purely bilateral issue. As a result, the Russian government likely frustrates and impedes the settlement of the southern Kuriles issue, in part, to spite Japan for trying to involve the international community in the dispute – many governments, particularly the U.S., are sympathetic to the Japanese position. Like its Soviet predecessor, the Russian government remains vehemently opposed to the internationalization of the southern Kuriles dispute because the process has historically worked against Kremlin interests in reinforcing Russian claims to sovereignty over the islands. For its part, Japan naturally prefers the internationalization of the dispute because it has consistently benefited from the process in the past and would most likely do so again.

The Impact of U.S. Arbitration and Interference on Past Peace Processes

U.S. arbitration and interference in Russian-Japanese peace processes over the last century has proven a particularly influential factor in opposition to, and preference for, the internationalization of the southern Kuriles dispute. Every time the U.S. has influenced the
resolution of territorial discrepancies between Russia and Japan during this period, by arbitration or interference, the settlement has worked in favor of Japanese and U.S., not Russian, interests. The outcomes of the 1905 Portsmouth Peace Conference, 1951 San Francisco Peace Conference, and 1956 Soviet-Japan Joint Declaration confirm this argument. Beyond limiting Russian power in Northeast Asia, U.S. involvement in these three instances also compromised Russian territorial integrity in the region.

In the 1905 Portsmouth and 1951 San Francisco peace processes the U.S. assumed the role of chief arbiter. The Russians and Japanese generally approved of U.S. mediation prior to peace negotiations in both instances – Russia more reluctantly than Japan in each case. The 1956 peace process, however, was an organic, bilateral endeavor between the Soviet and Japanese governments in which each sought reconcile to postwar political differences with the other. Indeed, neither government desired active U.S. participation in their bilateral peace negotiations from 1955-1956. Although limited to political pressure on the Japanese government, U.S. involvement in the 1956 Soviet-Japan peace process essentially constituted interference in an otherwise bilateral diplomatic enterprise.

U.S. government interest in Russian-Japanese peace processes in 1905, 1951, and 1956 was primarily strategic. In each instance, the U.S. sought to enlist or retain Japan as its principal ally in Northeast Asia in order to prevent Russia from expanding its power in the region at the expense of U.S. political, economic, and military interests. Japan naturally benefited from its use as an instrument of U.S. strategic ambition in Northeast Asia in this regard. Indeed, the U.S.-mediated 1905 Treaty of Portsmouth obligated Russia to cede political-military and economic prerogative in Manchuria and Korea to Japan, as well as the southern half of Sakhalin Island. Moreover, the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty precluded Soviet-Japanese reconciliation in the
postwar era, afforded Japan the opportunity to legally contest Soviet annexation of the southern Kuriles, and created the basis for a U.S.-Japan security alliance designed to limit Soviet power in Northeast Asia.

U.S. interference in the 1956 Soviet-Japan peace process, although having undermined Japanese aspirations to normalize relations with the Soviet Union, nevertheless resulted in official U.S. recognition of Japanese sovereignty over the southern Kuriles. The interference also lent critical international backing to Japan’s challenge to Soviet claims to sovereignty over the four islands. More importantly for the U.S., however, the continued absence of Soviet-Japanese peace offset Japan’s increasingly worrisome “trends toward neutrality,” maintained a critical balance of power in U.S. and Soviet forces in Northeast Asia, and preserved the U.S.-Japanese security alliance.

The Internationalization of the Dispute in the 1990s

During the 1990s, Japan exhibited particularly remarkable diligence in bringing its claim to the southern Kuriles to the attention of the international community. At the 1990 Houston, 1992 Munich, and 1997 Denver G7 summits, the Japanese government, much to Soviet and Russian dissatisfaction, convinced its G7 peers to include the southern Kuriles dispute on the summit agenda.\(^{159}\) Indeed, the 1992 Munich G7 communiqué, specifically Article 1 Section 9, directly addresses the southern Kuriles dispute and Russia’s need to approach it in a constructive, progressive manner.\(^{160}\) Moreover, one Western official at the 1992 Munich summit remarked to the press that Japan’s G7 peers generally qualified Russian custody of the southern Kuriles as a wrongful occupation.\(^{161}\)

From Japan’s perspective, the G7 provided a particularly effective forum in which to enlist the support of its powerful Western allies, all of which are sensitive to the Japanese
concerns over the southern Kuriles issue, in pressuring Russia to return the four islands to Japan. The Japanese government lobbied its G7 partners, particularly those from Europe, for assistance in resolving the islands dispute on the grounds that the southern Kuriles issue was an “urgent” problem “with global dimensions.” In response, Japan’s G7 allies attempted to force the Soviet and Russian governments’ hands in returning the southern Kuriles to Japan by making continued economic assistance and future membership in the powerful organization contingent on Russian efforts to settle the territorial dispute. Japanese efforts also prompted the U.S. to more vocally express its support for Japan’s claims to the Kuriles in the first half of the 1990s. In May 1992 and December 1995, U.S. Vice President Dan Quayle and U.S. Ambassador to Russia Thomas Pickering, respectively, confirmed U.S. recognition of Japanese sovereignty over the four islands.

Although Japan’s internationalization of the southern Kuriles dispute at the 1990, 1992, and 1997 G7 summits did not generate an immediate resolution to the territorial issue, it nevertheless strengthened and legitimized Japanese claims to the four islands; moreover, it encouraged Yeltsin to vigorously engage the issue with his Japanese counterpart, Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto, from 1997 to 1998. Japan’s efforts to internationalize the southern Kuriles dispute to its advantage since the 1997 Denver G7 summit, however, have been less public, frequent, and effective since Putin came to power in Russia in late 1999.

The Internationalization of the Dispute since 2000

Putin’s ascension to, and consolidation of, political power in Russia, Russian economic recovery and growth from 1999-2008, and Russia’s emergence in the international community as a great power and energy superpower, have discouraged Japan from internationalizing the southern Kuriles dispute as aggressively as it had during the early and mid-1990s. With a
stagnating economy that is expected to become increasingly dependent on Russian energy and raw material exports over the next few decades, Japan has been far less inclined to provoke Russian ire by expanding international awareness of the southern Kuriles dispute. That the Japanese government opposed settling the issue in the UN International Court of Justice in 2002 confirms this trend in its behavior. Nevertheless, Japan will likely continue drawing international attention to the southern Kuriles dispute to the extent that it is possible without angering Russian leaders and irreparably damaging Russian-Japanese relations.

Japan’s allies in the West, most notably the U.S. and EU, have grown increasingly reluctant to pressure Russia over the return of the southern Kuriles, particularly on a multilateral basis in international fora such as the G8. Good relations with Russia are critical to U.S. strategic interests in Central Asia where Russian influence and support plays a critical role in enabling the U.S. military effort in Afghanistan. Moreover, the EU depends on Russia for 25% of its natural gas imports and desires continued stability in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus. Therefore, neither the U.S. nor the EU seeks to pressure the Kremlin on the southern Kuriles issue at the expense of their own interest in continued, stable relations with Russia. As a result, official commentary on the southern Kuriles dispute in the international community, particularly in the West, has been rather muted since 2000.

The U.S. and EU have issued noteworthy commentary on the southern Kuriles issue only three times since 2000. The first occurred in December 2004 when former U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld reassured then Japanese Minister of Environment Yuriko Koike of U.S. continued support for, and understanding of, Japan’s claim to the southern Kuriles. Moreover, Rumsfeld raised the possibility of the U.S. “throwing its weight behind” Japan in any future Russian-Japanese negotiations over the territorial issue. Rumsfeld also remarked that
the U.S. would raise the territorial dispute as a matter of strategic importance in U.S.-Russian
dialogue when the opportunity presented itself. The second occurred in February 2005 in
Washington, D.C. when the U.S.-Japan Security Consultative Committee issued a joint statement
qualifying Russia’s “constructive engagement” in Northeast Asia and the resolution of the
“Northern Territories issue” as “common strategic objectives” of the U.S. and Japan. The
third occurred in July 2005 when the European Parliament issued a resolution on East Asian
security urging Russia to cease its occupation of the southern Kuriles and return them to
Japan. Besides these instances, members of the international community, particularly Japan’s
Western allies, have been reluctant to wade into the diplomatic quagmire that is the southern
Kuriles dispute in the new millennium.

**Russian Reactions to the Internationalization of the Dispute in the Putin Era**

In the Putin era, the Russian government has vehemently opposed the internationalization
of the southern Kuriles dispute. More specifically, Russia neither appreciates biased Western
commentary on the dispute nor approves of any international forum in which Japan and its allies
seek to engage Russia in addressing the territorial issue on a multilateral basis. It is the position
of the Russian government that the southern Kuriles dispute is a “purely bilateral” issue – one
that Russia and Japan will resolve independently of external interference. As such, the Russian
government regards Japanese and “third-country” – read U.S. – efforts to internationalize the
southern Kuriles dispute via biased commentary or multilateral dialogue as “highly improper”
and “counterproductive” acts that artificially inflate the issue in favor of U.S. strategic interests
in Northeast Asia.

Indeed, the only manner in which Russia prefers to discuss the territorial issue in an
international setting is in private with Japan on the sidelines of meetings and conferences such as
APEC and the G8. Although amenable to those private discussions, the Russian government continues to discourage Japan and “third countries” from breaking the “tacit rule” of such meetings: incorporating bilateral issues between participants into the agenda. The Russian government asserts that such behavior will only delay a resolution to the territorial issue. The most recent instance of a Russia-Japan private sideline meeting of this sort took place between Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and Japanese Prime Minister Naoto Kan at the G8 summit in Toronto in late June 2010.

CONCLUSION

The Southern Kuriles dispute has been the greatest obstacle to the normalization of Russian-Japanese relations in the Putin and Medvedev eras. The two governments’ seemingly irreconcilable positions on this matter remain steeped in their long-running historical political-military rivalry over ownership of Sakhalin Island and the Kurile Archipelago – a competition that commenced well before the establishment of formal Russian-Japanese diplomatic ties in 1855. Begun in late August 1945, the current territorial dispute indeed constitutes the latest phase in this rivalry. Accordingly, the residual psychological and strategic trauma from these experiences, especially the more recent ones that occurred in the first half of the 20th century, have become partially manifest in intensely intransigent and nationalistic perspectives on the contested ownership of Iturup, Kunashir, Shikotan and the Habomai Islets. This trauma has become further evident in the mutually condemned strategies that the Russian and Japanese governments use to reinforce their claims to the islands.

Due to the mutually reciprocal distrust and threat perceptions that characterize and perpetuate this dispute, as well as their common hypersensitivity to issues of territorial security, a
successful resolution of the Southern Kuriles impasse does not appear on the horizon for the governments of Russia and Japan. To be certain, the only manner in which Russia and Japan will be able to overcome these severe psychological, and to a lesser extent strategic, handicaps will be to desire and pursue more frequent and substantive dialogue on the matter. In particular, this dialogue must occur in the form of regular contact and deliberation on the Southern Kuriles issue at highest levels – read national executive – of Russian and Japanese government. Only then will Russia and Japan begin to engage successfully in the resolution process and avoid instances of prisoner’s-dilemma-like neorealist disagreement, competition and “defection” that have delayed the settlement of the Southern Kuriles dispute and the signing of a peace treaty since the end of World War II.
NOTES


2 In her highly informative book, *Hokkaido: A History of Ethnic Transition and Development on Japan’s Northern Island*, Ann B. Irish explains that a principal reason for the signing of the Russian-Japanese 1875 Treaty of St. Petersburg was an urgent need on behalf of the Japanese to settle the issue of ownership – or as she qualifies it, “boundary determination” – over Sakhalin so as to avoid conflict between Russians and Japanese living on the Island and a potentially larger Russian-Japanese military clash over this territory. Although Irish does not state in her book the presence of similar incentives for “boundary determination” in 1855, her accounts of the uneasy coexistence of Russian and Japanese settlers on Sakhalin and the Kuriles as well as Russia’s rather obvious territorial ambitions in the maritime areas surrounding the Sea of Okhotsk, including Hokkaido, likely inspired the politically waning and militarily weaker Tokugawa government to settle the matter in 1855 diplomatically, and thus somewhat preemptively, rather than militarily. Had Japan attempted to resolve the matter militarily in 1855, Russia would likely have annexed not only Sakhalin and the Kurile Archipelago, but potentially Hokkaido as well. Russia’s unilateral declaration of sovereignty and ownership of the whole of Sakhalin in 1853 was particularly indicative of its expanding interest and assertiveness in the region. It is not especially surprising that Russia’s acknowledgement of Japan’s ownership and inviolable sovereignty over Hokkaido accompanied Japan’s recognition of Russian dominion over the whole of Sakhalin in the 1875 Treaty of St. Petersburg. (For information corroborating this argument, please see Irish, *Hokkaido*, pp.60-64, 77, 82.)

3 The seven instances of Russian-Japanese jurisdictional turnover in regard to Sakhalin Island and the Kurile Archipelago include the first two divisions of the territories in the 1855 and 1875 treaties, the Japanese seizure of all of Sakhalin in July 1905, the Japanese relinquishment of northern Sakhalin to Russia in September 1905, the Japanese invasion of northern Sakhalin in April 1920, Japan’s return of northern Sakhalin to the Soviet Union in January 1925, and the Soviet annexation of southern Sakhalin and the entire Kurile Archipelago beginning with its military invasion of these territories in late August and early September 1945. Indeed, this rate of territorial exchange between Russia and Japan from 1855-1945 averaged a change in jurisdiction once every 13 years.


5 Ibid., p. 52.

6 Ibid., pp. 59-61, 188.

7 The failure of the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty to acknowledge Soviet sovereignty over southern Sakhalin and the Kuriles was only one of many reasons why the Soviets left San Francisco in 1951 in protest without signing the treaty. Further reasons include: the exclusion of the People’s Republic of China and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea from the peace process, the concurrent conclusion of a U.S.-Japan security alliance, and the lack of extensive consultation with the Soviet Union in drafting and proposing the peace treaty.


9 Ibid., p. 190.

10 Ibid., p. 75.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.


15 Ibid., pp. 94-97.

16 Ibid., pp. 99-102, 192-194.


23. Ibid.


25. Ibid. This article only accounts for Russian claims that Japan’s case for ownership of the Kuriles stems from inaccurate interpretations of historical outcomes and agreements in Russian-Japanese relations. However, similar Japanese claims against Russia can be inferred from Japan’s long-standing opposition to Russian control of the southern Kuriles.


28. Ibid., p. 74.

29. Ibid., pp. 59, 60, 188.

30. Ibid., pp. 59, 60. After the 1875 Treaty of St. Petersburg, Meji Japan administered the southern Kuriles as part of Hokkaido.


32. For the purposes of this commentary, Russian elite opinion pertains to the attitudes of Russian President, his Cabinet, members of the Russian Federal Assembly, Russian Far Eastern regional executives, the senior officers in the Russian military, and influential members of the Russian intelligentsia. Japanese elite public opinion pertains to the attitudes of the Japanese Prime Minister, his Cabinet, members of the National Diet of Japan, Hokkaido regional executives, senior officers in the Japanese Self-Defense Forces, and influential members of the Japanese intelligentsia.

33. For the purposes of this commentary, the Russian public is broken down into three categories: national, regional, and local. Russian national public opinion pertains to the attitudes of non-elite members of the Russian citizenry. Russian regional public opinion pertains to the attitudes of non-elite inhabitants of the Russian Far Eastern Federal District, comprising Amur Oblast, Jewish Autonomous Oblast, Kamchatka Krai, Magadan Oblast, Primorsky Krai, Sakha Republic, Sakhalin Oblast, Khabarovsk Krai, and Chukotka Autonomous Okrug. Russian local public opinion pertains to the attitudes of non-elite inhabitants of the southern Kuriles. Japanese public opinion, however, only pertains to non-elite members of the Japanese citizenry.

34. Radyuhin, “Putin Hardens Stand on Disputed Islands,” The Hindu, November 22, 2005.


44. The Russia-based FOM: Public Opinion Foundation published a research findings from a poll surveying Russian public opinion on the southern Kuriles’ dispute in October 1999 in which it compared its findings to identical polls conducted in 1996 and 1997. The 1999 report found that 52% of Russians polled believed that Japan must give up its claim to the southern Kuriles in order for Russia to sign a peace treaty with Japan. In 1996 and
Putin’s decision to resolve the Russian-Chinese Argun and Amur Islands’ border disputes by evenly splitting the land area of the islands provides a particularly instructive precedent for resolving the southern Kuriles’ dispute. At the time of the Russian-Chinese joint decision to resolve the Argun and Amur Islands’ disputes in May 2005, 82% of the Russian public remained vehemently opposed to the full transfer of Bolshoi Island, the full transfer of Tarabarov Islands, and the partial transfer of Bolshoi Ussurinsky, located near China’s Northeast border region, from Russia to China. (See Sergei Blagov, “Russia Hails Border Deal with China Despite Criticism,” Eurasia Daily Monitor, May 25, 2005, accessed October 17, 2009. Retrieved from http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1 &tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=30445.) Notwithstanding the extent of Russian public protests to the islands’ transfer in Khabarovsk and abundant opposition to the transfer in Russian public opinion, Putin, Lavrov, and other senior Russian political leaders forced the resolution of the Argun and Amur Islands’ disputes to fruition. Indeed, Russia’s desire to settle its border disputes with China for the purposes of deepening its strategic partnership with China largely determined Putin’s persistence and resolve in settling the issue despite the Russian public’s overwhelming opposition to the decision and agreement. Russian and Chinese negotiations over the resolution of these territorial disputes were highly secretive and the Russian government suppressed media coverage of local protests to the island transfers. (See James Brooke, “An Obscure Test for Kurile Giveaway by Russia?” The International Herald Tribune, January 22, 2005.) Moreover, national media, military leaders, and members of the Federal Assembly quickly fell in line and supported the Kremlin’s decision. Support of the Federal Assembly was most immediately evident in its ratification of the resolution in May 2005. (See Blagov, “Russia Hails Border Deal with China Despite Criticism,” Eurasia Daily Monitor, May 25, 2005.)

Notwithstanding Putin’s capacity to contravene public, and even elite, opinion on matters in Russian foreign policy, he can neither curb completely its impact on unpopular foreign policy decisions nor mitigate entirely its potentially negative effects on his political future. In past instances of unpopular foreign policy decision-making, particularly that of border demarcation with China, however, Putin has effectively suppressed media coverage, protests, and public awareness of such events in order to avoid political recourse among the Russian elite and citizenry. (See Brooke, “An Obscure Test for Kurile Giveaway by Russia?” The International Herald Tribune, January 22, 2005.) It is likely, though, that settling Russia’s territorial dispute with Japan would prove more problematic for Putin than settling Russia’s territorial dispute with China. To be certain, the Russian government would find it difficult to conduct secretive negotiations with Japan to resolve the southern Kuriles’ dispute – a crucial strategy that both Russia and China employed to mitigate the impact of public opposition to the Amur Islands’ settlement on the negotiation process as well as the governments’ image and domestic popularity. Unlike Russia and China, Japan is a genuinely democratic country. (Ibid.) The Japanese government therefore must be transparent in its actions and accountable to its citizens. Moreover, it must guarantee a free, vibrant press autonomous from government control. It must also recognize and uphold its citizens’ right to freedom of speech as well as their right to protest government actions. Indeed, Russian government efforts to suppress dissenting media coverage of, and public protest to, a resolution to the southern Kuriles’ at home may diminish some international attention to the issue. Media coverage and the expression of public opinion in Japan, however, will undoubtedly result in immediate, detailed international exposure of Russian-Japanese negotiations over the southern Kuriles. After all, the southern Kuriles’ dispute constitutes the most prominent issue in Russian-Japanese relations and thus remains the “key pillar” in Japan’s diplomatic agenda with Russia. (Kanako Takahara, “Koizumi Isle Posturing for Home, Russia Audience?” The Japan Times, September 9, 2004.)


That Japan prefers a more predictable, expedited negotiation process to the current process of fits and starts should not, however, imply that Japan is not willing to be flexible in its territorial demands to the Russian Federation. Specifically, LDP Secretary General Tsutomu Takebe noted that although the transfer of the islands may take time, Russia and Japan should determine ownership of the islands “in the nearest time”. (See Andrei Antonov, “Japan Wants Quicker Settlement of Territorial Dispute with Russia,” ITAR-TASS News Agency, February 1, 2005.) Indeed, the Japanese government may deem a gradual return of the four islands permissible in the event that the Russian government formally and legally recognizes Japanese ownership over all four islands at once. Another Japanese official remarked in November 2007 that the Japanese need to “be patient” in regard to negotiations over the territorial issue as the return of the islands could be a matter of generations instead of years. (See Richard Beeston and Cape Nosappu, “Russia Tightens Grip on Disputed Islands,” The Times (London), November 14, 2007.) To this effect, the official further commented that Japan had waited over fifty years for the

Antonov, “Japan Wants Quicker Settlement of Territorial Dispute with Russia,” may take time, Russia and Japan should determine ownership of the islands “in the nearest time”. (See Richard Beeston and Cape Nosappu, “Russia Tightens Grip on Disputed Islands,” The Times (London), November 14, 2007.) To this effect, the official further commented that Japan had waited over fifty years for the Russia to return the islands to Japan and should therefore “be prepared to wait for another fifty before the islands are returned”. (Ibid.) Other Japanese officials advocating a gradual or partial return of the southern Kuriles include former Prime Ministerial Special Emissary to Russia and current Diet Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Muneo Suzuki and former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Prime Minister Taro Aso (See Kimura, The Kurillian Knot, pp. 117-119; Joseph Ferguson, “Japanese Prime Minister Hatoyama Meets President Medvedev in New York,” Eurasian Daily Monitor, October 6, 2009, accessed October 20, 2009. Retrieved from http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=35583&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=1&cHash=cac9d47d2f; Velisarios Kattoulas, “Split Kuriles in Two, Says Minister,” The Times (London), December 14, 2006.)

Members of the Japanese intelligentsia have criticized the Japanese government for failing to use economic leverage in the 1990’s and early 2000’s to force Russia into a settlement over the southern Kuriles. In 2004, President of the Japan Forum on International Relations, an independent think-tank in Japan, Kenichi Ito, alleged that the Russian government had not returned the southern Kuriles to Japan because the Japanese government had “abandoned” the option of “suspending all economic cooperation” with Russia until the two sides had resolved the territorial and peace treaty issues. (See Takahara, “Koizumi Isle Posturing for Home, Russia Audience?” The Japan Times, September 9, 2004.) It seemed that this perspective had been begun penetrating the upper echelons of the Japanese political elite when former Japanese Prime Minister Taro Aso remarked to Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, in a meeting on the sidelines of the annual G8 summit in L’Aquila, Italy in July 2009, that the Japanese government would soon have to reconsider its Russia policy, specifically the decoupling of economic and political relations, if the Russian government did not renew efforts to resolve to the southern Kuriles’ dispute. (“Russian-Japanese Tug of War Over Kurils,” RIA Novosti, July 10, 2009, accessed October 20, 2009. Retrieved from http://en.rian.ru/analysis/20090710/155492397.html.)

In a September 2006 Daily Yomiuri poll, 86% of respondents advocated the return of all four islands either immediately or gradually: 40% believed that all four islands should be returned at once; 27% thought Russia should recognize the islands as Japanese territory yet did not rule out a gradual return of the islands; 19% believed that the return of Shikotan Island and the Habomai Islets should be settled first and negotiations over Kunashir and Iturup held thereafter. Merely 3% of respondents endorsed the Russian solution advocating the return of only two islands, Shikotan and the Habomai Islets.

Members of the older generations in Japan, particularly former southern Kuriles’ residents now living in Hokkaido, perceive the Soviets’ annexation of the four islands as “one of Stalin’s greatest crimes – a crime that Russia’s continued occupation of the southern Kuriles continues to perpetrate to this day. (See Beeston and Nosappu, “Russia Tightens Grip on Disputed Islands,” The Times (London), November 14, 2007.) Former island residents therefore remain convinced that the prospect of a phased return of the southern Kuriles is “totally out of the question”. (See Takehiko Nomura, “Leaders Drift Slowly on Island Accord; Russia, Japan Eye World War II Treaty,” The Washington Times, March 23, 2001.) Consequently, this particular segment of the Japanese population strongly believes that Russia must return the four islands to Japan at the same time.

“Islands Plague Japan-Russia Ties; Efforts to Keep Northern Territories on Diplomatic Agenda Fall Short,” The Daily Yomiuri, February 10, 2005.
among the younger generations nor incorporated them into the government-sponsored campaign for the return of the islands to Japan.


“Islands Plague Japan-Russia Ties; Efforts to Keep Northern Territories on Diplomatic Agenda Fall Short,” The Daily Yomiuri, February 10, 2005.

There is no statistical data to confirm disbelief or loss of faith in government efforts to get the southern Kuriles back from Russia among the Japanese public, particularly among the younger generations. However, the fact that 60% of those surveyed in the October 2008 Japanese Cabinet Office poll were not interested in participating in activities demanding the return of the four islands seems to suggest a growing disbelief among this demographic that Japanese government efforts to regain the southern Kuriles’, virtually ineffective for some sixty years, will somehow encourage a resolution to the long-standing territorial issue in the near future.

This circumstance would likely occur as a result of two possible developments in Japanese public perspective on the territorial issue. The Japanese public could believe the government simply incapable of resolving the issue and apathetically refrain from challenging Russian claims to the islands – essentially accepting Russian ownership of the southern Kuriles as a fait accompli. Or, due to lack of awareness, the Japanese public could believe that the islands historically belonged to Russia and therefore not question Russian sovereignty over them.


Russian federal and regional officials routinely voiced deep concern over the impact of the islands’ poor standard of living, dilapidated transportation and communication infrastructures, and thinning population on the Kremlin’s ability to retain the southern Kuriles. (See “Russia: Sakhalin Governor Sees Little Likelihood of Kurils
Going to Japan,” Nezavisimaya Gazeta, May 17, 2001; “Russia Not Planning to Quit Dneister or Kurils, Defence Minister Reiterates,” Channel One TV, July 29, 2005.)
71 “Russia to Focus on Developing Islands also Claimed by Japan,” Kyodo News Agency, August 29, 2006.
73 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
76 Radyuhin, “Putin Hardens Stand on Disputed Islands,” The Hindu, November 22, 2005.
77 “Russia to allocate R17bn for Development of Disputed Pacific Islands,” RIA Novosti, August 3, 2006; “Russia to Focus on Developing Islands also Claimed by Japan,” Kyodo News Agency, August 29, 2006.
79 Ibid.
80 Radyuhin, “Putin Hardens Stand on Disputed Islands,” The Hindu, November 22, 2005.
82 Ibid; “Russia to Focus on Developing Islands also Claimed by Japan,” Kyodo News Agency, August 29, 2006.
83 “Russia to Focus on Developing Islands also Claimed by Japan,” Kyodo News Agency, August 29, 2006.
84 Ibid. Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov has argued that all facilities on the southern Kuriles should be built to serve in dual military-civilian capacities. (See “Russian Defence Minister Urges Infrastructure Development for Kurils,” Interfax News Agency, October 13, 2005; “Far East Military Units Will Get Newest Weapons First, Russian Minister Says,” BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union – Political, July 30, 2005.)
88 Ibid.
91 The author reached the figure 60% by means of conducting his own calculations based on island land-size estimates.
93 The author reached the figure 60% by means of conducting his own calculations based on island land-size estimates.
94 The author reached the figure 60% by means of conducting his own calculations based on island land-size estimates.
96 Ibid.
98 Russia, in particular has become increasingly vocal in regard to its determination to conclude a peace treaty on terms advantageous to its interests. (See “Putin Says Japan Must Agree to Russia’s Terms for Peace Treaty,” RIA Novosti, May 13, 2009, accessed October 20, 2009. Retrieved from http://en.rian.ru/russia/20090513/121579737.html.)

Paul Anthony. “Russia’s Strategic, Star-Crossed Strait; The Russian Navy Will Always Be Sensitive About This Section of the Nation’s Northern Border,” *The Straits Times* (Singapore), September 2, 2006; Kimura, *Japanese-Russian Relations under Brezhnev and Andropov*, pp. 19, 71, 266.

“Russia Not Planning to Quit Dneister or Kurils, Defence Minister Reiterates,” *Channel One TV*, July 29, 2005.


Russian government plans to invest hundreds of millions of dollars in Petrapavlovsk-Kamchatsky, Rybachiy, and the southern Kuriles, however, demonstrate the Kremlin’s appreciation of the strategic importance of the Kamchatka-Kurile region to Russian security in Northeast Asia. Indeed, Russia seeks to maintain this crucial buffer between its forces in the Northwest Pacific and Japanese and U.S. forces in the region. (See “Russia Not Planning to Quit Dneister or Kurils, Defence Minister Reiterates,” *Channel One TV*, July 29, 2005; “Russia to allocate R17bn for Development of Disputed Pacific Islands,” *RIA Novosti*, August 3, 2006; “Russia to Focus on Developing Islands also Claimed by Japan,” *Kyodo News Agency*, August 29, 2006; Nicholson, Brendan. “Russia Flexes Its Muscles Across Asia-Pacific Zone; Regional Ambitions,” *The Age* (Melbourne), August 31, 2007.)

The Japanese and Japan-based U.S. air force bases closest to Rybachiy are those located in southwestern Hokkaido and northern Honshu, respectively. These Japanese and U.S. bases are situated roughly 1,700 km and 1,900 km from Rybachiy, respectively. Let us suppose that Russia ceded the southern Kuriles to Japan and the latter set up, or allowed the U.S. to establish, an air force base in Kurilsk, the northernmost city on Iturup and the administrative center of the four islands. The distance between Rybachiy and Japanese and U.S. air forces would contract to roughly 1,165 km. (All distances are approximations calculated with the use of “Google Maps” retrieved from http://maps.google.com/maps, and “Google Maps Distance Calculator” retrieved from http://www.daflogic.com/projects-google-maps-distance-calculator.htm.)


Ibid.


“Russian Minister Says Mineral Extraction in Southern Kurils ‘Strategic Task,’“ *ITAR-TASS News Agency*, February 1, 2005. The Russian Ministry of Natural Resources has remarked that the prospecting and extraction of these resources constituted a “strategic task” for the Russian government. The ministry has also stated that the establishment of facilities in the southern Kuriles to extract and process these resources fully kept with Russia’s geopolitical interests.
This estimate is likely greater as well given that large swaths of territory in Siberia are uninhabited, population of 140 million and land-area of 16.4 million sq. km., has a population density of approximately 9 persons per sq. km. This estimate is likely greater as well given that large swaths of territory in Siberia are uninhabited, nevertheless it could be nowhere equivalent to that of Japan.


“Russian Government Backs Development Plan for Disputed Kuril Islands,” Russian Channel Europe TV, August 3, 2006. Author also conducted own calculations using CIA estimates. Russia, with a current population of 140 million and land-area of 16.4 million sq. km., has a population density of approximately 9 persons per sq. km. This estimate is likely greater as well given that large swaths of territory in Siberia are uninhabited, nevertheless it could be nowhere equivalent to that of Japan.


126 “Russian Government Backs Development Plan for Disputed Kuril Islands,” Russian Channel Europe TV, August 3, 2006. Author also conducted own calculations using CIA estimates. Russia, with a current population of 140 million and land-area of 16.4 million sq. km., has a population density of approximately 9 persons per sq. km. This estimate is likely greater as well given that large swaths of territory in Siberia are uninhabited, nevertheless it could be nowhere equivalent to that of Japan.

Julian Ryall, “Tokyo Set to Develop Distant Islands: Report,” South China Morning Post, January 28, 2009. That the Japanese government decided in January 2009 to begin developing its more distant islands to “clarify” Japan’s borders and “preserve, control, and make the most appropriate use of the islands” suggests its concerns in regard to reinforcing its distant maritime borders.

Ibid.


Kuznetsov, “Russian-Japanese Tug-of-War over Kurils,” RIA Novosti, July 10, 2009. Fukuda’s trip to Russia in late April 2008 was very much geared towards boosting LDP popularity in Japan via a strong diplomatic showing vis-à-vis Russia. At the time, the LDP’s approval rating was incredibly low due to its poor performance in terms of domestic policy. By championing the Northern Territories dispute Fukuda most likely sought to stir up nationalist sentiment in support of his government, and the LDP in general. That Fukuda visited the governor of Hokkaido the day prior to his trip to Moscow and claimed that he would negotiate the “hand-over” of the Northern Territories with a “strong will” further suggests his playing the nationalist card to bolster support for the LDP. Moreover, Hokkaido, at the time, had become an electoral stronghold and powerbase for the opposition DPJ. It is likely that Fukuda, perhaps anticipating having to soon call snap parliamentary elections, due to his government’s unpopularity, sought to contest DPJ dominance in Hokkaido. (See “Japanese PM Vows to Seek Handover of Russian-held Isles with ‘Strong Will’,” Kyodo News Agency, April 24, 2008; Jonathan Eyal, “Fukuda Visits Russia to Boost Relations; Trade is Booming, but Japanese Leader’s Trip Still Overshadowed by Heavy Legacy of History,” The Straits Times (Singapore), April 25, 2008.)

In 2006, nationalist groups like the Slav Brotherhood Movement began setting up paramilitary units throughout the southern Kuriles to protect the southern Kuriles in the event that the Russian government decided to hand over the southern Kuriles to Japan. The establishment and training exercises of such groups are generally designed to influence the Kremlin’s continued commitment to retain the southern Kuriles. (See “Russian TV Shows Locals in Far East Gearing up to Fight for Kurils,” Ren TV, April 19, 2006.)


Ibid. Lower-level government support for these groups typically becomes manifest in the form of political endorsements, event coordination and cooperation, and financial donations. The coupling of public and private interests concerning the southern Kuriles’ dispute in Russia and Japan often results in citizens’ organizations becoming unofficial mouthpieces for national and regional governments’ more radical commentary and positions on the territorial issue.


Kimura, The Kurillian Knot, p. 146.

Ibid.

Putin would likely encounter greater public and local resistance to settling the southern Kuriles’ dispute with Japan than he did in settling the Amur Islands’ dispute with the Chinese. (See “Russian TV Shows Call for Removal of Putin If Islands Go to Japan,” NTV Mir (Moscow), November 20, 2004.) However, if he were so determined, he could likely force through the Russian government, and upon the Russian citizenry, a resolution to the territorial issue with Japan. The southern Kuriles’ dispute, however, is currently too valuable a political, economic, and strategic asset for Putin in domestic Russian politics and Russian foreign policy towards Japan.


Despite their pledges to the Japanese electorate to settle the southern Kuriles’ dispute with Russia, the three most recent Japanese Prime Ministers Shinzo Abe, Yasuo Fukuda, and Taro Aso have been particularly ineffective in resolving this issue. Their promises to Russian Presidents Putin and Medvedev to force the hand of
the Japanese government and bureaucracy to resolve the southern Kuriles’ issue have proven equally as fruitless. Indeed, Russian efforts to prolong the resolution of the southern Kuriles’ dispute in hopes that Japan will sign a peace treaty before settling the territorial issue have benefited from Japan’s lack of strong political leadership in this regard.


145 Russia, in particular has become increasingly vocal in regard to its determination to conclude a peace treaty on terms advantageous to its interests. (See “Putin Says Japan Must Agree to Russia’s Terms for Peace Treaty,” RIA Novosti, May 13, 2009, accessed October 20, 2009. Retrieved from http://en.rian.ru/russia/20090513/121579737.html.)


148 Ibid., pp. 59-64. As co-author and primary arbiter of the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty, the U.S. designed the accord to be purposely vague in its treatment of southern Sakhalin and the Kuriles. Specifically, Article 2 of the treaty obliged Japan to renounce all claims and rights to southern Sakhalin and the Kuriles; however, it neither identified to which country, nor on what terms, sovereignty over these territories was to be transferred. Moreover, Article 2 did not specify which islands constituted the Kurile archipelago and which did not – thus sewing the seeds of the decades-old territorial dispute between Russia and Japan over Iturup, Kunashir, Shikotan, and the Habomai Islets. Indeed, the lack of a precise definition of the Kurile archipelago in Article 2 of the San Francisco Peace Treaty afforded the Japanese government a legal premise to: 1) qualify the southern Kuriles as an extension of Hokkaido and 2) rightfully claim the southern Kuriles as the sovereign territory of Japan. In protest to this and other shortcomings of the San Francisco Peace Treaty, the Soviets left San Francisco in 1951 without signing the accord.

149 Ibid.; Nikita Khrushchev, Khrushchev Remembers (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1970), pp. 83-85. In retrospect, the Soviets and Japanese should have sought to resolve the territorial and peace treaty issues as soon as possible after the 1951 San Francisco Peace Conference. However, regional developments in Northeast Asia at the time, most notably the Korean War and the Communist takeover of mainland China, precluded Soviet-Japanese peace negotiations. In The Kurillian Knot, Kimura makes this argument and cites Khrushchev’s memoirs to confirm his point. In Kimura’s chosen excerpt, Khrushchev essentially states that the Stalin’s choice not to sign the San Francisco Peace Treaty was a blunder that came at great strategic cost to the Soviet Union in Asia-Pacific in the early years of the Cold War.

150 Kimura, The Kurillian Knot, p. 75.


152 Ibid., pp. 96-98. Specifically, the U.S. threatened to revise its policy on returning the Ryukyu Islands to Japan if the Japanese government abandoned its claims to all four southern Kuriles. The threat worked. The 1956 Soviet-Japan Joint Declaration was sufficiently ambiguous in regard to the southern Kuriles’ and peace treaty issues
to assuage U.S. concerns that Japan would not conclude a peace accord with the Soviet Union at any time in the near or distant future.

Kimura, The Kurillian Knot, pp. 75-76.

Rumblings in the Russian State Duma began in April and May 1998 to impeach Yeltsin, a process that he ultimately survived in mid-May 1999.


Kikilo, Vladimir. “Pickering’s Statement on South Kurile Islands Officially Backed,” ITAR-TASS News Agency, December 9, 1995; “Russia Protests Against US Ambassador’s Statement on Kuril Islands to Japan,” ITAR-TASS News Agency, December 8, 1995. The Russian government took particular offense to Pickering's statement in December 1995. Indeed, then Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev issued a scathing condemnation of Pickering’s commentary and essentially told Pickering and the U.S. government to stay out of Russian affairs. Pickering’s acknowledgement of Japanese sovereignty over the southern Kuriles was also vexing to the Russian government because it the Clinton administration officially backed Pickering in this instance. Moreover, its confirmation of Japanese sovereignty over the southern Kuriles in December 1995 constituted the first time that the Clinton administration has addressed the matter publicly.


172 Ibid.


CHAPTER 5

RUSSIA, JAPAN AND THE SOUTHERN KURILES:

SUMMITRY AND CONTINUITY IN RUSSIAN

POLICY IN THE PUTIN-MEDVEDEV ERA
From 2000-2010, Russian policy toward its territorial dispute with Japan over ownership of the southern Kuriles reverted to the Soviet perspective, position and approach. It is the purpose of this chapter to establish and analyze this reverse in Russian strategy vis-à-vis Japan as it occurred in the Putin-Medvedev era. Toward this end, this chapter also confirms the lack of any substantive progress in the resolution of the dispute since the turn of the millennium. From a theoretical standpoint, this chapter demonstrates that such contentious neorealist issues as a territorial dispute although significantly detrimental to the stability of relations between states, nevertheless inspire and encourage states to maintain dialogue and communication. The general purposes for maintaining this dialogue and communication are the discouragement of mutually reciprocal distrust and threat perceptions and the avoidance of the provocation or outbreak of military conflict brought on by the prisoner’s-dilemma-like circumstances that such distrust tends to foment. Moreover, this chapter also demonstrates that the growing economic interconnectedness of Russia and Japan in the Russian Far East is having a positive impact on bilateral ties and consequently promoting efforts on both sides, no matter how symbolic they may be, to find and successfully implement a resolution to the southern Kuriles dispute. As such, this chapter discusses Russian-Japanese dialogue over the impasse as it existed during the Putin-Medvedev era.

**PUTIN AND THE SOUTHERN KURILES DISPUTE**

During his tenure as president of the Russian Federation, Putin participated with Japanese prime ministers Mori, Koizumi and Fukuda in five notable summits that displayed the increasing complexity with which the southern Kuriles dispute developed from 2000-2008. These key, high-level meetings included the September 2000 Putin-Mori Tokyo summit, the March 2001 Putin-Mori Irkutsk summit, the January 2003 Putin-Koizumi Moscow summit, the November
2005 Putin-Koizumi Tokyo summit, the June 2007 Putin-Abe summit on the sidelines of the G8 Germany Conference, and the April 2008 Putin-Fukuda Moscow summit. With the exception of the January 2003 Putin-Koizumi summit during which Putin and Koizumi signed the 2003 Russia-Japan Plan of Action, a landmark, comprehensive agreement providing for and encouraging bilateral cooperation in numerous spheres, the meetings generally failed to produce any remarkable, tangible progress toward the resolution of the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues. Nevertheless, it is important to analyze the incentives for and outcomes of these summits because it establishes an understanding of the southern Kuriles dispute as it existed during Putin’s presidency and provides some insight into the trajectory of the territorial and peace treaty issues developing in the Medvedev era.

KEY SUMMITS IN PUTIN’S FIRST TERM

The September 2000 Putin-Mori Tokyo Summit

In the interim of Yeltsin’s surprise resignation on December 31, 1999 and Putin’s inauguration as president of Russia on May 7, 2000, the Japanese government actively lobbied the Kremlin to commit to a summit-level meeting between the Russian President and Japanese Prime Minister by the end of 2000¹ – the date by which Yeltsin and Hashimoto had agreed to resolve the southern Kuriles dispute and sign a peace treaty at Krasnoyarsk in November 1997. Although it is possible that the Japanese government hoped to sign a bilateral peace treaty with Russia under its new president, most likely Putin, by the end of 2000, this desired outcome was not entirely realistic. Rather, it is more probable that the Japanese government sought to achieve two alternative, yet relevant objectives. First, the Japanese government likely sought confirmation from Putin that he would continue the territorial dispute resolution and peace processes as aggressively as his predecessor.² Second, the Japanese government likely sought to
elicit Putin’s assurance that Russia and Japan would resolve the territorial dispute and conclude a peace treaty by a specific date – much like Yeltsin and Hashimoto at Krasnoyarsk and Kawana in 1997 and 1998, respectively.

However, rumblings that Putin would neither embrace nor vigorously pursue Yeltsin’s policies on the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues began to surface in the Russian press, particularly in statements from officials in the Russian Foreign Ministry, before Putin’s inauguration during which time he served as both prime minister and acting president of Russia.³

In snap elections held in late March 2000, Putin won the presidency in the first round of voting. He was inaugurated in early May 2000. Almost immediately thereafter, the Japanese government signaled its interest in hosting Putin for an official state visit.⁴

Putin went to Japan in September 2000. The September 2000 Putin-Mori Tokyo summit, the first such summit in the post-Yeltsin era, marked the beginning of Putin’s complete departure from Yeltsin’s approach to the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues, particularly in regard to the provisions of the 1993 Tokyo Declaration. These provisions included Russia’s acknowledgement of the territorial dispute, Russia’s recognition that the dispute concerns all four southern Kuriles, Russia’s agreement that a final resolution of this dispute will address the ownership of all four islands, and that the resolution of this dispute will take place within the framework of a bilateral peace treaty between the Russian Federation and Japan.⁵

The most immediate and compelling evidence of Putin’s departure from the Yeltsin track was Putin’s statement at the September 2000 Tokyo summit that he felt in no way legally obligated to honor Yeltsin’s pledges at Krasnoyarsk and Kawana in 1997 and 1998, respectively, to sign a peace treaty with Japan by the end of 2000 as per the provisions of the 1991 Soviet-Joint Communiqué or the 1993 Tokyo Declaration.⁶ This statement almost immediately
suggested Putin’s disinterest in continuing Yeltsin’s approach to these two matters and his desire to engage the Japanese over the territorial and peace treaty issues at a slower rate than Yeltsin. That Putin verbally acknowledged the 1956 Soviet-Japan Joint Declaration, specifically Article 9, as the supreme legal document governing the bilateral resolution of the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues, further confirmed his aversion to Yeltsin’s policies. Moreover, extolling the continued legality of the 1956 Soviet-Japan Joint Declaration afforded Putin the opportunity to establish a legal basis for his campaign to gradually reverse Yeltsin’s positions on the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues in favor of a more conservative approach.

Notwithstanding Japanese frustration with Putin’s negation of Yeltsin’s approach, Putin’s invocation of the continued legality of the 1956 Soviet-Japan Joint Declaration in regard to the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues, specifically Article 9, nevertheless proved somewhat promising to the Japanese government. Indeed, Putin’s recognition of the 1956 joint declaration as the supreme legal document was, at the time, incredibly significant from a Japanese perspective. Specifically, Putin’s recognition of the continued legal validity of the entire 1956 joint declaration – particularly Article 9, which Khrushchev and all subsequent successors, including Gorbachev, denounced – marked the first time since the Soviets’ unilateral abrogation of the 1956 joint declaration that a Kremlin leader had directly, albeit only verbally, confirmed the validity and supremacy of the document in its entirety. Japanese efforts to secure Putin’s confirmation of the 1956 joint declaration in writing at the September 2000 Tokyo summit, however, were not fruitful. The Japanese would have to wait until the March 2001 Putin-Mori summit in Irkutsk for such confirmation.
Putin officially and permanently distinguished his policy on the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues from that of Yeltsin during an unofficial summit with Japanese counterpart, and friend, Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori in Irkutsk in March 2001. At the summit, both leaders confirmed in writing and formally acknowledged for the first time, in the provisions of the Irkutsk Joint Statement, the validity of the 1956 Soviet-Japan Joint Declaration, particularly Article 9, as the starting point for negotiations in the territorial dispute resolution and peace processes.

From the Russian perspective, the Irkutsk Joint Statement likely confirmed Japan’s acknowledgment of, and commitment to, Russia’s position that a bilateral Russian-Japanese peace treaty must precede any resolution, partial or complete, to the southern Kuriles dispute. Indeed, one of the most fundamental differences between Yeltsin and Putin in this regard was Putin’s unwavering position that a peace treaty must precede a resolution to the territorial dispute. From the Japanese point of view, however, the Irkutsk Joint Statement likely confirmed de facto Russian recognition of Japanese sovereignty over Shikotan and the Habomai Rocks. The Japanese also likely interpreted the Irkutsk Joint Statement to infer that the two governments would negotiate the final status, and eventual return, of Iturup and Kunashir in the terms of a bilateral peace treaty.

In his efforts to facilitate a more timely settlement of the territorial and treaty issues, Mori unofficially proposed to Putin at the March 2001 Irkutsk summit a “two-track” approach to negotiating the transfer of the islands from Russia to Japan. Mori suggested that negotiations concerning the transfer of Shikotan and the Habomai Islets and those concerning Iturup and Kunashir be conducted separately, as the latter also involved determining the sovereignty of
Iturup and Kunashir. However, Mori further suggested that these separate negotiations be conducted simultaneously. Mori presumably advanced the “two-track” formula to accelerate the rate at which Russian and Japanese governments engaged the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues – hoping to normalize Russian-Japanese relations in a more rapid, efficient and effective manner.\textsuperscript{11}

The governments and citizens of neither Russia nor Japan received Mori’s proposal of a “two-track” approach well. For the Russians, an acceptance of the “two-track” approach signified Russian recognition of Japanese sovereignty over the four islands and was therefore unacceptable. For the Japanese, acceptance of the “two-track” approach broke traditional protocol and expectations of negotiating the return of all four islands at once. Moreover, the “two-track” approach appeared dangerously close to and suggestive of a “phased return” of the islands, in which Russia would transfer the southern Kuriles to Japan separately. Large segments of the Japanese government and public, not just conservative elements of society, were overwhelmingly opposed to any such method of transfer or return. Mori’s short-lived flirtation with alternative methods for the transfer of the southern Kuriles ended with Junichiro Koizumi’s ascension to the position of prime minister of Japan in April 2001.\textsuperscript{12}

\textit{The January 2003 Putin-Koizumi Moscow Summit}

The January 2003 Putin-Koizumi summit in Moscow was a landmark event in the history of post-Soviet Russian-Japanese relations. The January 2003 Moscow summit resulted in the signing of the 2003 Japan-Russia Action Plan (JRAP), a comprehensive agreement between the two governments that provides for and encourages bilateral cooperation in six specific areas. These six areas include political dialogue, peace treaty negotiations, strategic cooperation in the international arena, trade and economic interaction, defense and security, and cultural and
interpersonal exchange. Due to the sensitive nature of the southern Kuriles dispute – and its potentially detrimental impact on any Russian-Japanese agreement extensive in its treatment of Russian-Japanese relations – the JRAP addresses the territorial dispute, somewhat indirectly, as an issue of border demarcation in the subsection concerning peace treaty negotiations.

The plan recognizes the 1956 Soviet-Japan Joint Declaration and 2001 Irkutsk Joint Statement, among other documents, as bases for the “complete normalization” of Russian-Japanese relations “by means of concluding a peace treaty through the solution of issues where the Islands belong.” Beyond mentioning the “Joint Russian-Japanese Subcommittee on Border Demarcation” and the “Joint Compendium of Documents on the History of the Territorial Issue between Japan and Russia,” in title only, the phrases quoted above constitute the only references to the territorial dispute in the 10 pages of the JRAP. Notwithstanding the minimal treatment of the territorial issue in the JRAP, the document, at the time, nevertheless represented an important, formal shift in both Russian and Japanese policy toward and approach to the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues. Specifically, Russian and Japanese political officials sought to expand the traditional, primary focus in Russian-Japanese relations beyond the territorial and peace treaty issues to include other crucial spheres of cooperation neglected, or insufficiently attended, at the expense of asymmetric focus on these two matters.

The Japanese government, particularly Koizumi’s cabinet, took the initiative in developing the JRAP. Koizumi and his cabinet officials strongly believed that a “comprehensive package approach” would prove most effective in diminishing Russian hypersensitivity to the idea of engaging the Japanese in dialogue over the southern Kuriles. Moreover, the Koizumi government hoped this approach would encourage the Russians to look more favorably on peace treaty negotiations involving efforts to resolve the territorial dispute.
In acceding to the JRAP, the Russian and Japanese governments were essentially adopting “a more sophisticated long-range view” of the territorial and peace treaty issues “for their mutual benefit.”

The concept and provisions of the JRAP are beneficial to both Russia and Japan. For Russia, the JRAP afforded accelerated, substantial and long-term Russian-Japanese economic cooperation a status in Russian-Japanese relations comparable to that of the territorial issue. Furthermore, Japan’s accession to the JRAP indicated to Russia that Japan understood the following: long-term Japanese economic, defense, and strategic international cooperation with Russia were as important to Russia as Russia’s commitment to sincerely negotiate a resolution to the territorial dispute was to Japan. That Japan came to this realization proved crucial in gaining Russia’s endorsement of the JRAP. For Japan, the JRAP provided an opportunity to use economic, defense and strategic international cooperation as a means of leverage in resolving the territorial and peace treaty issues with Russia. Specifically, Japan could cite the fulfillment of its obligations to Russia in the JRAP to pressure Russia to honor its obligations to the JRAP, particularly tangible progress toward the resolution of the southern Kuriles dispute.

Essentially, the JRAP provided Japan a standard to which it could hold Russia in its efforts, or lack thereof, in contributing to the settlement of the territorial issue. In these respects, the JRAP served, as intended, as the way forward in Russian-Japanese relations in building a level of mutual trust sufficient to facilitate the resolution of the southern Kuriles dispute, the ratification of a peace treaty, and the complete normalization of Russian-Japanese relations. Therefore, even though the 2003 Putin-Koizumi summit in Moscow did not produce direct or immediate progress in regard to the southern Kuriles dispute, it laid a solid, comprehensive foundation for the resolution of the territorial issue in the future.
KEY SUMMITS IN PUTIN’S SECOND TERM

The November 2005 Putin-Koizumi Tokyo Summit

Putin paid his second official state visit to Japan in late November 2005. By this time, Russian and Japanese positions on the southern Kuriles dispute had hardened and become increasingly divergent since Putin and Koizumi had last met in Moscow in January 2003. Following that summit, the Russian government issued a series of statements reasserting the legal supremacy of Article 9 of the 1956 Soviet-Japan Joint Declaration. Specifically, Putin and Lavrov reinforced the position that Russia would transfer only Shikotan and the Habomai Islets to Japan, as a “gesture of goodwill,” after the ratification of a peace treaty. Putin and Lavrov’s proposition stipulated, however, that the Japanese renounce all further claims to Iturup and Kunashir Islands. Moreover, Putin and Lavrov continued to assert that Russian sovereignty over all four southern Kuriles was “unquestionable,” reflected the outcome of World War II, and would no longer be a topic for discussion in peace treaty negotiations.

During the same period, the Japanese government maintained its claim to ownership of all four southern Kuriles as well as its demand that a Russian-Japanese peace treaty provide for the return of all four southern Kuriles to Japan. Indeed, Koizumi’s claims to Japanese sovereignty over the southern Kuriles became more assertive from January 2003 – November 2005. Two particularly notable incidents exhibited Koizumi’s growing assertiveness in this period. First, in mid-August 2004 Koizumi called upon cabinet officials and LDP parliamentary deputies to study the feasibility of visiting one of the southern Kuriles by the end of the year. Although nothing ultimately came of Koizumi’s request, the fact the he had even suggested visiting one of the southern Kuriles was especially provocative. Second, in early September 2004, Koizumi conducted an “inspection” of the southern Kuriles with a pair of binoculars.
aboard a Japanese coast guard ship. Shortly afterward, Koizumi stated that the four islands were indeed “part of Japan’s territory” and that he had “long wished to view them” with his own eyes.

Because Russian and Japanese positions on the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues had become virtually irreconcilable by the late November 2005 Tokyo summit, Japanese officials and experts remained skeptical of the summit resulting in “substantial progress” on the territorial dispute. Despite Koizumi’s “impassioned plea” to Putin during a two-and-a-half hour meeting to return the four southern Kuriles to Japan, the November 2005 Putin-Koizumi Tokyo summit “ended without any tangible progress” over the territorial dispute. Koizumi attributed the continued impasse over the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues to “considerable gaps” between Russian and Japanese positions on the matters. Indeed, the gap was so pronounced that it precluded the signing of a joint communiqué confirming even past bilateral agreements concerning the four islands. After the summit, then-Russian Ambassador to Japan Aleksandr Losyukov went on record stating that progress on resolving the territorial dispute was not likely until 2015.

The June 2007 Putin-Abe G8 Mini-Summit in Heiligendamm

During his tenure as Prime Minister of Japan, Shinzo Abe met with Vladimir Putin on three separate occasions – the November 2006 Hanoi APEC conference, the June 2007 Heiligendamm G8 conference and the September 2007 Sydney APEC conference. The three meetings occurred as mini-summits on the sidelines of these conferences. Each involved discussions concerning the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues. None lasted more than an hour. The brevity, sparseness, and infrequency of the Putin-Abe dialogues in Vietnam, Germany, and Australia were not conducive to remarkable progress on the territorial dispute and
peace treaty impasse. However, given the domestic situations that Putin and Abe each were facing at the time, the fact that these three meetings occurred at all between September 2006 and September 2007 was particularly notable.

In 2007 both Putin and Abe were deeply engaged in efforts to ensure their own domestic political survival. Putin was preoccupied with orchestrating a transition of executive authority in the upcoming 2008 Russian Presidential election that would secure him a position of unchallenged, yet legitimate, political power after leaving office. Putin’s preparations for this transition included selecting and priming viable, loyal candidates for the 2008 Russian Presidential election, establishing himself as leader of United Russia and future Prime Minister of Russia, appointing trusted supporters to key posts in the Russian government, and coordinating United Russia’s victory in the December 2007 National State Duma elections. With his and Medvedev’s approval ratings hovering at an impressive 70% and no substantive opposition, Putin had far less to worry about in regard to domestic political survival in 2007 than his Japanese counterpart. Indeed, Abe’s consistently low approval ratings, many public gaffes, and the scandal of his agricultural minister’s suicide in May 2007 created a situation in which it became virtually impossible for him to remain Prime Minister of Japan beyond September 2007.

Despite their respective preoccupations with domestic political survival in 2007, Putin and Abe made it a point to discuss matters of mutual concern in Russian-Japanese relations, including the territorial and peace treaty issues, when and where the opportunity presented itself. The June 2007 G8 summit in Heiligendamm, Germany constituted the most significant of the three abovementioned opportunities. The November 2006 Hanoi APEC conference was the inaugural meeting of Putin and Abe. As such, the leaders’ dialogue consisted of a meaningful, albeit introductory, exchange of views, intentions, and expectations regarding multiple spheres of
bilateral cooperation, not least the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues. Nevertheless, Putin and Abe were neither able to address these matters in detail nor on a particularly familiar personal basis. Moreover, Abe’s administration was barely two months old and had other more pressing domestic and international issues on its agenda than the these two issues – economic recovery and the North Korean nuclear crisis, respectively.

Conversely, Putin’s discussion with Abe at the September 2007 APEC conference in Sydney, Australia was all but moot dialogue. Indeed, Abe attended the Sydney APEC summit against the backdrop of a rather untenable, political situation in Japan. Cabinet Minister resignations amid political scandal, the LDP July 2007 loss of the House of Councilors to the opposition DPJ, and low approval ratings did not bode well for Abe’s political future in Japan. In light of these very public indicators of Abe’s political vulnerability, it is likely that the Russian government, in the weeks leading up to the September 2007 Sydney APEC conference, anticipated the election of a new Japanese Prime Minister before the end of the year. The Putin-Abe sideline meeting at the September 2007 Sydney APEC conference, however, certainly did not constitute a futile endeavor. The two leaders agreed to move forward on a host of issues, particularly post-Kyoto climate control and a bilateral civilian nuclear cooperation pact.\(^\text{34}\) Putin and Abe briefly discussed the southern Kuriles dispute and peace treaty impasse; however, the leaders agreed to nothing beyond the continued efforts of their governments to accelerate lower-level negotiations on the two matters.\(^\text{35}\) Nevertheless, it remains possible that Abe’s precarious political situation at home influenced the minimal extent to which both sides addressed the territorial and peace treaty issues.

Time constraints and concerns over domestic political vulnerability undermined Putin’s and Abe’s ability to address the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues in a substantive manner.

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The Putin-Abe meeting at the June 2007 Heiligendamm G8 summit however, took place under a different, more favorable set of circumstances than did their meetings at the 2006 and 2007 APEC conferences. Indeed, the Russian and Japanese Foreign Ministries had ample time to lay the groundwork for the 2007 Heiligendamm G8 mini-summit. Moreover, Abe’s political standing in Japan was far more secure in June 2007 than it was in September 2007. Also, Abe was likely able to develop and refine his own approach to negotiating with Putin over the territorial and peace treaty issues. The 2007 Heiligendamm G8 summit represented Abe’s one concrete opportunity to negotiate with Putin over these two matters from a position of experience, preparedness and strength.

In a somewhat preemptive maneuver, Putin sent Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov to visit the southern Kuriles on June 3, 2007—five days prior to the former’s anticipated meeting with Abe at the 2007 Heiligendamm G8 summit. That Lavrov was the first Russian foreign minister to visit the islands in the post-Soviet era was politically significant and deeply irritated the Japanese government. Essentially, Lavrov’s trip to the southern Kuriles constituted a very public effort on Putin’s behalf to reinforce Russian sovereignty over the southern Kuriles before the Heiligendamm summit. Moreover, in an interview with journalists from G8 countries on June 4, 2007, the day after Lavrov’s trip to the southern Kuriles, Putin reasserted Russian government policy on the territorial issue. Specifically, Putin noted that Russian sovereignty over the four islands reflected the outcome of World War II and was confirmed in international law. Putin therefore argued that no territorial dispute existed between Russia and Japan. It is likely that Putin’s actions undermined Abe’s southern Kuriles negotiating strategy for the June 2007 Heiligendamm G8 summit.
Despite their relatively brief 35 minute meeting in Heiligendamm, Putin and Abe managed to engage in rather frank dialogue over the southern Kuriles dispute. Well aware of its routinely negative impact on peace treaty negotiations and, to a lesser extent, bilateral economic cooperation, Putin and Abe agreed to advance their countries’ partnership in these two specific areas “without delaying and shelving” the territorial issue. Accordingly, the two leaders reiterated their commitment to expand economic relations while working toward a mutually acceptable resolution to the territorial and peace treaty issues. Putin and Abe further agreed to instruct their respective bureaucracies to facilitate an enduring confluence of these three policy initiatives. Indeed, the territorial dispute, peace treaty negotiations, and economic cooperation comprised the primary topics of discussion and review in the Putin-Abe meeting at the June 2007 Heiligendamm G8 summit. And, although this mini-summit did not conclude with a major breakthrough on either the territorial or peace treaty issues, it nevertheless confirmed the two governments’ shared determination to continue bilateral dialogue on both matters. The leaders also expressed their intent to meet for further bilateral talks on the sidelines of the September 2007 Sydney APEC conference. Moreover, Abe used the occasion to invite Putin to Japan for an official state visit – most likely to accelerate the peace process. In this regard, the Putin-Abe mini-summit in Heiligendamm in June 2007 laid the foundation for Russian and Japanese efforts to resolve the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues in the post-Koizumi era.40

*The April 2008 Putin-Fukuda Moscow Summit*

The Putin-Fukuda era in Russian-Japanese relations was exceptionally brief. It lasted only from late September 2007 to early May 2008. Like Shinzo Abe, his most recent predecessor, Yasuo Fukuda occupied the post of prime minister of Japan for roughly one year.41 Unlike Abe, however, Fukuda’s tenure overlapped the transition of presidential power in Russia
from Vladimir Putin to Dmitry Medvedev in early May 2008. As Fukuda was Prime Minister of
Japan from September 26, 2007 – September 24, 2008, his time in office therefore coincided
with the last seven and first five months of Putin’s and Medvedev’s presidencies, respectively.
Consequently, Putin and Fukuda met just once during Putin’s final seven months as President of
Russia. The circumstances surrounding the informal April 2008 Putin-Fukuda Moscow summit
were particularly unique. That the meeting occurred at all is testament to Putin’s and Fukuda’s
commitment to continued, stable Russian-Japanese relations and regular political dialogue
between officials at the highest level of Russian and Japanese government.

Fukuda’s unofficial visit to Moscow in April 2008 was long in the making. Indeed, the
Russian and Japanese governments began laying the groundwork for Fukuda’s April 2008 visit
two months after Fukuda’s election as prime minister of Japan. In late December 2007, Toyota
opened a car manufacturing plant in St. Petersburg, Russia – an incredibly significant event in
Russian-Japanese economic relations. Fukuda’s good friend, political mentor, and former
Japanese Prime Minister, Yoshiro Mori, was among the elite attendees of the plant’s
inauguration. Aware that Putin and Mori remained good friends beyond the latter’s departure
from office in April 2001 Fukuda likely anticipated a meeting of some sort between Putin and
Mori after the opening ceremony. As a result, Fukuda probably regarded Mori’s attendance at
this important event as an opportunity to commence more substantive dialogue with Putin on the
southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues. Seeking to make the most of this opportunity, Fukuda
sent to Putin, care of their close mutual friend Yoshiro Mori, a personal letter in which he
expressed his interest in stepping up efforts to resolve the territorial and peace treaty issues.
Upon receiving Fukuda’s letter in December 2007, Putin expressed to Yoshiro Mori his “strong
hope” of meeting Fukuda directly before leaving office in May 2008. By late December 2007,
Putin’s and Fukuda’s determination to meet in person and achieve a “breakthrough on stalled negotiations” over the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues, while Putin was still President of Russia, had become increasingly evident.\textsuperscript{42} 

In early February 2008, a month prior to the Russian Presidential election, Putin sent a personal letter in response to Fukuda’s earlier message in December in which he emphasized his shared desire to “resolve promptly” the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues.\textsuperscript{43} Putin further requested that Fukuda visit Moscow in April 2008. Russian presidential requests to meet Japanese Prime Ministers – in general, and on such short notice – are “extremely rare.”\textsuperscript{44} Fukuda accepted Putin’s invitation and, despite his tenuous political position at home, paid an unofficial visit to Moscow from April 25-27, 2008. Skeptical Japanese officials and political pundits did not expect Fukuda’s trip to effect a “concrete breakthrough” on the territorial and peace treaty issues.\textsuperscript{45} 

On his way to Moscow, Fukuda stopped in Hokkaido on August 24 and met with the island’s governor, Harumi Takahashi.\textsuperscript{46} During his audience with Takahashi, Fukuda claimed the southern Kuriles as “an integral part” of Japan’s sovereign territory” and assured the governor that he would negotiate the “hand-over” of the four islands with a “strong will.”\textsuperscript{47} Two reasons likely influenced Fukuda’s stopover in Hokkaido the day before his arrival in Moscow. First, Fukuda probably hoped that a display of confidence and resolve over the Northern Territories dispute would bolster his low approval ratings among the Japanese public. Second, Fukuda likely believed that assertive public confirmation of Japanese sovereignty over the four islands would provide him greater leverage in talks with Putin on the matter. 

Notwithstanding their enthusiasm and “eagerness for a frank exchange of opinions”\textsuperscript{48} on the southern Kuriles dispute, Putin and Fukuda did not discuss the issue in “great detail”\textsuperscript{49} during
their two-hour meeting on April 26, 2008. Indeed, the brevity of Putin’s conversation with Fukuda regarding the territorial dispute remained relatively “unclear” to the two leaders’ spokespersons and advisors. Three indicators, however, suggest their brief dialogue on the matter was more rhetorical and subdued than substantive and deliberate. First, Fukuda kept discussion of the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues “low key” and instead focused on cultivating good personal relations with Putin. Second, Putin and Fukuda merely reiterated the common policy lines of finding a “mutually acceptable” resolution to the territorial dispute and agreeing to instruct their foreign ministries to accelerate negotiations over the matter accordingly. Neither leader put forth new initiatives regarding the settlement to the southern Kuriles issue. Third, the relatively casual mood and location of the meeting – an informal conversation held in Putin’s private residence in suburban Moscow, which Putin’s dog attended – did not suggest an atmosphere conducive to significant consideration of the territorial dispute. As expected, Fukuda’s April 2008 visit to Moscow did not facilitate a breakthrough in negotiations over the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues during the last days of Putin’s presidency.

MEDVEDEV AND THE SOUTHERN KURILES

When presidential power transferred from Putin to Dmitry Medvedev on May 7, 2008, Russian policy on the southern Kuriles dispute experienced very little, if any, substantive change. The principal reason for this lack of movement in Russia’s treatment of its territorial dispute with Japan in the Medvedev era has been Putin’s continued dominance of Russian politics and government. That Medvedev lacks his own powerbase from which to launch an effective campaign to modify Russia’s policy on this sensitive and highly contentious matter according to his, as opposed to Putin’s, prerogative further exacerbates stagnation in the sphere of Russian-
Japanese interaction. Despite the absence of remarkable or fundamental progress in the resolution of the southern Kuriles dispute from May 2008 – September 2009, an assessment of Russian-Japanese dialogue concerning the territorial impasse under Medvedev nevertheless remains necessary to a comprehensive analysis of this dispute as it existed during and after Putin’s presidency.

This section therefore combines the investigation of critical hypothetical questions pertaining to Russian policy on the southern Kuriles dispute in the Medvedev era with a discussion of the current political reality surrounding this matter since Putin left office. Accordingly, this section examines the issue of Russian sovereignty over the southern Kuriles from May 2008 – September 2009 by establishing similarity in the Medvedev era and Putin’s perspectives on the territorial dispute as well as continuity in policy on the matter from Putin to Medvedev. Furthermore, it identifies and qualifies the political and institutional bases of Putin’s continuing influence in the southern Kuriles impasse and assesses the likelihood of a split developing between Medvedev and Putin in regard to Russian policy and executive prerogative regarding the territorial issue. Finally, this section provides a brief synopsis of Medvedev’s dialogue with Japanese Prime Ministers Fukuda and Aso over the matter of ownership of the southern Kuriles and confirms that there has been virtually “no significant movement” toward the resolution of this dispute since Medvedev assumed office.
SOVEREIGNTY OVER THE SOUTHERN KURILES IN THE MEDVEDEV ERA

Putin, Medvedev and the Southern Kuriles: Similarity in Perspective and Continuity in Policy

The election of Dmitry Medvedev as president of the Russian Federation had little noticeable impact on Russian policy toward the southern Kuriles issue. As Putin’s hand-picked successor, Medvedev’s perspective on the impasse overwhelmingly reflects that of his predecessor. Indeed, Medvedev maintains that Russian sovereignty over Iturup, Kunashir, Shikotan and the Habomai Islets is a result of World War II, “duly formalized” in accordance with international law, and therefore “unquestionable.” Moreover, Medvedev shares Putin’s view of the territorial impasse as an “issue of border demarcation” as opposed to a matter of disputed sovereignty. Like Putin, Medvedev subsequently refuses to engage in any dialogue concerning the southern Kuriles in which Japan challenges the legality of Russian ownership of the four islands. That Medvedev refuses to engage Japan in any such dialogue over the southern Kuriles demonstrates the manner in which similarity in perspective informs continuity in the two leaders’ policies on the matter.

Three additional instances of continuity in Putin’s and Medvedev’s southern Kuriles policies exist beyond a mutual aversion to any further discussion of Russian sovereignty over the islands. First, Medvedev continues his predecessor’s recognition of the 1956 Soviet-Japan Joint Declaration, particularly Article 9, as the supreme legal document in the adjudication of the territorial and peace treaty issues. In this regard, Medvedev shares Putin’s views that the declaration legally supersedes the 1991 Soviet-Japan Joint Communiqué and the 1993 Tokyo Declaration. He further agrees with Putin that the Russian and Japanese governments must sign
and ratify a peace treaty prior to the finalization of the border demarcation process. Moreover, Medvedev believes any potential transfer of Russian territory to Japan in the border demarcation process will be limited to Shikotan Island and the Habomai Islets – a principal view of his predecessor. Similar to Putin, Medvedev also asserts that Russia will transfer Shikotan Island and the Habomai Islets to Japan only if the Japanese government renounces all further rights and claims to Russian territory, especially Iturup and Kunashir islands. Finally, Medvedev shares Putin’s stance on the primacy of the 1956 Joint Declaration in bilateral relations in his understanding that the Russian and Japanese governments must abandon the “extreme positions” of refusing and demanding the return of all four islands, respectively. Implicit in the two leaders’ promotion of the 1956 Joint Declaration as the supreme legal document in the adjudication of the territorial and peace treaty impasses is their mutual perception of each as a purely bilateral issue between Russia and Japan. Medvedev and Putin’s concurring perception in this instance also alludes to their common aversion to Japanese efforts to internationalize the two matters, especially the southern Kuriles dispute.

Second, Medvedev maintains Putin’s policy of addressing and resolving the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues alongside a host of other concerns in Russian-Japanese relations, particularly in economic and strategic spheres of cooperation. In this respect, Medvedev has espoused Putin’s esteem for the 2003 Japan-Russia Action Plan – a comprehensive accord that Putin and Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi signed in January 2003. The two sides drafted the Action Plan in such a way as to provide for the resolution of the territorial and peace treaty issues together with an expansion of bilateral ties in political, economic, military and strategic areas of interaction. Essentially, the plan sought to reduce the prominence of the territorial and peace treaty issues in Russian-Japanese relations by packaging them into a
comprehensive program that made them more or less equal in priority to the development of ties in other spheres of interaction. To be certain, the purpose of moving forward “in all directions simultaneously” under the 2003 Action Plan was to create a strong foundation on, and positive atmosphere in, which to address and conduct, respectively, Russian-Japanese peace treaty negotiations, particularly in regard to the issue of border demarcation.62

The Russian government gladly welcomed the “comprehensive package approach” of the 2003 Japan-Russia Action Plan because it discontinued and replaced the past pattern in its relations with Japan, in which the territorial and peace treaty impasses stunted a deepening of bilateral ties, with a more balanced formula for political, economic, military and strategic exchange and cooperation.63 Indeed, Medvedev has echoed Putin’s policy and sentiment in this regard in remarking that the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues “should not dominate the agenda of relations” between Russia and Japan.64 Rather, he asserted that these two matters should “occupy a sensible position” in bilateral relations – a position in which the governments of Russia and Japan “neither overestimate, nor forget about” them.65 In this case, Medvedev’s calls for the streamlining of the territorial and peace treaty issues in Russian-Japanese relations intimate the enduring importance of the 2003 Action Plan to Russian interests vis-à-vis Japan, particularly in the economic sphere. That members of Medvedev’s administration have cited continuously the 2003 Action Plan and the synchronous expansion of ties in all major political, economic, military and strategic areas as the main vehicle for building the trust necessary to settle the southern Kuriles and peace treaty impasses further attests to the congruence in Medvedev and Putin’s policy positions on these two matters.66

By signing the 2003 Action Plan, Russia and Japan agreed to approach the resolution of the southern Kuriles “problem” from a long-term strategic perspective.67 In this regard, the
Russian government has remained especially vigilant since the implementation of the plan in January 2003. In particular, Putin and Medvedev each have understood and treated the “territorial problem” as a “highly complex” issue that will require at least a generation of expansive cooperation and trust-building with Japan in multiple spheres of interaction. These spheres most notably include extensive Japanese investment in the Russian Far East, major Japanese financial assistance in the region’s socio-economic development and industrial modernization, and the cultivation of relatively frequent confidence-building exercises and exchanges in the area of military ties.

Russia’s initial and continued interest in approaching the settlement of the “so-called territorial problem” from a long-term strategic perspective arises from two ambitions vis-à-vis Japan. On one hand, Japan must demonstrate to Russia that it can be trusted not to utilize any territorial concessions in the southern Kuriles to Russia’s economic or strategic disadvantage in Northeast Asia. On the other, Russia seeks to extract as much financial assistance from Japan in the Russian Far East as possible before handing over any of the islands’ territory to Japan. At the same time, Russia aspires to create the conditions necessary for a lasting, complementary and mutually beneficial economic partnership with Japan. Medvedev’s desire to approach the territorial problem from the same long-term strategic perspective, and for the same purposes, as Putin, constitutes the third instance in which Medvedev’s southern Kuriles policy exhibits continuity with that of his predecessor.

*The Political and Institutional Bases of Putin’s Continuing Influence in the Southern Kuriles Dispute in the Medvedev Era*

That Medvedev takes his cue from Putin on the southern Kuriles dispute is discernable from the similarity and continuity in the two leaders’ perspectives and policies, respectively, on
the matter – as well as from Medvedev’s loyalty to, and personal friendship with, his mentor Putin. To be certain, Medvedev’s position as Russian president served as a particularly effective political and institutional basis for Putin’s continued influence in the southern Kuriles dispute after he left office in early May 2008. Notwithstanding their significance in this regard, Medvedev’s loyalty to Putin and position as Russian president were only two of several political and institutional bases for Putin’s enduring prerogative in the government’s handling of the “territorial problem” in Russian-Japanese relations. The remaining political and institutional sources of Putin’s sustained influence in this issue area include his “silovik” powerbase, his continued dominance of Russian politics, his position as Prime Minister of Russia, his high public approval ratings, and a general understanding among Japanese political elite that it is Putin’s perspective that ultimately informs Russian policy on the southern Kuriles dispute.

Putin’s “silovik” powerbase is an especially notable source of his continued political influence in the southern Kuriles dispute. The “siloviki” comprise persons, typically technocrats, in the employ of the Russian government who once worked, or currently work, in the Russian federal security services (i.e., the KGB, the FSB or the MVR) or armed services. Many of the siloviki are Putin loyalists and confidantes who served with him in the St. Petersburg municipal government in the early 1990s, who share mutual friends with Putin from this city or who worked with him in one of his many positions in Yeltsin’s administration, particularly during his time as head of the FSB. Loosely affiliated with the siloviki are the “power ministries” – important bureaucratic agencies at the federal level of Russian government that assume and execute, respectively, the strategic, fundamental duties and functions of the state. The crucial administrative charges of the “power ministries” concern, in one way or another, the domestic and international security, survival and well-being of the state. Accordingly, these specialized
branches of the Russian federal government include the Ministries of Defense, Foreign Affairs, Interior, Finance/Economy, International Trade and Industry, and Justice as well as the FSB, MVR, Russian Armed Forces (i.e., Russian Joint Chiefs of General Staff) and the Russian Presidential Security Council.

Collectively, the siloviki and “power ministries” constitute a formidable, conservative voice and constituency in Russian politics, government and society, especially in matters of national security. For this reason, their input, counsel and perspective are indispensable and decisive factors in questions concerning the territorial security and integrity of the state, particularly those regarding the perennially vulnerable yet resource-rich regions of the Russian Far East. In such an instance, the explicit – or, at least, tacit – endorsement of the siloviki and “power ministries” of any major policy decision pertaining to a resolution of the southern Kuriles dispute in which Russia cedes any island territory to Japan remains essential to the decision’s successful implementation and execution. That is to say, the approval of these two groups of any such policy choice relating to the territorial dispute between Russia and Japan is a prerequisite to its actualization. Indeed, the support and loyalty of the “siloviki” and “power ministries” afford Putin valuable political and, to a lesser extent, institutional bases for his sustained influence in the southern Kuriles dispute.

Another significant political and institutional source of Putin’s enduring impact on Russia’s territorial row with Japan in the Medvedev era has been his continued dominance of Russian politics. Beyond his powerbase among the siloviki and “power ministries,” Putin also enjoys the extensive political and institutional support and loyalty of the Presidential Cabinet, the Federal Assembly (the national legislature), the federal and regional courts, regional executives and legislatures, the plenipotentiary representatives of Russia’s federal superdistricts, virtually all
of Russia’s major political parties, and the business oligarchs and other captains of Russian industry and finance. Although Medvedev has been President of Russia for the past two years, the vast majority of persons occupying posts in these governmental bodies or political and private-sector groupings are indebted to Putin, not Medvedev, for their accession to public office and positions of great wealth. After all, it was Putin – or Putin loyalists – who appointed these persons, or enabled their accession, to office and engineered their acquisition of considerable wealth during his second term as president, particularly in the latter half of his tenure. As such, Putin retains substantial, if not unrivaled, political influence in Russian government and society.

To be certain, the pervasiveness of Putin’s prerogative in just about every sphere of domestic and foreign policy naturally imparts to him the final say in governmental decisions as to whether Russia will hand over to Japan any territory in the southern Kurile Islands. Putin primarily derives this power from his political dominance of the key federal, regional and even local governmental institutions that facilitate the enactment and successful execution of any Russian resolution pertaining to the ownership or ultimate political status of Iturup, Kunashir, Shikotan and the Habomai Islets.

First, Putin exercises de facto control of the State Duma and Federation Council – the constituent lower and upper houses of the Russian Federal Assembly, respectively. His control of these two legislative bodies is attributable to his role as Chairman of Unified Russia, the prevailing political party at virtually all levels of Russian government including the State Duma and Federation Council. Notwithstanding his position as Chairman of Unified Russia, Putin is neither a member of the party nor its leader in the State Duma or Federation Council. Instead, Putin asserts authority in the former via his confidante, close political ally and Unified Russia colleague: Speaker of the State Duma, Boris Gryzlov. With a Unified Russia supermajority in
the State Duma, Putin can enact virtually any law and gain support for almost any international
treaty that he deems critical to Russian domestic and international interests. He can even
override the executive veto of Russian President Dmitry Medvedev if the occasion or need ever
was to arise. Accordingly, Putin can advance any legislative agenda that he wishes in regard to
any matters in domestic, foreign or national security policy that pertain to the southern Kuriles
dispute. Putin further bolsters his political and institutional dominance of the domestic and
international (i.e., Russian-Japanese) debate surrounding the southern Kuriles issue by
effectively controlling the Federation Council.

Putin exercises his political authority in the Federation Council in a more indirect manner
than in the State Duma. Specifically, members of the Federation Council gain office by way of
political appointment as opposed to popular election. In this respect, regional executives,
themselves typically cadres of Unified Russia and appointees of either Putin or Medvedev, select
and subsequently assign politically reliable and trusted persons – read: members of Unified
Russia or parties of the loyal opposition who remain faithful to Putin – to the Federation Council
as representatives for their particular region. Although seemingly more circuitous and thusly
diluted, Putin’s political influence in the Federation Council remains comparable to his political
influence in the State Duma. Additional reassurance of the Federation Council’s political
compliance with Putin’s policy preferences results from Putin’s good working relationship and
personal rapport with Federation Council leader Sergei Mironov. Despite the fact that his
relationship with Mironov occasionally has proven more tense and challenging than his
relationship with Mironov’s lower house counterpart, Boris Gryzлов, Putin and Mironov
nevertheless espouse similar perspectives on crucial matters in domestic, foreign and national
security policy. The southern Kuriles dispute is a critical issue area in which their perspectives
are especially congruent. That the Federation Council is responsible for the debate and ratification of international treaties (i.e., potential agreements between Russia and Japan), as well as the partial approval of domestic legislation relevant to the southern Kuriles, further establishes the institutional value of Putin’s political dominance and influence therein.

The second and third sets of domestic political institutions from which Putin derives the final say in Russian governmental decisions concerning the southern Kuriles as they affect Russian relations with Japan comprise regional executives and legislatures and the federal courts, respectively. As per the provisions of the Russian Constitution, regional and local governments and peoples of the “subjects” of the Russian Federation must approve of any international treaty or agreement in which the federal government cedes part of the subject’s territory to another country. This approval can occur in the form of either consultations between the federal, regional and local governments of the “subject” under consideration and its peoples or by way of popular, localized referendum or both. In this respect, Putin and, to a lesser extent, Medvedev’s appointment of loyal persons to the governorships or presidencies of Russia’s constituent regional governments and the expansive presence of the local party apparatus of Unified Russia, especially in its dominance of regional and local legislatures, proves an invaluable asset to Putin’s continued influence in the southern Kuriles dispute.

In the event that Putin opted to fully normalize relations with Japan by ceding a portion of Russia’s territory in the southern Kuriles, a politically compliant governor and legislature in Sakhalin Oblast – as well as acquiescent local officials residing on the islands – would be necessary to provide the requisite regional and local governmental endorsement of any such agreement. Moreover, an effective and well-managed campaign by the regional and local Unified Russia party apparatus would play a crucial role in organizing and delivering the
constitutionally required support via popular referendum that would enable successful federal legislation toward this end. Federal courts stacked with Putin- and Medvedev-appointed judges would tow their benefactors’ line by rejecting or undermining any local, regional or federal legal challenges to Putin’s desired outcome. And, although the other official bodies and groupings listed above would assume an important function in the process of negotiating, ratifying and implementing a treaty concerning any potential resolution to the southern Kuriles dispute, it would be minimal in comparison to those of the Federal Assembly, regional executives and legislatures, and the federal courts.

Notwithstanding the extensive network of personal connections that he has established and maintained by appointing loyalists to key administrative and bureaucratic posts at the federal and regional levels of government, Putin’s enduring dominance of Russian politics in the Medvedev era also stems from his continued involvement in running the day-to-day activities of the Russian national government. More specifically, Putin’s position as prime minister of the Russian Federation since May 2008 has served as a third political and institutional basis for his lasting impact on the southern Kuriles dispute in the Medvedev era. His role as prime minister has sustained Putin’s policy orientation as the dominant prerogative in the management of the southern Kuriles dispute for a number of reasons – the foremost of which was the office’s situation in the hierarchy of the Russian federal government. The prime minister ranks second only to the President in terms of institutional power and political influence. Moreover, the prime minister is next in line of succession to the Russian Presidency. Putin’s occupancy of the post of prime minister at once reinforces and amplifies his prevalence in Russian politics. Indeed, Putin’s commission as premier of the Russian Federation affords him virtually unrivaled influence in Russian policy toward Japan concerning the southern Kuriles dispute.
Still another reason that Putin’s occupancy of the post of prime minister allows him to retain the final say in Russian governmental decisions regarding the territorial impasse over the long-term is the absence of constitutional restrictions on how many times and how long he can serve in this capacity. To be certain, the occasion could arise in which Putin decides to diminish the powers of the Russian president to correspond with a more ceremonial and symbolic role in the affairs of the state – a role comparable to that of European monarchs and presidents in Israel, Germany, India, Iraq and Ireland to name a few. He enjoys the necessary majorities in both houses of the Federal Assembly to amend the Russian Constitution accordingly. At the same time, Putin also could use these majorities to increase the powers of the prime minister so as to make the post the dominant political and institutional office in the Russian government as it is in the U.K., Italy, Canada, Thailand, Australia and Japan. Putin, however, would likely occupy the post of prime minister for a prolonged period of time and thusly echo the tenures and regime-types of former Prime Minister of Singapore Lee Kuan Yew and Prime Minister of Malaysia Mahathir bin Mohamad – the former serving for roughly 30 years and the latter for approximately 20 years. The development of such a political situation in Russia undoubtedly would provide Putin lasting influence in all matters of the state, including the southern Kuriles dispute.

A fourth political basis for Putin’s continued, virtually exclusive prerogative in the Russian government’s handling of the territorial impasse in the Medvedev era is a high public approval rating. Public confidence in Putin’s performance as prime minister has been consistently remarkable since Medvedev appointed him to office in May 2008. Putin enjoyed an impressive public approval rating of 71% at the end of 2009. This rating was particularly noteworthy given the enduring negative impact of the global economic crisis on the financial
well-being of regular Russian citizens. Medvedev’s public approval ratings ranked only at 62% in January 2010. Implicit in these leadership-confidence statistics is Russians’ general perception of Putin as a more effective administrator than Medvedev. These statistics also suggest Russians’ understanding that, despite the institutional subjugation of the prime minister to the prerogative of the Russian president, Putin, not Medvedev, remains the ultimate authority in matters of Russian governmental domestic and foreign policy. Accordingly, the Russian public is likely to respect and follow Putin’s will and policy preferences – especially in regard to highly sensitive and nationalist-sentiment-invoking disputes such as that surrounding the contested Russian-Japanese ownership of the southern Kuriles. That Putin enjoys substantial elite and popular support of his southern Kuriles policy further reinforces and enhances the political and institutional bases of his continued influence in Russia’s territorial dispute with Japan.

A final political and institutional source of Putin’s ongoing impact on Russia’s southern Kuriles policy – though external to Russian politics – is the general recognition among the Japanese political elite that in the end it is Putin’s, and not Medvedev’s, perspective that informs Russian policy on the territorial dispute. Notwithstanding Medvedev’s constitutionally reinforced institutional supremacy to Putin as Russian president, the Japanese political elite, like the Russian elite and citizenry, knew that Putin remained the dominant force and personality in Russian government and politics. As such, in order to conclude any type of resolution to the southern Kuriles impasse in which Russia ceded island territory to Japan, Japanese officials knew that it was Putin with whom they would have to negotiate any such agreement. The fact that Putin left the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympic Games early to oversee the Russian military operation against Georgia in mid-August of that year as prime minister in the North Ossetian
capital of Vladikavkaz,\textsuperscript{74} instead of Medvedev, the constitutionally designated Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Armed Forces, displayed and most likely reassured the Japanese political elite as to the true center of political power in Russia, especially in regard to important matters in foreign policy such as territorial security. Indeed, Japan’s tacit acknowledgement of Putin’s continued dominance in Russian foreign affairs granted further legitimacy to his long-term influence in the southern Kuriles impasse.

\textit{A Possible Medvedev-Putin Split over the Southern Kuriles Dispute?}

There currently exists little, if any, fundamental difference between Medvedev and Putin in regard to the southern Kuriles dispute; and, the chances of such a difference emerging in the near or distant future remain highly unlikely. To be certain, continuity in perspective and policy from Putin to Medvedev has all but fully confirmed this argument. Putin’s many political and institutional bases for continued influence, if not outright dominance, in the southern Kuriles dispute further confirms this argument. Nevertheless, Medvedev and Putin are separate persons with unique experiential backgrounds that inform their political views and leadership style in a manner distinct from one another. Moreover, Medvedev and Putin occupy separately the two most politically and institutionally influential offices in Russian government – the constitutional powers of which are sufficiently ambiguous to foment tension and competition between the president and prime minister in the areas of domestic and foreign policy. As such, the possibility of a Medvedev-Putin split in regard to Russian policy over the southern Kuriles, though highly unlikely, is not implausible and therefore merits brief consideration in the context of a study of Russian relations with Japan from 2000-2010.

As president of the Russian Federation, Medvedev retains the constitutional prerogative and capacity to challenge, if not replace, Putin’s policy toward Japan concerning the southern
Kuriles impasse. According to the Russian Constitution, foreign policy is the legal purview of the Russian president. And, although the Russian Constitution provides the Prime Minister a relatively substantive role in the formulation and implementation of Russian foreign policy, it is to the president whom the constitution affords supreme authority in all diplomatic matters of the state. Hypothetically, the Russian Constitution endows Medvedev with the legal power and right to forge his own path – in particular, one noticeably distinct from, and in conflict with, that of Putin – in respect to the resolution of Russia’s territorial dispute with Japan.

For instance, Medvedev could decide that the southern Kuriles, comprising merely .03% of Russian territory in one of the most remote and difficultly reached and maintained regions of the country, are no longer more valuable or beneficial to Russia than peace and a fully normalized relationship with Japan. Consequently, Medvedev could settle the territorial dispute by agreeing to hand over to Japan all four of the islands either at once or according to a formula for a phased return. This agreement, likely a key provision in a bilateral Russian-Japanese peace treaty, would include significant Japanese, and perhaps even U.S., economic and security guarantees for Russia in the Seas of Okhtosk and Japan as well as in the Northwest Pacific. Such a development in Russian policy toward Japan, however, will remain exclusively a topic for academic conjecture and speculation as the reality of the current political situation in Russia does not provide for Medvedev’s constitutionally inspired or prescribed diplomatic coup over Putin’s southern Kuriles policy. Indeed, the current reality in Russian government and society intimates and establishes that Medvedev is by no means the dominant political authority in Russia. Rather, it is Putin who retains the greatest and virtually unrivaled wealth of political capital in Russia in the spheres of both domestic and foreign policy and will continue to do so into the near and distant future.
An attempt by Medvedev to assert his constitutional purview in foreign policy, especially in the southern Kuriles dispute, in a manner that either challenged or undermined Putin’s prerogative in the matter, however, would quickly reveal the disingenuousness of this recent commentary. To be sure, Putin would act swiftly and decisively to either preclude or preempt the emergence of any such situation. There is little doubt as to whether Putin would be successful in this endeavor. First, Medvedev lacks the necessary political power base and popular support to challenge Putin on this or any other comparably important matter in Russian foreign policy. The deficit in Medvedev’s political support and capitol within the executive branch of the Russian federal government in this policy area became apparent ten months after Medvedev’s inauguration as president.

During a meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Taro Aso in Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk in mid-February 2009, Medvedev declared his intent to apply a “new, original and nonstandard approach” to the settlement of the southern Kuriles dispute. Medvedev further expressed that his purpose in utilizing such an approach was to bring about an “unconventional solution” to the territorial impasse. In the days following Medvedev’s statements, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, himself a hold-over appointment from the Putin era and Putin loyalist, weighed in on Medvedev’s alleged promise to Aso of an “unconventional solution” to the territorial dispute. Specifically, Lavrov commented to Interfax News Agency that Japanese media reports claiming Medvedev’s assurance to Aso of such a solution was yet another Japanese “misunderstanding” of Russian officials’ commentary on the southern Kuriles dispute. Beyond confirming that Medvedev had given no such pledge to Aso in this meeting, Lavrov further, and more pointedly, noted that Medvedev simply “could not” have given “any non-standard promises” to Aso.
because any such offer would have to meet Russian interests and gain overwhelming support among the Russian people.  

The second manner in which Putin could preclude or preempt an effort by Medvedev to challenge or undermine his prerogative in Russian foreign policy in the event of a Medvedev-Putin split over the southern Kuriles dispute would be to remove him from office. In this scenario, Putin’s continued dominance of Russian government and politics in the Medvedev era would prove particularly effective. As the Chairman of Unified Russia, the most dominant political party in the State Duma, Putin could encourage party leaders and Unified Russia members of parliament (MPs) – especially his close friend, ally, Unified Russia co-leader and Speaker of the State Duma, Boris Gryzlov – to initiate impeachment proceedings against Medvedev. Due to the overwhelming majority that Unified Russia enjoys in the State Duma, impeachment proceedings initiated at Putin’s request would easily pass through the lower house of the Federal Assembly. Moreover, it is likely that support for such accusations against Medvedev in the Federation Council would surpass the two-thirds majority vote required to advance the impeachment process to its final stages of consideration in the Supreme and Constitutional Courts.

Stacked with Putin’s judiciary appointees, the Russian Supreme Court undoubtedly would charge Medvedev with treason, or some other comparable high-crime against the Russian state, and promptly remove him from office. To be certain the Supreme Court could portray and deem Medvedev’s effort to resolve the southern Kuriles dispute on terms conflicting with those of Putin as an attempt to undermine the territorial security and integrity of the Russian Federation. Public opinion would reflect and support this sentiment and perspective as a majority of Russians lack confidence in Medvedev’s leadership. Putin loyalists in the
Constitutional Court would confirm that the impeachment process followed accurately and completely the stipulations of the Russian Constitution. As Prime Minister, Putin is the constitutionally designated official next in line of succession to the Russian Presidency and thusly would assume his former post upon Medvedev’s departure.

If Putin did not wish to exercise such excessive institutional restraint on Medvedev, however, he could pursue a more moderate path of stalling legislation that any MP loyal to Medvedev may introduce to the State Duma concerning a resolution to Russia’s territorial dispute with Japan. Putin’s stalling strategy likely would include orchestrating debate on the matter as to suspend the issue in domestic legislative limbo. When taking into consideration the many advantages that Putin has over Medvedev in terms of political and institutional bases for his continued influence in the southern Kuriles dispute, it becomes evident that Medvedev has few options beyond staying Putin’s course in this vital, controversial area of Russian foreign policy if he desires to retain the Russian presidency. As such, the emergence of a Medvedev-Putin split over the southern Kuriles impasse is not likely to occur in the near or distant future.

SIDELINE SUMMITS AT INTERNATIONAL FORA SINCE 2008

Russian policy regarding the southern Kuriles dispute has experienced very little change in the Medvedev era. With the exception of Medvedev allegedly promising to Japanese Prime Minister Taro Aso an “unconventional solution” to the dispute in February 2009, the Russian position has undergone no attempt at modification since Medvedev’s inauguration as Russian president in early May 2008. In fact, Russia’s position and policy on the territorial issue have hardened and become only more conservative during Medvedev’s presidency. Accordingly, there was no substantive progress in Russian-Japanese dialogue over the southern Kuriles from May 2008 through September 2009. The lack of forward movement in this dialogue over the last
two years is a direct consequence of the irreconcilability of Russian and Japanese perspectives on
the territorial dispute that developed and took hold in the upper echelons of both governments in
Putin’s second term as Russian president.

Stylistically, however, the atmosphere in which Medvedev has conducted discussions on
the southern Kuriles with Japanese Prime Ministers Fukuda and Aso has become more
conciliatory and convivial than that which existed under Putin. This distinction in style between
Medvedev and Putin is largely attributable to the former’s non-military, political and academic
experiential background – a background decidedly different from that of Putin. Unlike his
mentor, Putin, Medvedev is not a Cold Warrior. Furthermore, Medvedev is the first Russian
president who does not espouse an almost exclusively Soviet-style worldview. Indeed,
Medvedev’s Japanese counterparts prefer his warmer, more personable style to Putin’s shrewder
diplomatic demeanor. Although noteworthy, the actual impact of the change in diplomatic
style from Putin to Medvedev has been minimal if not non-existent. In the last two years, this
distinction has facilitated neither progress nor fundamental change in Russian-Japanese dialogue
over the southern Kuriles dispute.

Coupled with the continued dominance of Putin’s prerogative in the southern Kuriles
dispute in the Medvedev era, the inertia in this sphere of Russian-Japanese relations does not
suggest a pressing need for commentary on, or descriptive analysis of, the territorial impasse as it
persisted from May 2008 – September 2009. That Medvedev has yet to hold intensive talks on
the matter with a Japanese prime minister in the context of an official, multiple-day state visit
after two years in office further exposes the almost complete lack of activity and remarkable
developments in the area of interaction between Russia and Japan. During his presidency,
Medvedev has met and discussed the southern Kuriles dispute with his Japanese counterparts
only on the sidelines of international forums such as, but not limited to, the annual meetings of APEC, the G8, the UN General Assembly and the G20. On some occasions, these mini-summits lasted as long as two hours. However, the Russian and Japanese leaders rarely, if ever, addressed the issue of the southern Kuriles for more than 60 minutes. The brevity of these meetings further discourages the examination of the territorial dispute in the Medvedev era. Nevertheless, an assessment of Medvedev’s dialogue with Japanese Prime Ministers Fukuda and Aso regarding the southern Kuriles dispute from May 2008 – September 2009 remains necessary and important.

The southern Kuriles dispute remains the most contentious and potentially destabilizing issue in Russian-Japanese relations. That it remains the principal obstacle to the signing of a post-World War II peace treaty, and essentially perpetuates a de jure state of Russian-Japanese war, is testament to the dispute’s continued ability to foment tension, discord and even military conflict between Russia and Japan in the new millennium. As great powers in the international community, a renewal of conventional Russian-Japanese military confrontation over the southern Kuriles would result in significant bilateral, regional and global consequences. Historically, armed conflict between Russia and Japan has almost always immediately taken on a regional, if not international, dimension that has threatened to precipitate a larger, more destructive military confrontation comprising Russia, Japan, the U.S., Europe and China. Any such conflict in the Medvedev era undoubtedly would follow this established trend.

Beyond inflicting substantial material and human loss on the local communities of the Russian Far East and Hokkaido, as well as perhaps northern Honshu, resumed military competition over Iturup, Kunashir, Shikotan and the Habomai Islets would disrupt and damage Northeast Asian and international markets and economic exchange as well as potentially incite renewed confrontation in the region between China and Taiwan, North Korea and South Korea,
and Japan and China over their own unresolved territorial disputes. Due to far-reaching and potentially catastrophic impact and strategic implications of such an occurrence, it remains crucial to continue observing and assessing the status of the southern Kuriles dispute in the Medvedev era – despite the relative absence of significant or remarkable activity and progress in this pivotal sphere of Russian-Japanese relations since May 2008. Accordingly, this section describes briefly, but in sufficient detail, the stagnation of the Russian-Japanese dialogue over the southern Kuriles dispute from May 2008 – September 2009.

The Medvedev-Fukuda July 2008 G8 Hokkaido Sideline Summit

The presidential and prime ministerial tenures of Medvedev and Yasuo Fukuda, respectively, coincided for only five months – from the time of Medvedev’s inauguration as Russian President in early May 2008 until Fukuda’s resignation in late September 2008. Consequently, the two leaders did not have sufficient time to make any real progress toward a resolution of the southern Kuriles dispute. That Medvedev and Fukuda managed to meet even once over this short period of time on the sidelines of the July 2008 G8 Hokkaido summit was an impressive feat. In many respects, the occurrence of this sideline summit was attributable to the limited contact between Medvedev and Fukuda that transpired prior to the G8 Annual Summit in Hokkaido, Japan in early July 2008. The limited interpersonal contact that preceded the two leaders’ sideline summit comprised a congratulatory phone call from Fukuda to Medvedev on the occasion of the latter’s victory in the Russian presidential election in early March 2008, and a follow-up face-to-face meeting with Medvedev as Russian president-elect in late April 2008 on the occasion of Fukuda’s unofficial visit to Moscow to hold talks with President Vladimir Putin, at Putin’s request, prior to his departure from executive office in early May 2008.
During Medvedev’s telephone conversation with Fukuda in early March 2008, each confirmed to the other his commitment to work toward the complete normalization of Russian-Japanese relations in their lifetimes. Implicit in this mutual pledge was their commitment to resolve the southern Kuriles dispute in their lifetimes as well. This relatively brief treatment of the territorial dispute was the only reference made to the matter in this conversation. In their first face-to-face meeting in late April 2008, President-elect Medvedev and Prime Minister Fukuda renewed the commitment that they had made to one another in their phone conversation nearly two months earlier regarding the normalization of bilateral relations in their lifetimes – a commitment in which the two also alluded to the settlement of the southern Kuriles dispute. Although Medvedev and Fukuda’s affirmation of this previous pledge during their late April 2008 meet-and-greet yielded very little in the way of substantive progress, or fundamental change in either side’s position on the matter, it was nevertheless remarkable because it intimated the Russian and Japanese governments’ willingness to continue working toward a solution to this highly complex issue in a time of economic and political uncertainty in both countries. It was at the late April 2008 talks that Medvedev and Fukuda also confirmed their plans to confer on the sidelines of the upcoming G8 summit in Hokkaido in early July 2008. Upon arriving in Tokyo a few days later, Fukuda remarked that he felt confident in his ability to secure a positive direction in Russian-Japanese relations with Medvedev upon his assumption of the Russian presidency in early May 2008.

The Medvedev-Fukuda mini-summit that occurred on the sidelines of the G8 annual conference in Hokkaido, Japan in early July 2008 constituted Medvedev’s first and only meeting with Fukuda as president of Russia. Despite Fukuda’s reference to Medvedev as Japan’s “high guest” at the Hokkaido G8 summit and their respective expectations of this sideline dialogue, the
leaders’ one-hour, “no-necktie” conversation produced “no significant movement” toward finding a mutually acceptable solution to the southern Kuriles dispute.\textsuperscript{83} That Medvedev and Fukuda established “a better understanding of each other’s positions” on the two matters provided only minimal consolation for those anticipating greater progress on the settlement of the territorial dispute at the leaders’ July 2008 G8 Hokkaido, Japan sideline summit.\textsuperscript{84} Notwithstanding their effort to reconcile Russia and Japan’s perspectives and policies on the southern Kuriles dispute in Hokkaido in early July 2008, Fukuda and Medvedev soon became engaged in more immediate, urgent priorities in domestic and foreign affairs which superseded their interest in resolving the territorial impasse. Medvedev faced a growing economic crisis in Russia and escalating tensions in the Caucasus with Georgia that would eventually foment a five-day war between the two states. Fukuda’s position as prime minister in the summer of 2008 became virtually untenable. As a result, Fukuda became preoccupied with his own political survival, not to mention his own growing economic crisis in Japan. Fukuda eventually stepped down as prime minister of Japan in late September 2008, thus ending the Medvedev-Fukuda era in Russian-Japanese dialogue over the southern Kuriles.

\textit{The Medvedev-Aso Mini-Summit in Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk in February 2009}

On September 24, 2008, Taro Aso replaced Yasuo Fukuda as president of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and prime minister of Japan. Aso was a veteran politician and an influential, high-ranking member in the LDP. After Fukuda had defeated Aso in the LDP election for prime minister in September 2007, Fukuda appointed Aso the secretary-general of the LDP – the second most powerful post in the LDP party organization. Moreover, Aso had held multiple ministerial positions in the Koizumi and Abe administrations. Indeed, his most notable appointments were his consecutive tenures as Japanese foreign minister from October
2005 – August 2007. In his capacity as foreign minister, Aso became particularly proficient in the many intricacies of the southern Kuriles dispute. Aso remained prime minister until late August 2009 at which time he presided over the LDP’s second, yet most resounding, electoral defeat since its formation in 1955 to the opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ). Aso subsequently resigned office in mid-September 2009. Like Abe and Fukuda before him, he served only one year as Prime Minister of Japan before consistently low public approval ratings and dissension within the LDP ranks brought about parliamentary electoral defeat and his resultant departure from office. Unsurprisingly, Aso’s short term as prime minister did not facilitate any substantive progress in Russian-Japanese efforts to resolve the southern Kuriles dispute.

The brevity of Aso’s tenure and a continuously increasing divergence in Russian and Japanese positions on the matter hindered the reconciliation of the two countries’ southern Kuriles policies from late September 2008 – late September 2009. Aso espoused a relatively hawkish stance on the southern Kuriles dispute when compared to his predecessors, Abe and Fukuda. To be certain, Aso’s more conservative personal view on the territorial impasse undermined his and Medvedev’s efforts to resolve this highly contentious issue. Moreover, Medvedev’s continued adherence to the dictates of Article 9 of the 1956 Soviet-Japan Joint Declaration in this regard did not inspire confidence in the two leaders’ ability to make significant forward movement in the normalization of Russian-Japanese relations. Indeed, their categorically-opposed views precluded Medvedev and Aso from creating the conditions in Russian-Japanese relations necessary for the resolution of the southern Kuriles dispute.

Medvedev and Aso convened on four different occasions from September 24, 2008 – September 16, 2009 – each meeting occurred in the form of mini-summits on the sidelines of
international gatherings and none lasted longer than two hours. The first mini-summit took place on the sidelines of the November 2008 APEC conference in Lima, Peru. Although their meeting focused on a variety of bilateral issues, including economic and security relations in Asia-Pacific, the southern Kuriles dispute and peace treaty impasse constituted a significant part of the leaders’ discussions. During their conversation, Aso expressed his interest in normalizing Russian-Japanese relations, yet criticized the Russian side for failing to sufficiently contribute to the realization of this objective. Moreover, Aso noted that the southern Kuriles issue remained a destabilizing element in Asia-Pacific. Medvedev responded that “no unresolvable problems” existed in Russian-Japanese relations and noted that he had no intention to leave the settlement of the territorial and peace treaty issues to future generations. Medvedev then remarked that the “goodwill” of Russian and Japanese leaders would play a dominant role in the resolution of these two issues, thereby confirming the need for friendly personal relations with Aso. Medvedev and Aso further agreed to launch “intensive, political dialogue” between the Russian and Japanese governments at the “leaders’ level”. At the end of the sideline summit, Medvedev reportedly told Aso that he enjoyed “such frank dialogue” and wished to hold it with Aso “quite often.”

The second, and arguably most significant, mini-summit between Medvedev and Aso took place on the sidelines of an international gathering in Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, the capital of Sakhalin Oblast and largest city on Sakhalin Island, for the inauguration of the Sakhalin-2 liquefied natural gas (LNG) pipeline in mid-February 2009 – roughly 60% of Sakhalin-2 LNG is shipped to Japan. That the summit occurred at all is testament to both leaders’ determination to work toward the normalization of Russian-Japanese relations, particularly in respect to the resolution of the southern Kuriles dispute, within their lifetimes. In an act relatively atypical of diplomatic etiquette, Medvedev proposed the meeting to Aso during a telephone conversation in
late January 2009, three weeks prior to the event. Aso gladly accepted the offer and the two leaders agreed to discuss a wide range of issues in the upcoming talks. Although some critics speculated that Aso would not gain much in regard to Russian concessions on the territorial issue, it is likely that Aso made the trip as an important act of political “goodwill” and a personal gesture to Medvedev in hopes to encourage progress on the territorial dispute in the future.

Aso’s trip to Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk in mid-February 2009 was significant because it demonstrated his initial flexibility in regard to the territorial issue. Specifically, it exhibited the manner in which Russian-Japanese cooperation in the economic sphere, in the area of the contested territories of Russia and Japan, can encourage flexibility and cooperation in the political sphere, particularly in regard to the territorial and peace treaty issue. By inviting him to Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, Medvedev was making an equally significant act of political “goodwill” and meaningful personal gesture to Aso. Essentially, Medvedev also exhibited the manner in which Russian-Japanese economic cooperation in disputed areas can encourage Russian flexibility in the political sphere, particularly in regard to the southern Kuriles issue.

After the inauguration of the Sakhalin II LNG pipeline, Medvedev and Aso met for approximately 90 minutes. This mini-summit, albeit brief, was nevertheless symbolically and substantively meaningful. Medvedev’s willingness to hold talks with Aso for one-and-a-half hours, given the number of other important foreign dignitaries and business leaders in attendance, was particularly indicative of his desire to make forward progress on the southern Kuriles dispute with Aso. The fact that Medvedev and Aso spent half of this time discussing the southern Kuriles dispute added substance to the conversation, beyond matters of mutual Russian-Japanese economic interest, which Aso undoubtedly and enthusiastically welcomed. That Medvedev also utilized this mini-summit as the venue at which to announce his intention to
pursue the resolution of the territorial issues with a “new, original and nonstandard approach”
attested to the level of trust and type of personal relationship that he sought to establish with
Aso. Although Medvedev did not specify as to the details or timeline for implementation of
this new approach, Aso was nevertheless highly receptive to this proposal and subsequently
endorsed this seemingly new direction in Russian policy to the long-festering territorial dispute.

Like Medvedev, Aso also conveyed his interest at the February 2009 Sakhalin mini-
summit in settling the territorial dispute. In particular, Aso reiterated his past position on the
southern Kuriles dispute that the two sides only will ever settle the issue if politicians, not
bureaucrats, make the necessary decisions as to the “how” and “when” of its resolution. He
confirmed to reporters shortly after his meeting with Medvedev that “no way other than a
decision by politicians” existed to effectively adjudicate the matter. In addition to this
commentary, Aso stated that “the age” had come “for Russia to become a constructive partner in
the Asia-Pacific region.” It is likely that this remark was simultaneously a couched jibe at
Putin’s intransigence on the territorial issue from 2000-2008 and subtle praise for Medvedev’s
seemingly more approachable personal demeanor and inclination to consider “new, original and
nonstandard” formulas for the settlement of the southern Kuriles impasse. Notwithstanding the
historic nature of Aso’s visit to Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk in February 2009, this mini-summit, like so
many of its predecessors, yielded little, if any, substantive forward progress in the Russian-
Japanese effort to finally settle the territorial dispute. Brief meetings between Medvedev and
Aso on the sidelines of the April 2009 G20 and July 2009 L’Aquila, Italy conferences produced
equally unremarkable developments in the southern Kuriles impasse.
CONCLUSION

This chapter confirmed that Russian policy toward its territorial dispute with Japan over ownership of the southern Kuriles from 2000-2010 experienced a reversion to a Soviet-era perspective, position and approach. It further indicated the lack of any substantive progress in Russian-Japanese efforts to resolve the territorial dispute as it persisted in the Putin-Medvedev era – as well as the fact that Medvedev’s perspective and policy on this matter exhibits little, if any, difference from that of Putin. From a theoretical standpoint, this chapter verified that continued dialogue between countries over unresolved, potentially conflict-inducing territorial disputes, remains crucial to the avoidance of military confrontation among states brought on by threat perception and prisoner’s-dilemma-like scenarios in international relations. Further critical to the prevention or diffusion of Russian-Japanese conflict over the southern Kuriles has been the increasingly intensive economic interconnectedness that has been developing between the two countries from 2000-2010. This development intimates the growing utility of the neoliberal paradigm in explaining and accounting for Russian relations with Japan during this period. The evidence and theoretical implications of this examination of Russian-Japanese summitry and continuity in Russian policy regarding the Southern Kuriles from Putin to Medvedev suggest that the former’s largely neorealist prerogative will remain dominant in Russian policy on this matter and thusly continue to frustrate its resolution.
NOTES


7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Kimura, The Kurillian Knot, pp. 119, 120.

10 Ibid., p. 74; “Editorial/Leadership Needed in Isles Dispute,” The Daily Yomiuri, March 26, 2001. During and after the signing of the 1956 Soviet-Japan Joint Declaration, as well as throughout the Cold War, the Japanese government’s interpretation of the Joint Declaration inferred Soviet recognition of the Japanese sovereignty over Shikotan Island and the Habomai Islets. Moreover, the Japanese also believed that the 1956 Joint Declaration inferred that the transfer of Kunashir and Iturup Islands would take place during peace treaty negotiations. It is logical to extrapolate that the Japanese government would arrive at a similar conclusion after Putin’s endorsement of the 1956 Soviet-Japan Joint Declaration in its entirety.

11 Kimura, The Kurillian Knot, p. 121.

12 Ibid., pp. 118, 119.

13 Ibid., p. 125.


15 Ibid.

Between the January 2003 Moscow summit and the November 2005 Tokyo summit Putin’s position on the southern Kuriles’ and peace treaty issues had become increasingly conservative. The “hardening” of Putin’s stance on these matters, as discussed in Radyuhin’s article resulted in similar developments on the Japanese side. Putin’s and Koizumi’s growing conservatism in regard to the territorial and peace treaty issues in this interim also proved a function of each leader’s efforts to gain popularity by stoking nationalist sentiment over many different issues, of which the southern Kuriles’ dispute was one.


“Japan Dismisses Russian President’s Comments on Disputed Islands,” Kyodo News Service, September 28, 2005.


Ibid.


Ibid; Kimura, The Kurillian Knot, p. 139.

Radyuhin, “Putin Hardens Stand on Disputed Islands,” The Hindu, November 22, 2005.


Ibid.

Since becoming Russian President, Medvedev, his advisors, high-ranking Russian legislators, and their Japanese counterparts have consistently emphasized the need to resolve the southern Kuriles issue within “their generation”. (See “Japan-Russia Summit Meeting (in Sakhalin): Overview,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan Website, February 18, 2009, accessed November 9, 2009. Retrieved from http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/russia/summit0902.html; “Japan, Russia Agree to Try Solving Dispute Over Island Ownership,” Kyodo News Agency, September 24, 2009; Naotaka Fujita, “Hatoyama: It’s Time to Break Deadlock with Russia on Isles,” The Asahi Shimbun, September 25, 2009.) Given his relatively young age of forty-four, it is likely that Medvedev’s conception of “generation” could very well encompass the next 25-30 years whereas his far older Japanese counterparts’ conception of “generation” could entail only the next 10-15 years. Despite Medvedev’s apparent enthusiasm to resolve the territorial issue, the two governments’ do not seem poised to reconcile their mutually exclusive perspectives and policies on the matter at any time in the near future.

Since becoming Russian President, Medvedev, his advisors, high-ranking Russian legislators, and their Japanese counterparts have consistently emphasized the need to resolve the southern Kuriles issue within “their generation”. (See “Japan-Russia Summit Meeting (in Sakhalin): Overview,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan Website, February 18, 2009, accessed November 9, 2009. Retrieved from http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/russia/summit0902.html; “Japan, Russia Agree to Try Solving Dispute Over Island Ownership,” Kyodo News Agency, September 24, 2009; Naotaka Fujita, “Hatoyama: It’s Time to Break Deadlock with Russia on Isles,” The Asahi Shimbun, September 25, 2009.) Given his relatively young age of forty-four, it is likely that Medvedev’s conception of “generation” could very well encompass the next 25-30 years whereas his far older Japanese counterparts’ conception of “generation” could entail only the next 10-15 years. Despite Medvedev’s apparent enthusiasm to resolve the territorial issue, the two governments’ do not seem poised to reconcile their mutually exclusive perspectives and policies on the matter at any time in the near future.


“Japan’s PM Aso to Make First Visit to Sakhalin, Meet Russian Leader,” Kyodo News Agency, February 17, 2009.


94 “Japan-Russia Summit Meeting (in Sakhalin) (Overview).” In Regional Affairs: Europe – Russia.


96 Ibid.

CHAPTER 6

RUSSIAN POLITICAL RELATIONS WITH JAPAN FROM 2000-2010
With the exceptions of the territorial and peace treaty issues, Russia’s political relations with Japan expanded significantly from 2000-2010. Indeed, this positive trend in Russian engagement with Japan demonstrated the willingness of each government to cultivate stable political relations with the other. This trend further demonstrated the importance and indispensability of stable political relations with Japan to the Russian government, particularly in regard to its chief interests in Northeast Asia and vis-à-vis Japan: territorial and, to a lesser extent, economic security in the Russian Far East. That political interaction between Russia and Japan in the areas of leadership rapport, implementation of the 2003 Japan-Russia Action Plan, intergovernmental exchange, environmental cooperation and cultural, educational and interpersonal exchange expanded so remarkably in the Putin-Medvedev era attests to the genuine desire of Russian and Japanese political leaders to maintain myriad, open avenues for, and methods of, communication.

Two principal reasons exist for maintaining these various means of open, frequent communication between the two governments. First, Russian and Japanese leaders seek to discourage the two countries’ historical distrust and perceptions of one another as a potential threat so as to prevent and avoid iterations and recurrences of competition and confrontation over hypersensitive neorealist issues such as ownership of the southern Kuriles and access to Siberia’s natural resources. Second, Russian and Japanese leaders seek to create a firm basis for long-term trust and cooperation between the two countries as a mutually beneficial reward in itself, as well as to resolve finally the territorial and peace treaty impasses. Accordingly, this chapter confirms the impressive expansion of Russia’s political relations with Japan from 2000-2010 and the increasing utility of the neorealist and neoliberal paradigms in explaining this sphere of bilateral ties over the past decade. It further confirms that the intensive, sustained dialogue and
cooperation that have emerged around the five areas of interaction mentioned above hold great promise for the avoidance of destructive prisoner’s-dilemma-like scenarios and the eventual normalization of Russian-Japanese relations.

**PERSONAL RAPPORT BETWEEN RUSSIAN AND JAPANESE POLITICAL LEADERS**

Personal rapport between Russian and Japanese leaders has a positive impact on Russian-Japanese relations. In the absence of effective institutional mechanisms and guidelines for regular, bilateral interaction, personal rapport between Russian and Japanese leaders has served as the political anchor, and, at times, catalyst, for progress in Russian-Japanese relations. To a great extent, personal rapport between Russian and Japanese national political executives accounts for the expansion of Russian-Japanese cooperation in multiple areas, particularly in the economic sphere, despite the ongoing impasse over the southern Kuriles’ and peace treaty issues. Indeed, the friendship of former Russian President Boris Yeltsin and former Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto set the precedent for personal rapport between Russian and Japanese political leaders in Russian-Japanese relations. Specifically, the Yeltsin-Hashimoto relationship facilitated impressive breakthroughs in Russian-Japanese economic and political cooperation in a relatively short period of time – thus demonstrating to future Russian and Japanese leaders the importance of cultivating close personal ties with their respective counterparts.

**FACTORS UNDERMINING THE DEVELOPMENT OF LEADERSHIP RAPPORT FROM APRIL 2001-SEPTEMBER 2009**

Since Yeltsin’s resignation in late December 1999, Russian and Japanese leaders have emulated the Yeltsin-Hashimoto rapport. With the exception of Putin’s strong personal
relationship with former Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori from April 2000 – April 2001, however, Russian and Japanese leaders have not been able to establish a level of rapport comparable to, or as effective as, that of Yeltsin and Hashimoto. Three factors undermined the development of strong personal rapport between Russian and Japanese leaders from April 2001–September 2009. First, the irregularity and brevity of Japanese prime ministerial tenures precluded the cultivation of long-term friendships and personal rapport between Russian and Japanese leaders. Second, an increasing divergence in Russian and Japanese government positions on the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues emerged and hardened during the Putin-Koizumi period. By September 2006, Russian and Japanese government positions on these issues had become virtually irreconcilable. Indeed, they have persisted as such into the Medvedev era. Third, Russian economic recovery and growth from 2001–2008 diminished the Russian government’s dependence on Japanese financial assistance. Consequently, economic need no longer dictated Russian flexibility on the southern Kuriles dispute and, as such, a strong personal relationship with Koizumi was likely not a priority for Putin. The latter two factors account for the lack of personal rapport between Koizumi and Putin despite five coinciding years in office from April 2001–September 2006.

PUTIN AND OBUCHI

Prior to Yeltsin’s abrupt resignation in late December 1999, the Japanese government expected Yeltsin to visit Japan in early spring 2000. Accordingly, the Japanese government had built a strategy around Yeltsin’s prospective visit in hopes to “facilitate mutually beneficial progress” towards the resolution of the southern Kuriles’ and peace treaty issues. Specifically, the Japanese government sought to capitalize significantly on Yeltsin’s 1997 Krasnoyarsk and 1998 Kawana agreements to “do the utmost to conclude a peace treaty [with Japan] by the end of
Yeltsin’s resignation on December 31, 1999, however, greatly complicated Japan’s objective to settle the territorial and peace treaty issues within the year. Well aware that good personal rapport with the Russian President was critical to the resolution of these two matters, then Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi moved quickly to endear himself to Putin. Obuchi’s immediate purpose in establishing personal rapport with Putin was to hold summit-level talks with Putin prior to the July 2000 G8 Conference Okinawa. At this prospective summit, Obuchi most likely hoped to secure from Putin a pledge to resolve the territorial and peace treaty issues by a specified date. Indeed, one senior Japanese Foreign Ministry official designated Obuchi’s mission to “build a personal relationship with Putin” as an “urgent task.”

Hours after Yeltsin’s resignation Obuchi sent Putin a personal message congratulating him on his appointment as Acting President and encouraging him to continue Yeltsin’s efforts to normalize Russian-Japanese relations by the end of 2000. In a letter sent to Obuchi in late January 2000, Acting President Putin confirmed that relations with Japan remained a priority in Russian foreign policy and expressed his eagerness to continue Yeltsin’s “creative partnership” with Japan. Most, importantly, however, Putin noted that he would “respect and try to carry out all top level agreements” between Russia and Japan established during Yeltsin’s presidency. Moreover, in mid-February 2000 then Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov delivered a personal message from Putin to Obuchi in which Putin reiterated the “priority importance” of Russia’s continued dialogue with Japan and endorsed Obuchi’s appeal for the development of bilateral cooperation in all areas. After having delivered Putin’s message to Obuchi, Ivanov remarked that Putin aspired to “follow the existing policy lines to establish friendly relationships with Japan that were initiated under the Yeltsin administration.”
Obuchi’s personal overtures to Putin increased after he won the Russian Presidential election in late March 2000. On the night of Putin’s election victory on March 26, 2000, Obuchi released a statement on behalf of the Japanese government welcoming Putin’s achievement. The statement further expressed Obuchi’s commitment to comprehensive cooperation with Putin’s government, especially in regard to resolving the territorial and peace treaty issues. At a press conference the next day, Obuchi stated his desire for “active contacts” with Putin and emphasized that he would gladly visit Russia in the event that Putin could not first visit Japan. Moreover, according to the Japanese Foreign Ministry, Obuchi had a ten-minute phone conversation with Putin on the night of March 27, 2000 during which he encouraged Putin to meet for summit-level talks as soon as possible. Putin replied that the “final goal” of the Russian government was the “complete normalization” of Russian-Japanese relations. Putin also noted that his advisors were studying “the possibility of summit talks as well as a visit to Japan”. Before Putin could meet with Obuchi and begin cultivating good personal relations in earnest, however, Obuchi suffered a massive stroke on April 1, 2000 and died a roughly a month later.

PUTIN AND MORI

After Obuchi’s stroke in early April 2000, five members of the LDP executive secretly convened and appointed then LDP member Yoshiro Mori as Obuchi’s successor. Breaking with Japanese diplomatic protocol, Mori made his first official trip abroad as Prime Minister of Japan to Russia instead of the U.S. The development of personal rapport between Putin and Mori was almost immediate. At the beginning of their meeting on April 30, 2000, Putin acknowledged Mori’s choice to first visit Russia as an important “symbolic” gesture in Russian-Japanese relations. Beyond conveying his appreciation for Japan’s continued support of Russian
economic reforms, Putin offered personal thanks to Mori for the work that his father, Shigeki Mori, a former Japanese prisoner of war interred in Siberia during World War II and former mayor of Neagari, Japan – a city in southwestern Honshu – had done in promoting friendly relations between the Soviet Union and Japan throughout the Cold War. The Soviet prison camp at which Mori’s father had spent his internment was located in a Siberian town named Shelekhov 20 km southwest of Irkutsk. Upon returning to Japan and becoming mayor of Neagari, Mori’s father established sister-city relations with Shelekhov. Mori reportedly moved Putin “to tears” while speaking of his father’s experiences in Shelekhov during and after World War II, particularly in regard to his father’s request to have some of his ashes buried in Shelekhov. Over the course of their four-hour conversation, Putin and Mori reached agreements on a “whole range” of political, economic, and military issues, including the southern Kuriles’ and peace treaty issues. By the end of the meeting, Putin and Mori further agreed to call each other by the familiar forms of their names, Volodya and Yoshi, respectively.¹⁴

After his meeting with Putin in late April 2000, Mori remarked to reporters in a hotel in St. Petersburg that Putin was “very smart and warm-hearted”, yet “a very tough negotiator” with a mind “like a razor blade”. Moreover, Mori admitted that progress on the southern Kuriles’ and peace treaty issues would depend, in great part, on Putin’s ability to use effectively his warm, yet shrewd personality to assert leadership in resolving these two matters. Mori further noted his desire to emulate the Yeltsin-Hashimoto rapport in his budding personal relationship with Putin. In his post-consultation commentary, Putin announced that he was “establishing good personal rapport” with Mori and thanked Mori for his enthusiasm in reciprocating this effort. Putin also expressed his gratitude to Mori for the “constructive” manner in which he approached the discussion the southern Kuriles’ and peace treaty issues.¹⁵
At the beginning of Putin’s first official visit to Japan on September 3, 2000, then Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov observed that Mori’s kind, atypical diplomatic gestures in welcoming Putin to Japan, particularly driving to Tokyo International Airport to meet Putin, accompanying Putin in his motorcade on the way from the airport to Putin’s residence in Tokyo, and spending time with Putin at his Tokyo residence, underscored the “good personal” and “comradely” relationship that had formed between the two leaders. Ivanov further emphasized the friendly atmosphere in which Putin’s visit was taking place created highly favorable conditions for “examining the most difficult problems”, namely the southern Kuriles’ and peace treaty issues. Notwithstanding the positive and friendly nature of the September 2000 Tokyo summit, Putin and Mori did not achieve any substantial progress in settling the territorial and peace treaty impasses. In fact, Putin demonstrated “very little interest” in concluding a Russian-Japanese peace treaty to resolve the southern Kuriles’ dispute. Moreover, Putin acknowledged no legal obligation to honor Yeltsin’s pledges at Krasnoyarsk and Kawana in 1997 and 1998, respectively, to conclude a peace treaty with Japan by the end of 2000. Putin did, however, verbally confirm the “irrevocable legal validity” of Article 9 of the 1956 Soviet-Japan Joint Declaration as the formula governing the Russian-Japanese peace process.  

In late March 2001, Putin and Mori held an unofficial summit in Irkutsk. The March 2001 Irkutsk summit was politically significant to Russian-Japanese relations in two respects. First, Putin confirmed, in writing, the legal supremacy of the 1956 Soviet-Japan Joint Declaration, particularly Article 9, in the adjudication of the Russian-Japanese peace process. Putin and Mori agreed more specifically that Article 9 of the Soviet-Japan Joint Declaration, the provision stipulating the transfer of Shikotan and the Habomai Islets from Russia to Japan only after the conclusion of a bilateral peace treaty, would serve as the starting point for future
negotiations concerning the territorial and peace treaty issues. Second, Putin used the Irkutsk summit as an opportunity to reinforce and expand his friendship with Mori. In this regard, Putin’s selection of Irkutsk as the summit venue was likely premeditated. Given its proximity to Shelekhov, the Russian city with which Mori’s father had a long, rich history and in which Mori’s family had buried some of his father’s ashes, Irkutsk was a particularly significant Russian locale for Mori. During the summit Putin and Mori traveled some 20 km southwest of Irkutsk and paid their respects to the memory of Mori’s father at his grave in the town of Shelekhov. Putin and Mori spent a good deal of time at the gravesite in the company of former and present mayors of Shelekhov who had known Mori’s father well. At this time, Putin observed that the past efforts of Mori’s father to improve Soviet-Japanese relations were “serving the purposes of the present”. 17

The Putin-Mori executive relationship came to an end shortly after the leaders’ unofficial summit at Irkutsk. Mori’s consistently low approval ratings and series of public political gaffes finally caught up to him. Mori subsequently resigned the post of Prime Minister of Japan in early April 2001. Junichiro Koizumi, a more politically and publicly popular LDP official than Mori, replaced Mori as Prime Minister of Japan. Koizumi’s conservative position on the southern Kuriles’ and peace treaty issues quickly undermined the positive atmosphere in Russian-Japanese relations that Mori had established partially with his more flexible views on these two matters. As a result, Mori’s departure from office denied Putin and Mori the opportunity to exercise the full impact of their close personal rapport on Russian-Japanese relations, particularly in regard to the settlement of the territorial and peace treaty impasses. Notwithstanding the brevity of Mori’s tenure, however, his close personal rapport with Putin remains intact and their friendship continues. 18
PUTIN AND KOIZUMI

Executive relations between Putin and Koizumi were more formal than friendly. The two leaders’ conservative, opposing positions on the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues were largely responsible for the less familiar nature of their political relationship. Notwithstanding these differences, however, Putin and Koizumi managed to establish a highly functional executive partnership that greatly benefited both countries from April 2001–September 2006. Indeed, these five and a half years comprised the most expansive period in Russian-Japanese relations in the post-Soviet era. During this period, the Russian and Japanese governments concluded dozens of political, strategic, economic, and military agreements – the most notable and comprehensive of which included the 2003 Japan-Russia Action Plan and twelve bilateral accords signed in November 2005.

Indeed, the Russia-Japan 2003 Plan of Action constituted the most notable bilateral agreement of the Putin-Koizumi era. The Russian and Japanese governments designed the 2003 Plan of Action as a comprehensive approach to resolving the southern Kuriles’ and peace treaty issues. The 2003 Plan of Action therefore provides for and encourages Russian-Japanese cooperation in the following fields: political dialogue, peace treaty negotiations, strategic relations in the international community, trade and economic matters, defense and security, and cultural and interpersonal exchange. By virtue of its scope and innovative approach to the improvement of Russian-Japanese relations, the 2003 Plan of Action is arguably the most important and comprehensive agreement between the Russian and Japanese governments since the end of the Cold War. That the two governments accomplished impressive diplomatic feats such as the 2003 Plan of Action, even as their positions on the unresolved territorial and peace
treaty issues became increasingly divergent, was testament to the effectiveness and highly
functional nature of the Putin-Koizumi relationship.

Excluding the lack of progress on the territorial and peace treaty issues, Russian-Japanese
relations experienced remarkable expansion in all areas, particularly in the economic sphere,
from April 2001 – September 2006. Ultimately, however, increasingly strained overall relations,
as a result of the seemingly irreconcilable divergence in Russian and Japanese positions on the
southern Kuriles’ and peace treaty issues, became the legacy of the Putin-Koizumi era. The
negative legacy of the Putin-Koizumi era has continued to impede the development of strong
personal rapport between Russian and Japanese political executives since late 2006. Regrettably,
the tenures of Koizumi’s successors from the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan have been too
short for Russian or Japanese leaders to attempt to reverse this unfavorable trend in executive
relationships.

PUTIN AND ABE

In late September 2006, Shinzo Abe, Junichiro Koizumi’s heir apparent, became the 57th
Prime Minister of Japan. Soon thereafter, then Russian Ambassador to Japan Aleksandr
Losyukov, commenting on Abe’s extensive experience in Russian-Japanese relations as a cabinet
member in both Mori’s and Koizumi’s prime ministerial administrations, publicly hailed Abe as
a “well-known partner” to Russia. Losyukov added that Abe knew very well “the essence of
Russian-Japanese relations” as a result of his participation in Russian-Japanese territorial and
peace treaty negotiations under his predecessors. Notwithstanding Losyukov’s praise and
expectations, however, Abe’s term as Prime Minister of Japan lasted for only one year.
Combined with the legacy of Koizumi’s considerably hard-line view on the southern Kuriles’
and peace treaty issues, the brevity of Abe’s tenure did not provide him the opportunity to
develop strong personal rapport with then Russian President Putin. Indeed, Putin and Abe only had the opportunity to meet and speak with each other on three occasions – all of which occurred as mini-summits on the sidelines of APEC and G8 conferences. The three Putin-Abe mini-summits took place on the sidelines of the November 2006 Hanoi APEC conference, the June 2007 Germany G8 conference, and the September 2007 Sydney APEC conference.

Putin and Abe established good personal rapport to the extent that it was possible given the limited nature of their executive relationship. In their first meeting in Hanoi in November 2006, the two leaders confirmed their willingness to continue seeking a “mutually acceptable resolution” to the southern Kuriles’ and peace treaty issues. Towards the end of their consultation, Putin praised the contribution of Abe’s late father, Shintaro Abe, former Japanese Foreign Minister from 1982-1986, to the “rebuilding” of Soviet-Japanese relations in the mid-1980’s. Putin further stated his hope that Abe would continue the “family tradition” in this regard. At their second and third mini-summits in Germany and Sydney in June and September 2007, respectively, Putin and Abe discussed the territorial and peace treaty issues, as well as economic cooperation, particularly in Siberia and the Russian Far East. Perhaps the most remarkable Russian-Japanese agreement to come out of the short-lived Putin-Abe era was the “Initiative for Strengthening Japan-Russia Cooperation in Siberia and the Russian Far East” – the provisions of which encouraged further cooperation in the spheres of energy, security, transportation, and trade and investment in these two regions of Russia.22

PUTIN, MEDVEDEV, AND FUKUDA

As a result of mounting personal health issues, political pressure from within the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), and incredibly low public approval ratings, Shinzo Abe stepped down as Prime Minister of Japan in late September 2007. Yasuo Fukuda, a senior ranking member of
the LDP and former Chief Cabinet Secretary during the Mori and Koizumi administrations, replaced Abe as Prime Minister on September 26, 2007. Fukuda’s tenure as Prime Minister of Japan was exceptionally brief. Roughly a year after assuming the post of Prime Minister on September 24, 2008, Fukuda resigned from office amid a series of public political gaffes, crippling legislative deadlock between the Democratic Party Japan (DPJ)-dominated upper and LDP-dominated lower houses of the National Diet, and particularly low approval ratings.

Like Abe, the brevity of Fukuda’s tenure and the ever-increasing divergence in the two countries’ positions on the southern Kuirles’ and peace treaty issues did not provide an opportunity for the development of strong personal rapport between Japanese and Russian leaders. Unlike Abe, however, Fukuda encountered greater difficulty in forging close personal relations with his Russian counterpart because his term as Prime Minister overlapped with the last seven and first five months of Putin’s and Medvedev’s presidencies, respectively. Indeed, the transition of presidential power in Russia and Fukuda’s short-lived tenure as Prime Minister of Japan greatly limited the prospects of Fukuda establishing strong personal rapport with either Putin or Medvedev. Moreover, Fukuda likely found himself in a more demanding position than Abe in regard to cultivating a friendship with his Russian counterpart, particularly when Medvedev became President, because he had to put forth efforts to establish and maintain close executive relations with both newly-elected Russian Prime Minister Putin and President Medvedev.

Notwithstanding the institutional complexity of the Putin-Medvedev-Fukuda executive triangle, the three leaders established good personal rapport to the extent that it was possible, given the limited nature and duration of their political relationships. In mid-October 2007, Putin and Fukuda held a ten-minute phone conversation in which Putin expressed his interest in
discussing directly with Fukuda “every important issue” in Russian-Japanese relations. The “important” issues included the southern Kuriles’ dispute, the peace treaty impasse, and bilateral trade and economic cooperation in Siberia and the Russian Far East, particularly in regard to energy and transportation infrastructure. Due to more pressing matters in domestic and foreign policy, however, Putin and Fukuda did not have the opportunity to directly discuss these issues with one another. Fukuda paid an unofficial visit to Moscow in late April 2008 – his first and only as Prime Minister of Japan. In the interim between Fukuda’s phone conversation with Putin in mid-October 2007 and his unofficial visit to Moscow in late April 2008, Russian-Japanese relations expanded impressively in all areas, excepting of course in the territorial dispute and peace treaty spheres. The more notable accomplishments in Russian-Japanese relations over this short period included the opening of a Toyota car manufacturing factory in St. Petersburg in December 2007 (Nissan and Suzuki were also constructing, but had yet to open plants in St. Petersburg at this time as well), an agreement on a joint project between Japanese and Russian oil companies to explore new oil fields in the Russian Far East in early April 2008, the near completion and signing of a Russia-Japan nuclear cooperation pact, and several consultative meetings between Russian and Japanese Foreign Ministers Sergey Lavrov and Masahiko Komura, respectively, concerning the continued implementation of the 2003 Plan of Action and Fukuda’s visit to Moscow in late April 2008.

Fukuda’s unofficial visit to Moscow from April 25-27, 2008, was arguably the most important political exchange between the Russian and Japanese governments during the Putin-Medvedev-Fukuda era. Fukuda’s visit to Moscow in late April 2008 was long in the making. Indeed, then President Putin expressed his desire to meet and hold talks with Fukuda shortly after he became Prime Minister of Japan on September 26, 2007. Putin’s and Fukuda’s friendships
with former Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori played an important role in laying the groundwork for Fukuda’s visit to Moscow in late April 2008. Fukuda, Mori’s former Chief Cabinet Secretary from April 2000-April 2001 and with whom Mori had a long personal and professional history, asked Mori to hand Putin a personal letter when he visited Russia in December 2007.  

In the letter, Fukuda conveyed his interest in stepping up efforts to resolve the territorial and peace treaty issues as well as expand Russian-Japanese relations in a broad range of areas of cooperation. Upon receiving Fukuda’s letter and meeting with Mori in Moscow in December 2007, Putin expressed his “strong hope” of meeting Fukuda directly before leaving office in May 2008 in order to facilitate a “breakthrough on stalled negotiations” over the southern Kuriles’ and peace treaty issues. In early February 2008, a month prior to the Russian Presidential election, Putin sent a personal letter in response to Fukuda’s earlier message in which he emphasized his shared desire to “resolve promptly” the southern Kuriles’ and peace treaty issues. Putin further requested that Fukuda visit Moscow in April 2008. A Japanese Foreign Ministry official commented that Russian Presidential requests to meet Japanese Prime Ministers were “extremely rare”.

Fukuda’s visit to Russia from April 25-27, 2008, was politically significant to Russian-Japanese relations for a number of reasons. First, Fukuda visited Moscow when it was by no means in his interest to leave Japan given the increasing precariousness of his tenure as Prime Minister. Second, Fukuda forwent his previously scheduled tour of Europe during which he planned to meet with leaders in Britain, Germany, France, and Russia to visit only Russia. That Fukuda traveled only to Russia instead of all four countries was doubly noteworthy. Fukuda’s trip to Moscow was the first time a Japanese Prime Minister had visited Russia since Koizumi in
early May 2005. Moreover, Russia was the only other member of the G8 to which Fukuda traveled prior to the G8 summit in Hokkaido in July 2008 besides the U.S. Third, Fukuda’s meetings with Putin and Medvedev helped set the basis for transitional Russian-Japanese relations with Putin and Medvedev. Fourth, in meeting with Putin and Medvedev at this time, Fukuda thought he was beginning to establish personal rapport with the two Russian leaders that would eventually cultivate the trust and cooperation necessary to settle the territorial and peace treaty issues.

Indeed, the main purpose of Fukuda’s trip to Russia in late April 2008 was to initiate the development of strong personal rapport with Putin and Medvedev. Fukuda’s primary focus in this regard, however, was the development of a solid friendship with Putin as he would remain the dominant figure in Russian politics even after stepping down as the President of Russia and would continue in the powerful position of Prime Minister after exiting the presidency. Fukuda further sought to establish a “personal relationship” with Putin while Putin was still President so that he could carry the “bond of trust” over to Medvedev’s administration. Moreover, Fukuda’s objective in cultivating “good personal ties and mutual trust” with Putin, and to a lesser extent Medvedev, was to “build momentum for top-level dialogue” and “strong economic ties” in the future. In addition, Fukuda noted that it was crucial for Japanese and Russian leaders, in general, to develop strong personal rapport so that they could express to one another their “frank opinions” on all bilateral matters, especially the southern Kuriles’ and peace treaty issues.

In order to create a warmer, friendlier environment for their meeting, Putin opted, rather suddenly, for a change of venue from the Kremlin to one of the presidential residences in “a leafy suburb” of Moscow. Putin’s last-minute change of venue was personally and politically significant in that it marked the first time in post-Soviet Russian-Japanese relations that a
Russian President had invited a Japanese Prime Minister to a Russian Presidential residence. In keeping with the air of hospitality that Putin had provided, Fukuda smiled at Putin in the beginning of the meeting and stated that he had kept his “promise” to meet with Putin while he was still the President of Russia. Fukuda also made it a point to keep the discussion of the territorial and peace treaty impasses “low key” to avoid jeopardizing his efforts to cultivate good personal relations with Putin. Unsurprisingly, the talks between Putin and Fukuda did not produce a breakthrough in negotiations over the territorial and peace treaty issues. Nevertheless, the two leaders agreed to assign “fresh directives” to their respective governments so as to expedite the resolution of these two matters and raise bilateral relations to “the highest level”. Beyond the territorial dispute and peace treaty impasse, however, Putin and Fukuda addressed a number of mutual interests and concerns in economic and strategic relations, ranging from the development of Russian Far Eastern energy resources to North Korea’s nuclear program.

After his meeting with Putin, Fukuda then visited Russian President-elect Dmitry Medvedev in his personal residence in another Moscow suburb. Essentially, the Fukuda-Medvedev consultation in late April 2008 was little more than a meet-and-greet. The conversation was light and friendly. Medvedev expressed that he was “pleased to meet” Fukuda, as well as to have the opportunity to get to know him. Medvedev further thanked Fukuda for his congratulatory letter and phone call after he had won the Russian Presidential election almost two months earlier. At the same time, Fukuda and Medvedev renewed their pledge to one another, made during their telephone conversation in March, to continue working towards the complete normalization of Russian-Japanese relations in their lifetimes. The two also confirmed their plans to confer on the sidelines of the upcoming G8 summit in Hokkaido in early July 2008. Upon arriving in Tokyo a few days later, Fukuda remarked that he felt positive in his
ability to secure a positive direction in Russian-Japanese relations with both Putin and Medvedev.39

Medvedev’s first and only meeting with Fukuda as President of Russia occurred on the sidelines of the G8 annual summit in Hokkaido in early July 2008, roughly two months after Fukuda had spoken with then Russian President-elect Medvedev at his residence in Moscow in late April of the same year. Although the two leaders made “no significant movement” towards finding a mutually acceptable solution to the territorial and peace treaty issues, they did establish “a better understanding of each other’s positions” on the two matters.40 The one-hour, “no-necktie” conversation between Fukuda and Medvedev, in which the Fukuda referred to Medvedev as the “high guest” at the Hokkaido G8 summit, however, did not focus exclusively on the territorial and peace treaty issues.41 Indeed, Fukuda and Medvedev agreed to “enhance political exchanges at all levels”, more assertively protect the marine environment of the waters surrounding the southern Kuriles as well as the Sea of Okhotsk in general by means of an integrated Russian-Japanese database on the ecosystems in these locales, and curb transnational crime and international terrorism.42 The two leaders sought to realize the latter objective by signing a bilateral treaty that would allow Japanese and Russian authorities to circumvent diplomatic and bureaucratic obstacles when exchanging information in criminal investigations involving the security interests of the other country.43

Notwithstanding their efforts to establish a personal and working relationship in Moscow and Hokkaido in late April and early July 2008, respectively, Fukuda and Medvedev would soon become engaged in addressing more immediate, urgent priorities which superseded their foreign policy interests vis-à-vis each other. Medvedev faced a growing economic crisis in Russia and escalating tensions in the Caucasus with Georgia that would eventually foment a five-day war
between the two states. Fukuda’s position as Prime Minister in the summer of 2008 was virtually untenable. Consequently, Fukuda was preoccupied with his own political survival, not to mention his own growing economic crisis in Japan. Fukuda eventually stepped down as Prime Minister of Japan in late September 2008, thus ending the Putin-Medvedev-Fukuda era in Russian-Japanese relations.

**MEDVEDEV AND ASO**

On September 24, 2008, Taro Aso replaced Yasuo Fukuda as president of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and prime minister of Japan. Aso was a veteran politician and an influential, high-ranking member in the LDP. After Fukuda had defeated Aso in the LDP election for prime minister in September 2007, Fukuda appointed Aso the secretary-general of the LDP – the second most powerful post in the LDP party organization. Moreover, Aso had held multiple ministerial positions in the Koizumi and Abe administrations. Indeed, his most notable appointments were his consecutive tenures as Japanese foreign minister from October 2005 – August 2007. Upon taking office in late September 2008, Aso initially enjoyed an impressive approval rating of 48.6%.

In a manner similar to his two most immediate predecessors, however, Aso’s public approval ratings dropped precipitously only months after he assumed office. By late February 2009 only 14% of the Japanese public approved of Aso’s performance as Prime Minister. The statistic improved minimally to approximately 20% over the next few months. It remained as such until late August 2009 at which time Aso presided over the LDP’s second, yet most resounding, electoral defeat since its formation in 1955 to the opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ).

Aso resigned office in mid-September 2009. Opposition leader and DPJ co-founder, Yukio Hatoyama, replaced him. Like Abe and Fukuda before him, Aso served only one year as
prime minister of Japan before consistently low public approval ratings and dissension within the LDP ranks brought about parliamentary electoral defeat and his subsequent resignation from office. The LDP’s defeat was largely attributable to Aso’s several public political gaffes and poor management of Japan’s worsening economic crisis⁴⁶ – a localized effect of the severe global economic downturn. Unsurprisingly, Aso’s short term as prime minister did not impact the cultivation of personal rapport between Aso and Medvedev in a particularly positive manner.

The brevity of Aso’s tenure, the continuously increasing divergence in Russian and Japanese positions on the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues, and the urgency of Russian and Japanese deteriorating economic situations, hindered the development of a significant friendship between Medvedev and Aso. Moreover, Aso adhered to a relatively hawkish stance on the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues when compared to Abe and Fukuda. As a result, Aso’s more conservative personal view on the most contentious issue in Russian-Japanese relations further undermined his efforts to establish good personal relations with Medvedev. That Medvedev continued to adhere to the dictates of Article 9 of the 1956 Soviet-Japan Joint Declaration in this regard, however, did not encourage amicable personal relations with Aso either. Notwithstanding either their categorically-opposed views on the southern Kuriles or the precariousness of their respective countries’ economic circumstances, Medvedev and Aso made a genuine effort, to the extent that it was possible in the time given, to develop good rapport with one another.

Beyond the continuing disputes over the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues, diplomatic precedent for good personal relations between Aso and Medvedev certainly existed. Indeed, Aso’s long career in Japanese government and politics accounted for most of this pretext. First, Aso’s tenure as Japanese foreign minister afforded him valuable personal and professional
experience in all areas of Russian-Japanese relations, including the increasingly important and expanding sphere of bilateral economic cooperation. Second, Aso knew and had previously worked with many other high-ranking officials, most notably Prime Minister Putin and Foreign Minister Lavrov, in the Russian foreign policymaking community. Third, and perhaps most importantly, Aso was particularly proficient in regard to the many intricacies of the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues. For his part, Medvedev enjoyed Putin’s patronage, who remained in good personal standing with former Japanese Prime Ministers Mori, Koizumi and Abe, and also had developed a familiar acquaintance with Aso’s good friend and predecessor Yasuo Fukuda. Additionally, Medvedev’s non-KGB professional past created a preconception for Aso of Medvedev as a warmer, more welcoming personality and counterpart than Putin.

Although Medvedev and Aso convened on four different occasions from September 24, 2008 – September 16, 2009, each meeting occurred in the form of mini-summits on the sidelines of international gatherings and none lasted longer than two hours. Nevertheless, Medvedev and Aso interacted well with one another, discussed all areas of Russian-Japanese relations and came to a number of tentative, yet meaningful, agreements on several different issues concerning both governments. Furthermore, Aso’s May 2009 summit with Prime Minister Putin compensated for the lack of an official executive visit and summit between Medvedev and Aso. In many ways, Aso’s summit with Putin in May 2009 was equally, if not more, important than one with Medvedev because it afforded Aso an opportunity to begin establishing stronger personal rapport with the most powerful political figure in Russia. Even so, Aso made it a priority to meet with Medvedev when and where possible to discuss the more pressing matters in Russian-Japanese relations, particularly the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues.
The November 2008 APEC Conference - Lima, Peru

The first mini-summit between Medvedev and Aso took place on the sidelines of the November 2008 APEC conference in Lima, Peru. Although their meeting focused on a variety of bilateral issues, including economic and security relations in Asia-Pacific, the southern Kuriles dispute and peace treaty impasse constituted a significant part of the leaders’ discussions. During their conversation, Aso expressed his interest in normalizing Russian-Japanese relations, yet criticized the Russian side for failing to sufficiently contribute to the realization of this objective. Moreover, Aso noted that the southern Kuriles issue remained a destabilizing element in Asia-Pacific. Medvedev responded that “no unresolvable problems” existed in Russian-Japanese relations and noted that he had no intention to leave the settlement of the territorial and peace treaty issues to future generations. Medvedev then remarked that the “goodwill” of Russian and Japanese leaders would play a dominant role in the resolution of these two issues, thereby confirming the need for friendly personal relations with Aso. Medvedev and Aso further agreed to launch “intensive, political dialogue” between the Russian and Japanese governments at the “leaders’ level.” At the end of the sideline summit, Medvedev reportedly told Aso that he enjoyed “such frank dialogue” and wished to hold it with Aso “quite often.” Aso further added to the amicable nature of their encounter by presenting Medvedev with a Japanese toy of which he knew Medvedev’s son was fond.

The February 2009 Sakhalin-2 LNG Pipeline Inauguration - Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, Russia

The second mini-summit between Medvedev and Aso took place on the sidelines of an international gathering in Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, the capital of Sakhalin Oblast and largest city on Sakhalin Island, for the inauguration of the Sakhalin-2 LNG pipeline in mid-February 2009 –
roughly 60% of Sakhalin-2 LNG is shipped to Japan. That the summit occurred at all is testament to both leaders’ determination to establish strong personal rapport and work toward the normalization of Russian-Japanese relations within their lifetimes. In an act relatively atypical of diplomatic etiquette, Medvedev proposed the meeting to Aso during a telephone conversation in late January 2009, three weeks prior to the event. Aso gladly accepted the offer and the two leaders agreed to discuss a wide range of issues in the upcoming talks. Although some critics speculated that Aso would not gain much in regard to Russian concessions on the territorial or peace treaty issues, it is likely that Aso made the trip as an important act of political “goodwill” and a personal gesture to Medvedev.\textsuperscript{51}

Indeed, Aso’s trip to Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk in mid-February 2009 was significant for four reasons. First, Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk was formerly named Toyohara and served as the capital city of Japanese southern Sakhalin, Karafuto Prefecture, from 1908-1945. Aso was visiting the territory that Imperial Japan had gained from Czarist Russia as a result of the 1905 Treaty of Portsmouth – the very territory that the Soviets had, according to the Japanese, illegally expropriated from Japan after World War II. The Japanese had never officially recognized Soviet or Russian sovereignty over southern Sakhalin or the Kurile Archipelago after World War II and consistently question Russian claims to both sets of maritime territory.\textsuperscript{52} Aso’s attendance of the Sakhalin-2 LNG pipeline inauguration marked the first time since the end of World War II that a Japanese prime minister had visited southern Sakhalin and Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk.\textsuperscript{53}

Second, in visiting Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, Aso was essentially acknowledging de facto Russian sovereignty over southern Sakhalin. This was indeed a bold political act for any Japanese prime minister because the loss of southern Sakhalin, although not nearly as immediately regrettable as the southern Kuriles, remained a painful reminder to the Japanese of
Soviet transgressions toward their country after World War II. Aso therefore risked the Japanese public interpreting his presence on the island as implicit recognition of Russian sovereignty over southern Sakhalin and the Kurile Archipelago. Aso also risked criticism from opponents and allies in Japanese politics that traveling to southern Sakhalin would provide Russia an opportunity to depict Aso’s trip there as de facto Japanese acknowledgement of Russian sovereignty over disputed maritime territories. In fact, the Japanese government asserted in early March 2009 – only two weeks after the Medvedev-Aso talks on Sakhalin – that Aso’s visit to the island and the opening of a Japanese consulate in the island’s capital, Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, had no legal bearing as to whether south Sakhalin and the Kurile Archipelago belonged to Russia. That Aso was willing to hold quasi-official talks with the Russian president in southern Sakhalin, at the provincial Russian government office on the island, knowing the potential domestic political consequences of such an act nevertheless demonstrated a particularly friendly personal gesture on Aso’s behalf.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, Aso’s trip to Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk in mid-February 2009 was significant because it demonstrated Aso’s initial flexibility in regard to the territorial and peace treaty issues. Moreover, on a larger scale, Aso’s visit to southern Sakhalin exhibited the manner in which Russian-Japanese cooperation in the economic sphere, in the area of the contested territories of Russia and Japan, can encourage flexibility and cooperation in the political sphere, particularly in regard to the territorial and peace treaty issues.

Fourth, by inviting him to Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, Medvedev was making an equally significant act of political “goodwill” and meaningful personal gesture to Aso. Indeed, Aso’s presence on southern Sakhalin constituted a relatively risky political maneuver on Medvedev’s part. The Russian public could well have interpreted Medvedev’s invitation of Aso to Yuzhno-
Sakhalinsk as some kind of Russian concession to the Japanese on the territorial issue. When former Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi requested his cabinet to consider drafting a feasibility study for a potential visit to one of the southern Kuriles, the Russian government became immediately outraged. The Russian government condemned Koizumi’s request and declared that it would regard any such visit by a Japanese prime minister as an infringement on Russian sovereignty over the southern Kuriles. It is possible that Medvedev could have risked public perception of Aso’s trip as a state-sanctioned instance of Japanese infringement on Russian sovereignty over its Pacific maritime territories. That Medvedev was willing to jeopardize his domestic political standing demonstrates his commitment to establishing normalizing Russian-Japanese relations and cultivating good personal ties with Aso. Accordingly, Medvedev also exhibited the manner in which Russian-Japanese economic cooperation in disputed areas can encourage Russian flexibility in the political sphere, particularly in regard to the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues.

Indeed, the considerable political risk at which Medvedev and Aso put themselves in convening this summit contributed significantly to its “highly congenial, “friendly and constructive atmosphere.” After the inauguration of the Sakhalin II LNG pipeline, Medvedev and Aso met for approximately 90 minutes. This mini-summit, albeit brief, was nevertheless symbolically and substantively meaningful. Medvedev’s willingness to hold talks with Aso for one-and-a-half hours, given the number of other important foreign dignitaries and business leaders in attendance, was particularly indicative of the his desire to establish strong personal rapport with Aso. The fact that Medvedev and Aso spent half of this time discussing the southern Kuriles dispute added substance to the conversation, beyond matters of mutual Russian-Japanese economic interest, that Aso undoubtedly and enthusiastically welcomed.
Medvedev also utilized this mini-summit as the venue at which to announce his intention to pursue the resolution of the territorial issues with a “new, original and nonstandard approach” attested to the level of trust and type of personal relationship that he sought to establish with Aso. Although Medvedev did not specify as to the details or timeline for implementation of this new approach, Aso was nevertheless highly receptive to this proposal and subsequently endorsed this seemingly new direction in Russian policy to the long-festering territorial dispute.

Like Medvedev, Aso also conveyed his interest, though implicitly, in cultivating strong personal rapport with Medvedev in his commentary on Russian-Japanese relations at the February 2009 Sakhalin mini-summit. In particular, Aso reiterated his past position on the southern Kuriles dispute that the two sides will settle the issue only if politicians, not bureaucrats, make the necessary decisions as to the “how” and “when” of its resolution. He confirmed to reporters shortly after his meeting with Medvedev that “no way other than a decision by politicians” existed to effectively adjudicate the matter. Essentially, Aso was alluding to the indispensability of frequent contact, deliberation and negotiation between the most senior policymakers in each country, especially the national executives, to the resolution of the territorial issue. Aso was further alluding to the importance that genuine friendship between the two countries’ leaders assumed in the facilitation and eventual success of talks concerning the southern Kuriles dispute. In addition to this commentary, Aso stated that “the age” had come “for Russia to become a constructive partner in the Asia-Pacific region.” It is likely that this remark was simultaneously a couched jibe at Putin’s intransigence on the territorial issue from 2000-2008 and subtle praise for Medvedev’s seemingly more approachable personal demeanor and inclination to consider “new, original and nonstandard” formulas for the settlement of the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues.
The Medvedev-Aso mini-summit on Sakhalin in February 2009, although incredibly brief, nevertheless contributed to the strengthening of good personal relations between the two leaders. To be certain, this meeting proved a fitting and sufficient follow-up to the leaders’ first talks on the sidelines of the November 2008 APEC annual forum in Lima, Peru. Not only did Medvedev and Aso discuss substantive, important issues in their February 2009 mini-summit, they also continued to build a sound basis of trust and mutual understanding for future engagement on crucial matters, principally the territorial and peace treaty issues. Additionally significant developments from the Sakhalin talks included the two leaders’ assurance to put forth their best efforts to conduct similar discussions on the sidelines of the upcoming April 2009 G20 and July 2009 G8 summits in London and L’Aquila, Italy, respectively.66

The April 2009 G20 London “Chat”

After the success of their meeting on Sakhalin in mid-February 2009, Medvedev and Aso looked forward to reconvening on the sidelines of the London G20 summit in early April 2009.67 Due to Aso’s unexpected and premature departure from the London G20 conference, however, this much anticipated mini-summit never materialized.68 Aso had intended to be present for the duration of the London conference and subsequently convene sideline mini-summits with some of the other leaders in attendance, including Medvedev. That Aso departed in an untimely manner is largely attributable to North Korea’s seemingly imminent plan to launch a satellite into orbit – which many countries, along with Japan, believed to be “a cover for the test-firing of a long-range ballistic missile” – in the first week of April 2009. And, although the two leaders did not enjoy the opportunity to convene at length in London, they nevertheless had a “brief chat” prior to Aso’s return to Japan in which Aso expressed his keenness to continue at the upcoming July G8 summit in Italy “the talks they had when they met in mid-February in
Sakhalin.” Medvedev responded positively to Aso’s anticipatory sentiment regarding the July G8 summit in Italy. Consequently, the April 2009 G20 London summit did not impact the slowly emerging Medvedev-Aso personal rapport in a particularly significant manner. At the same time, the effort that both officials put into meeting on such short notice for such a limited amount of time demonstrated their mutual, continued interest in maintaining a professionally and personally considerate relationship for the benefit of their governments and peoples.69

July 2009 G8 L’Aquila, Italy Mini-Summit

Despite the relatively enthusiastic and optimistic sentiment that the two leaders expressed in London three months earlier regarding their meeting on the sidelines of the July 2009 G8 conference in L’Aquila, Italy, the mini-summit that Aso and Medvedev convened at the Italy G8 conference occurred under very different, indeed difficult, circumstances than those under which they had convened in Lima in November 2008 and Sakhalin in February 2009. In particular, Aso found himself in a far more precarious domestic political situation in July 2009 than he had in November 2008, and February and April 2009. That is to say, prior to his arrival in Italy in early July for the G8 conference, Aso faced an irreversible, precipitous decline in his public approval ratings, mounting pressure within the LDP to resign and a seemingly imminent electoral loss to the opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ). As many leaders do in such situations, Aso sought triumphs in the realm of foreign policy via aggressive and nationalistic actions, statements and postures to bolster his, as well as the LDP’s, waning domestic political fortunes.

Accordingly, Aso adopted a far more assertive tone in his commentary on the territorial dispute over the southern Kuriles and endorsed, if not encouraged, the unanimous parliamentary enactment70 of an LDP-initiated71 and -sponsored law claiming the southern
Kuriles as “primordial territories” and thus an “integral part” of Japan. Russian parliamentary demands that its Japanese counterpart withdraw the bill from consideration for passage in late June 2009 fell on deaf ears. As a result, then chairman of the Russian Federation Council – the upper house in the Russian national legislature, the Federal Assembly – Sergei Mirinov publicly embraced the Soviet-era argument that there existed no “Kurile territorial problem” between Russia and Japan, as Russian sovereignty over the four islands was “unconditional,” only “other problems, such as the delimitation and demarcation of the Russian-Japanese border” and “the signing of a comprehensive peace treaty.” Mirinov further noted that the peace process remained “stalled by Japan’s territorial claims on Russia.” Such contentious domestic and international political jockeying on both sides fostered an amicable atmosphere neither leading into nor during the Medvedev-Aso mini-summit on the sidelines of the July 2009 G8 conference in L’Aquila, Italy.

Notwithstanding the heightened sensitivities of both leaders to the territorial and peace treaty issues when they met on the sidelines of the July 2009 G8 summit, each was nevertheless “happy” to see the other. Moreover, Medvedev and Aso conducted their talks on these two issues in a “serious, amicable” and “frank” manner. That Medvedev and Aso were able to discuss these matters alongside economic and other issues in the midst of escalating controversy over the southern Kuriles dispute is indicative of their professionalism and mutual commitment to cultivate strong personal rapport so as to facilitate the complete normalization of Russian-Japanese relations. Ultimately, however, it seemed that the Japanese law proclaiming the southern Kuriles an “integral part” of Japan and the Russian response considerably undermined any effort that either leader had put into employing July 2009 G8 conference as a forum in which to build personal rapport with the other. Unlike their previous encounters, this meeting was
essentially bereft of extensive, remarkable diplomatic gestures and pleasantries intimating the emergence of a personal bond between the Medvedev and Aso. In this respect, and virtually all others, the Medvedev-Aso mini-summit on the sidelines of the G8 Italy conference was a significant disappointment to both sides. Soon after this conference, the LDP suffered a massive, historical defeat in national parliamentary elections for the House of Representatives – the lower house in the Japanese national legislature – to the opposition DPJ. For the first time since the end of World War II, the LDP controlled a legislative majority in neither the upper nor lower houses of the Japanese National Diet. Having presided over this landmark defeat, Aso resigned as prime minister of Japan in mid-September 2009; thus ending the fledgling Medvedev-Aso executive relationship.

THE 2003 JAPAN-RUSSIA ACTION PLAN

The Russian and Japanese governments signed multiple communiqués regarding bilateral relations in the decade following Soviet collapse. Most of these agreements addressed the territorial and peace treaty issues, as well as the need to expand Russian-Japanese cooperation in other areas, principally the economic sphere. Moreover, these agreements called on both governments to work towards the resolution of the territorial and peace treaty issues and expansion of relations – political, strategic, economic, and military – on a simultaneous basis. The provisions of these communiqués, however, were by no means sufficient to realize this objective. Indeed, the lack of a comprehensive, detailed approach to settling the territorial and peace treaty issues, while at the same time expanding cooperation in other areas, impeded the normalization of Russian-Japanese relations and frustrated Russian and Japanese political leaders. The 2003 Japan-Russia Action Plan represented a sincere, mutual effort on behalf of
then Russian President Putin and then Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi to effectively address this problem.

Upon assuming office as Prime Minister of Japan, Junichiro Koizumi rejected Mori’s “phased-return” proposal for the resolution of the territorial and peace treaty issues. Instead, Koizumi reverted to the standard Japanese position concerning the return of the southern Kuriles – all four islands, all at once, prior to the signing of a peace treaty. In the past, however, Putin consistently refused to entertain the Japanese formula for settling the two issues. Consequently, Koizumi and his cabinet deemed a “comprehensive package approach” to be the most effective method by which to encourage Putin’s consideration of the Japanese position. In advocating the “comprehensive package approach” Koizumi played rather astutely to Russian interests in resolving the southern Kuriles’ dispute in a Russian-Japanese peace treaty alongside a host of other bilateral issues. Koizumi’s strategy seemed initially very promising.

Putin and Koizumi first agreed to negotiate the terms of the Action Plan in a meeting on the sidelines of the June 2002 G8 summit in Canada. The two leaders subsequently instructed their respective foreign policy officials to prepare the Action Plan prior to Koizumi’s expected official visit to Moscow in January 2003. Japan took most of the initiative in drafting the Action Plan. Nevertheless, from July – December 2002, Russian and Japanese Foreign Ministers Lavrov and Kawaguchi, respectively, convened and successfully fleshed out the plan’s details. Putin and Koizumi signed the Japan-Russia Plan of Action in the Kremlin on January 10, 2003, during Koizumi’s first official visit to Russia as Prime Minister of Japan.

Putin and Koizumi adopted the 2003 Japan-Russia Action Plan with the intention of “breathing new life” into Russian-Japanese relations and upgrading the countries’ relationship to “a new qualitative stage”. The two leaders also confirmed the Action Plan as a “sea chart”
for navigation in bilateral ties”.  They further endorsed the Action Plan as a future- and strategically-oriented agreement that demonstrated their countries’ common interest in developing the “latent potential” of bilateral relations in a consistent and systematic manner.  In this regard, the Action Plan asserts that developing the latent potential of the Russian-Japanese relations is of “strategic significance” on a regional and global level.

By virtue of its scope and innovative approach to the improvement of Russian-Japanese relations, the 2003 Action Plan is arguably the most important and comprehensive agreement between the Russian and Japanese governments since the end of the Cold War. The 2003 Japan-Russia Action Plan encourages intensive cooperation between Russia and Japan in six specific areas. These six areas include expanded political dialogue, peace treaty negotiations, strategic relations in the international community, trade and economic matters, defense and security, and cultural and interpersonal exchange.  In the last seven years, both governments have worked particularly hard to implement the Action Plan. Indeed, Russia and Japan have concluded numerous treaties and expanded bilateral relations at a remarkable rate since early 2003, particularly in the economic sphere.

The major fault in the 2003 Action Plan, however, is that it establishes neither an order of priority among the six areas nor any explanation of how they relate to one another.  Consequently, the Russian and Japanese governments have succeeded in fulfilling their commitments to one another as per the Action Plan in all but one area: peace treaty negotiations. The Japanese government has benefited substantially from developing bilateral relations with Russia along the lines of the 2003 Action Plan and therefore remains committed to its continued implementation. Nevertheless, it is becoming increasingly impatient with Russia’s aversion to
peace treaty negotiations, especially because Japanese leaders feel that Japan has consistently fulfilled its obligations in the agreement.

Recently, Japanese officials have become more vocal and direct in expressing their frustration with the Russian government’s unwillingness to fulfill its obligations to the 2003 Action Plan and engage in serious peace treaty negotiations. In October 2007, then Japanese Foreign Minister Masahiko Komura remarked that a lack of progress on the territorial and peace treaty issue would obstruct the “smooth” implementation of the 2003. 89 Komura drew further attention to Russia’s avoidance of peace treaty negotiations in April 2008 when he stated that it was the only point of the Action Plan in which there remained no “noticeable” development. 90 In his meeting with Prime Minister Putin in May 2009, then Japanese Prime Minister Taro Aso reiterated Japan’s deep disappointment in the Russian government for having yet to make a genuine effort in regard to the Action Plan’s provisions for peace treaty negotiations. Moreover, in his meeting with Russian President Medvedev on the sidelines of the July 2009 G8 summit in Italy, Aso subtly threatened that in the event of Russia’s continued refusal to take “practical steps” to sign a peace treaty, Japan would not be able to develop “partner relations” with Russia in Asia-Pacific. 91

Ultimately, the 2003 Japan-Russia Action Plan has not and, most likely, will not have the Japanese government’s desired effect - regaining the southern Kuriles from Russia all together, all at once. Indeed, the Action Plan has proven relatively successful in specifying Russia’s and Japan’s mutual political, strategic, economic, and military interests. Furthermore, it provides an effective approach to advance these mutual interests. However, the Action Plan appears to have failed in regard to its primary objective of resolving the southern Kuriles’ dispute in a comprehensive bilateral agreement alongside a number of other important issues.
INTERGOVERNMENTAL EXCHANGE

Intergovernmental exchange between Russian and Japanese political officials has flourished over the last decade. From December 31, 1999 – July 15, 2009 approximately 107 exchanges occurred – 64 visits, 21 meetings on the sidelines of international fora, and 22 official communications. Well over 90% of these exchanges transpired during Putin’s tenure as Russian President. Roughly 10% occurred in Medvedev’s first fifteen months in office. Let us first consider Russian-Japanese intergovernmental exchange in the Putin era.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL EXCHANGE IN THE PUTIN ERA

Russian VIP Visits to Japan

A total of 98 Russian-Japanese intergovernmental exchanges occurred in the Putin era. These 98 exchanges from December 31, 1999 – May 7, 2008 comprised 58 visits, 20 meetings on the sidelines of international fora, and 20 telephone conversations and personal letters. Of the 58 visits, 29 involved Russian officials traveling to Japan and 29 involved Japanese officials traveling to Russia – an equal exchange. The 29 visits of Russian officials to Japan during the Putin era included 27 trips of Russian federal officials and two trips of Russian regional officials. The 27 visits of Russian federal officials to Japan during this period consisted of the September 2000 Putin-Mori and November 2005 Putin-Koizumi summits, 16 consultations between Russian presidential and Japanese prime ministerial officials, and 9 visits of representatives from the Russian Federal Assembly to the Japanese National Diet. Of the 16 consultative meetings between Russian presidential and Japanese prime ministerial officials in the Putin era, a total of 10 involved Russian Foreign Minister Ivanov or Lavrov, their deputies, or other subordinates. The remaining six consultations involved officials from either the Russian
presidential and Japanese prime ministerial staff or other Russian and Japanese federal ministries.

Japanese VIP Visits to Russia

In the Putin era, Japanese officials visited Russia on 29 separate occasions. Each occasion involved only officials from the national government of Japan.  These 29 visits comprised five Japanese prime ministerial summits with Putin, 22 consultations between Japanese prime ministerial and Russian presidential officials, and two visits of representatives from the Japanese National Diet. Of the 22 consultative meetings between Japanese prime ministerial and Russian presidential officials in the Putin era, a total of 16 involved Japanese Foreign Ministers, their deputies, or other subordinates. The remaining six consultations involved officials from either the Japanese prime ministerial and Russian presidential staff or other Japanese and Russian national ministries.

Russian-Japanese Meetings on the Sidelines of International Fora

Meetings of Russian and Japanese officials on the sidelines of international summits, particularly those of APEC and the G8, accounted for 21 of the 107 Russian-Japanese intergovernmental exchanges that occurred from December 31, 1999 – July 15, 2009. Of these 21 sideline mini-summits, a total of 20 took place during the Putin era. These 20 mini-summits comprised 10 consultative meetings at the executive level and 10 consultative meetings at the foreign ministerial level. In Putin’s first term, there were 7 executive- and foreign ministerial-level mini-summits on the sidelines of international fora. In his second term only 3 of each occurred.
Official communication between Russian and Japanese political leaders, in the form of either telephone conversations or personal letters, accounted for 22 of the 107 instances of Russian-Japanese intergovernmental exchange over the last decade. In the Putin era, 20 such correspondences occurred. Indeed, Putin and his Japanese counterparts held telephone conversations or exchanged personal letters a total of 7 times from December 31, 1999 – May 7, 2008. Russian and Japanese Foreign Ministers corresponded via phone or personal letter 13 times over the same period.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL EXCHANGE IN THE MEDVEDEV ERA

Of the 107 total instances of Russian-Japanese intergovernmental exchange between December 31, 1999 and July 15, 2009, only 9 took place in Medvedev’s first fifteen months in office. Indeed, these 9 exchanges consisted of 6 visits, one meeting on the sidelines of an international summit, and two official communications. Of the 6 visits that occurred from May 7, 2008 – July 15, 2009, five involved Russian federal officials traveling to Japan. During this time Japan paid only one visit to Russia. In this regard, Russian-Japanese intergovernmental exchange has been particularly lopsided in Medvedev’s first fifteen months as Russian President.

The five Russian visits to Japan comprised four consultative meetings between Russian presidential and Japanese prime ministerial officials and one visit by representatives of the Russian Federal Assembly to the Japanese National Diet. Two of these four consultative meetings involved Russian and Japanese Foreign Ministers and two involved Russian Presidential Chief of Staff Sergey Naryshkin. The one Japanese visit that took place in Medvedev’s first fifteen months as Russian President occurred in February 2009. At this time,
then Japanese Prime Minister Taro Aso attended the opening of an LNG plant on Sakhalin Island, met Medvedev. The two leaders held a mini-summit after the ceremony.

From May 7, 2008 – July 15, 2009 there occurred only one meeting between Russian and Japanese officials on the sidelines of an international summit. In early July 2009, Medvedev and Aso met on the sidelines of the G8 summit in L’Aquila, Italy. Official communication between Russian and Japanese political leaders took place only twice over this period.

**IMPORTANT INTERGOVERNMENTAL EXCHANGES**

A host of important VIP visits, sideline mini-summits, and official communications occurred in Russian-Japanese relations over the last ten years. Some important intergovernmental exchanges during Putin’s first term as Russian President included: the July 2000 Japan-Russia Mini-Summit at the G8 conference in Okinawa, the September 2000 Putin-Mori Summit in Tokyo, Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi’s letters to Putin expressing condolences over the Nord-Ost Siege at the Dubrovka Theatre in Moscow in October 2002, the January 2003 Japan-Russia Action Plan signing Summit in Moscow, Russian Prime Minister Kasyanov’s visit to Tokyo in December 2003 confirming Russia’s commitment to the 2003 Japan-Russia Action Plan, and Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi’s letters of condolence to Putin over the terrorist bombing on the Moscow subway in February 2004.

The following account for some of the more significant exchanges in Russian-Japanese relations that transpired in Putin’s second term: Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi’s letter to Putin expressing condolences over the Beslan Tragedy in September 2004; Japanese Foreign Minister’s letter to Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov expressing condolences over the Beslan tragedy; the Lavrov-Machimura foreign ministerial meeting in January and May 2005 that paved the way for the Putin-Koizumi Tokyo Summit in November 2005; and, the November 2005
Putin-Koizumi Summit in Tokyo. Additional significant exchanges during Putin’s second term included the February 2006 Japan-Russia consultations on disarmament and non-proliferation in Moscow; the June 2007 Second Japan-Russia Strategic Dialogue in Tokyo; the June 2007 Initiative for the Strengthening of Japan-Russia Cooperation in the Russian Far East and Eastern Siberia; the mission group of Sakhalin regional administrators to Japan in March 2008; and the Putin-Fukuda and Medvedev-Fukuda meetings in Moscow in April 2008.

In the first fifteen months of Medvedev’s tenure as Russian President, several notable instances of Russian-Japanese intergovernmental exchange have occurred. These include Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov’s visit to Japan in October 2008 (his first in almost three years), the Medvedev-Aso mini-summit in Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk in February 2009, the Putin-Aso summit in Tokyo in May 2009, and the Medvedev-Aso mini-summit on the sidelines of the G8 conference in L’Aquila, Italy in early July 2009.

ENVIRONMENTAL COOPERATION

In the Putin era, opportunities for Russian-Japanese environmental cooperation were frequent and encouraging. As a result, environmental cooperation between Russia and Japan expanded significantly at all levels – bilateral, regional, and global – from 2000-2008. Expanded environmental cooperation in this period undoubtedly contributed to the overall development of respect and mutual trust in Russian-Japanese relations.

BILATERAL COOPERATION

At the bilateral level, environmental cooperation between Russian and Japan during Putin’s tenure addressed a host of issues concerning the preservation and sustainable use of ecosystems in the Russian Far East, northern Japan, and the Seas of Okhotsk and Japan. These issues included wildlife conservation in the southern Kuriles and northern Hokkaido,
logging and deforestation in the Russian Far East,\textsuperscript{96} and rampant poaching in the Seas of Japan and Okhotsk. They further included pollution prevention and management of oil, chemical, and nuclear waste spills in the Seas of Japan and Okhtosk, as well as the dismantlement of decommissioned Russian nuclear submarines and proper treatment and storage of their nuclear fuel.\textsuperscript{97} Russian-Japanese attention to these issues persists in the Medvedev era.\textsuperscript{98} Indeed, relevant agreements between Russian and Japanese national governments within two months of his inauguration suggest Medvedev’s continued interest in bilateral environmental cooperation with Japan.\textsuperscript{99}

**REGIONAL COOPERATION**

At the regional level, Russia and Japan engaged one another alongside China, the Koreas, and Mongolia in multilateral efforts to protect the inland, coastal, and marine ecosystems of Northeast Asia from 2000-2008. Russia and Japan share co-founding membership in Northeast Asia’s premier regional environmental organizations: the Northeast Asia Sub-Regional Program for Environmental Cooperation (NEASPEC) and the Northwest Pacific Action Plan (NOWPAP).\textsuperscript{100} NEASPEC seeks to address and mitigate the environmental problems concurrent with rapid economic development throughout Northeast Asia such as urban air pollution, rural deforestation desertification, and coastal and marine contamination and degradation.\textsuperscript{101} NOWPAP aims specifically to redress the issues of coastal and marine pollution and degradation in Northeast Asia.\textsuperscript{102} Delegations to NEASPEC and NOWPAP consist of government officials, members of the intelligentsia, and civilian specialists from member-states. Whereas NEASPEC meets on an annual basis, NOWPAP holds several consultative meetings each year. Russian-Japanese environmental cooperation in NEASPEC and NOWPAP continues under Medvedev.
Combined, NEASPEC and NOWPAP have held roughly fifteen consultative meetings between May 7, 2008 and November 1, 2009 – seven of which took place in Russia and Japan.\textsuperscript{103}

**GLOBAL COOPERATION**

Russian-Japanese environmental cooperation at the global level during the Putin era primarily concerned climate control. More specifically, Russian and Japanese governments have focused their combined efforts on combating the causes and effects of global warming. The most significant achievement in this regard was Russia’s critically-needed ratification of the Kyoto Protocol in early November 2004 and the treaty’s subsequent activation as international law in mid-February 2005.\textsuperscript{104} Indeed, Putin aspired to see Russia as the chief facilitator of the Kyoto Protocol in the international community.\textsuperscript{105} Putin’s decision to endorse the Kyoto Protocol provided Japan and the EU significant political leverage in their persistent, yet ultimately unsuccessful campaign to pressure the U.S., China, and India into adopting limits on carbon emissions.\textsuperscript{106} Russia will most likely fulfill its commitment to the protocol under Medvedev until it expires in 2012.\textsuperscript{107} Even as Russia’s economy grows, it is currently in no danger of exceeding its Kyoto-allotted carbon emission limit.\textsuperscript{108} It remains to be seen, however, if Russia will participate in a post-Kyoto regime beyond 2012. A post-Kyoto treaty will likely require a significant reduction in Russian carbon emissions and discourage Russian accession to an economically disadvantageous post-Kyoto climate regime.\textsuperscript{109}
CULTURAL, EDUCATIONAL AND INTERPERSONAL EXCHANGE

HISTORICAL ROOTS OF CURRENT EXCHANGE

The Soviet Era

Russian-Japanese cultural, educational, and interpersonal exchange is rooted in Soviet-Japanese government-level cultural cooperation. In January 1972, Soviet and Japanese governments signed and exchanged notes allowing for government-level cultural exchange between their two countries.\(^{110}\) Soviet and Japanese leaders initially adopted these notes as a temporary measure to allow cultural exchanges between their countries in the absence of a formal bilateral agreement to this effect.\(^{111}\) The two governments renewed and exchanged these notes every two years until May 1986 when Soviet and Japanese Foreign Ministers Shevardnadze and Abe, respectively, signed a formal agreement providing for governmental cultural cooperation and exchange\(^{112}\) – the agreement took effect in December 1987.\(^ {113}\) Both governments regarded the May 1986 Soviet-Japan Cultural Agreement as a major success and breakthrough in Soviet-Japanese relations.\(^{114}\) Soviet-Japanese cultural exchange had gained far more momentum during Gorbachev’s tenure than it ever had under Brezhnev. Indeed, the 1986 Soviet-Japan Cultural Agreement served as the basis for Russian-Japanese cultural relations in the early post-Soviet era.

The Post-Soviet Yeltsin Era

In January 1993, Japan and Russia revised the May 1986 Soviet-Japan Cultural Agreement to reflect Russia’s transition to democracy. Specifically, the governments replaced the phrase in the 1986 version that called for “approving mutual exchanges between the two countries” with “encourage freer cultural exchanges” between the two countries – thus implying
the greater mobility of Russian citizens to travel abroad in the post-Soviet era. The Russian and Japanese governments further promoted bilateral cultural, as well as educational and interpersonal, exchange in relevant memoranda concurrently signed with the 1993 Tokyo Declaration and the 1998 Tokyo Declaration. Under a more politically liberal regime than that of the Soviet Union, Russian officials, businessmen, and citizens in the Yeltsin era were able to more freely and frequently visit Japan and engage Japanese counterparts. Moreover, regime change in Russia afforded the Japanese the same opportunities vis-à-vis Russia. Consequently, Russian-Japanese cultural exchange under Yeltsin expanded beyond the more limited Soviet experiences of the Gorbachev era to include greater student and citizen participation. Just as Gorbachev’s efforts facilitated Yeltsin’s achievements in Russian-Japanese cultural relations in the 1990’s, Yeltsin’s efforts made Putin’s accomplishments in this sphere equally as possible.

CURRENT CULTURAL, EDUCATIONAL, AND INTERPERSONAL EXCHANGE

Cultural, educational, and interpersonal exchange between Russia and Japan expanded “dynamically” in the Putin era. Russian and Japanese governments – national, regional, and local – as well as students and citizens participated in numerous cultural, educational, and interpersonal activities from 2000-2008. During this period, however, Japanese officials occasionally expressed disappointment in the lack of more frequent, high-volume human exchange between Russia and Japan. Although Japanese officials’ concerns were valid, accomplishments in Russian-Japanese cultural, educational, and interpersonal exchange over these eight years undoubtedly eclipsed the shortcomings in this aspect of Russian-Japanese relations. Indeed, expanded cooperation and exchange in these three particular areas cultivated a
deeper sense of respect and mutual understanding between Russian and Japanese governments and citizens that persisted into the Medvedev era.

The Putin Era

Putin is a judo-master and has co-authored a book on the history, theory, and practice of this distinctive Japanese martial art. His personal affinity for Japanese culture is profound as is his professional belief in the necessity of sustained, extensive cultural, educational, and interpersonal exchange between Russia and Japan. Putin believes that frequent cooperation in these three specific areas is crucial to the development of respect and mutual understanding between Russian and Japanese governments and peoples – understanding that can help resolve the southern Kuriles’ and peace treaty issues and fully normalize Russian-Japanese relations.

As a result, Putin made the expansion of Russian-Japanese cultural, educational, and interpersonal ties a priority during his presidency.

Putin confirmed his personal and professional interest in continued, expanded cultural relations between Russia and Japan during his inaugural executive summit in Japan in September 2000. One of the many agreements that Putin and Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori signed at the 2000 Tokyo Russia-Japan summit was a five-year intergovernmental accord promoting Russian-Japanese cultural ties. The accord called for exchanges of scientists, teachers, and students as well as strengthened contacts between organizations of culture, science, and sport.

The accord also encouraged exchanges of art exhibitions, books, and joint efforts to preserve cultural valuables and established the Russian-Japanese Commission for Cultural Relations.

In the spirit of enhanced bilateral cultural cooperation between the two countries, former Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto – with whom Yeltsin remained good friends – used his own savings to found a Japanese cultural center at Moscow State University in November
2000. Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori also contributed his own personal funds to the cultural center. Putin would eventually award Mori Russia’s Order of Friendship in July 2004 for this and many other personal contributions to increased cultural and interpersonal exchange between Russia and Japan. The Japanese government registered the cultural center at Moscow State University as the principle legal entity in Russia to oversee all other such institutions in Russia, including those in Khabarovsk, Vladivostok, and St. Petersburg.124

In June 2002, the Japanese government, under the relatively new leadership of maverick LDP leader Junichiro Koizumi, ratified another cultural exchange pact with Russia. It went into effect in July 2002. This particular pact expanded the May 1986 Soviet-Japanese Cultural Agreement – revised in 1993 to reflect the advent of political liberalism in post-Soviet Russia – to include mutual protection of copyrights, intellectual property rights, and cultural properties.125 The Russian and Japanese governments confirmed the primacy of the June 2002 pact in bilateral cultural exchange in the 2003 Japan-Russia Action Plan. Specifically, the Action Plan established the June 2002 pact as the starting point for all Russian-Japanese cultural, educational, and interpersonal exchanges conducted after January 2003.126

Accordingly, the 2003 Action Plan encouraged exchanges between Russian and Japanese academic communities, student and youth groups, and non-governmental organizations. The Action Plan also promoted the translation, publishing, and dissemination of literature and reading materials providing accurate assessments of Russian and Japanese life, government, culture and society. Moreover, the plan advocates greater cooperation among Russian and Japanese museums, libraries, art galleries, and sports clubs. That Russia and Japan designated cultural and interpersonal interaction as one of the six main pillars of bilateral relations indicates the importance of such exchanges to each government. Additionally, this designation constitutes the
most recent development in the evolution of the May 1986 Soviet-Japan Cultural Agreement and further indicates the impact of Gorbachev’s efforts on current cultural relations between Russia and Japan.\textsuperscript{127}

Russian-Japanese cultural relations continued to gain momentum after the signing of the Action Plan in January 2003. From April 2003 – March 2004 Russia hosted the “Japanese Culture Festival in Russia”. This eleven-month festival consisted of over one hundred Japanese government-sponsored and –funded cultural events throughout Russia in cities like Irkutsk, Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, Vladivostok, Khabarovsk, Omsk, Moscow, Yekaterinaberg, and St. Petersburg. These events included the donation of Japanese cultural gifts to Japan, Japanese musical, dance, and theatre performances, professional sports matches, Japanese art museum exhibitions, Japanese naval ship port calls on Vladivostok, translation competitions, literature festivals and readings, and academic lectures. The supervisor of the 2003 Japanese Culture Festival in Russia, Director-General of the European Affairs Bureau at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Komatsu Ichiro, remarked that Russians and Japanese were “very interested” in, yet fairly unfamiliar with, each other’s culture. Accordingly, Ichiro noted that the cumulative purpose of these numerous events throughout Russia was to introduce Russians to Japanese cultural traditions.\textsuperscript{128}

The success of the 2003 Japanese Culture Festival in Russia helped facilitate the first and second Russia-Japan Cultural Forums in June and October 2004. Each forum lasted roughly four days and consisted of conferences, performances, and lectures on topics pertinent to Russian and Japanese culture.\textsuperscript{129} These fora marked one of the first instances in which Russian-Japanese cultural exchange had occurred under the auspices of the 2003 Japan-Russia Action Plan.\textsuperscript{130} More importantly, however, the success of the 2003 Japanese Culture Festival in Russia paved
the way for more frequent, regularized interactions of this sort and scope. In Putin’s second term, several notable events occurred that encouraged further cultural, educational, and interpersonal exchange between Russia and Japan.

First, Russia and Japan celebrated 150 years of relations in November 2005. Japan’s commemoration of the February 1855 signing of the Treaty of Shimoda between Czarist Russia and the Tokugawa Shogunate purposely coincided with Putin’s official visit to Japan in late November 2005. On November 20, 2005, a day before his summit meeting with then Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, Putin, along with Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov and then Russian Ambassador to Japan, Alexander Losyukov, visited the Japanese-Russian Friendship and Art Exhibition in Tokyo. Putin noted that such events were crucial to the development of respect and mutual trust in Russian-Japanese relations.¹³¹

Second, the Russian government sponsored and funded the first “Festival of Russian Culture in Japan” in 2006. Indeed, the opening of the festival in mid-January 2006 marked the 50th anniversary of the restoration of Russian-Japanese ties in the October 1956 Soviet-Japan Joint Declaration – the accord that formally ended World War II hostilities between the Soviet Union and Japan. Putin sent a greeting to the participants, organizers, and visitors of the opening of the 2006 Festival of Russian Culture in Japan in which he commended their contributions to the “dynamic” development of Russian-Japanese cultural relations since 2000. Putin’s greeting also expressed his hope that the cultural, educational, and interpersonal interactions of the festival would strengthen Russian-Japanese political, economic, and military ties. The 2006 Festival of Russia in Japan received an overwhelmingly positive response from the Japanese government and citizenry. The festival comprised events in over 150 cities and towns throughout Japan and boasted an approximate cumulative attendance of 2.7 million people.¹³²
Roughly a week after the opening of the Festival of Russian Culture in Japan, Japanese Ambassador to Russia, Issei Nomura, issued a statement that complemented Putin’s previous accolades. Nomura remarked that Russia and Japan, as of late January 2006, were experiencing the best level of bilateral relations in 150 years – both in “qualitative and quantitative terms”.\(^\text{133}\) That the Russian and Japanese governments held the First Japan-Russian Mixed Cultural Commission at the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs building in Tokyo in April 2006 supported Nomura’s claim. Moreover, it constituted a third event in the latter half of Putin’s presidential tenure that further encouraged cultural exchange between Russia and Japan. Multiple officials from both governments attended the commission. Participants on the Japanese side included the Director-General of Public and Cultural Affairs of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, officials from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, representatives from the Japanese Agency of Cultural Affairs, and the Japan Foundation.\(^\text{134}\) Participants on the Russian side included the Director of the First Asian Department of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, officials from the Ministry of Culture and Mass Communication, representatives from the Ministry of Education and Science, administrators from the Russia-Japan Society, and staffers from the Embassy of Russia in Japan.\(^\text{135}\)

Fourth, Japan’s welcoming response to the 2006 Festival of Russian Culture in Japan, encouraged the Russian government in October 2006 to commit to holding the festival in Japan on an annual basis from 2007-2011.\(^\text{136}\) The Russian government entrusted the organization of the festivals to the Russian Ministry of Culture and the “Russia-Japan” Society.\(^\text{137}\) The 2007 Festival of Russian Culture in Japan lasted from July-November of that year and consisted of art exhibitions, musical and theatrical performances, and literature readings among other events.
Fifth, Hokkaido University and the Japan-Russia Youth Exchange Center co-hosted the 2007 Japan-Russia Student Forum in September 2007. In this forum, Russian and Japanese students participated in round-table discussions concerning the manner in which mutual stereotypes and globalization impacted cultural relations and human exchange between Russia and Japan. Students also had the opportunity to share their opinions on the future of Russian-Japanese relations and engage in Japanese cultural activities in and around Sapporo. Russian Ambassador to Japan, Alexander Losyukov, and Japanese Senior Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs, Itsunori Onodera, delivered lectures on the state of Russian-Japanese relations.

Finally, in 2008 the “Russia-Japan” Society, formerly the USSR-Japan Society, celebrated its 50th anniversary. The “Russia-Japan” Society is a premier non-governmental, non-profit organization dedicated to the development and strengthening of good-neighborly relations between Russia and Japan. That the Russian government assigned the “Russia-Japan” Society responsibility for five consecutive Festivals of Russian Culture in Japan from 2007-2011 demonstrates the prominence of the Society in Russian-Japanese cultural relations. The Society’s principle objective is the improvement of Russia’s image in Japan and Japan’s image in Russia. Towards this end, the Society organizes trips for Russian and Japanese businessmen, scholars, youth, and students to Russia and Japan. Furthermore, the Society specializes in translating and publishing literature for Russian and Japanese government agencies and private companies. The “Russia-Japan” Society has branches in many regions of Russia and boasts several thousand active members. Society Directors and Board members include scholars, scientists, political analysts, statesmen, and cultural and public figures that are well-known in both countries. The longevity and success of the “Russia-Japan” Society continues to inspire the
expansion of Russian-Japanese cultural, educational, and interpersonal exchange in the Medvedev era.\textsuperscript{141}

The Medvedev Era

The momentum in cultural, educational, and interpersonal ties that Russian and Japanese governments, non-governmental organizations, universities, businesses, and citizens established during Putin’s presidency persisted into the Medvedev era. Indeed, numerous events in these three areas have occurred in Medvedev’s first eighteen months in office, most prominently the 2008 and 2009 Festivals of Russian Culture in Japan. The 2008 Festival introduced the latest generation of Russian artists – circus performers, ballet dancers, actors, musicians, and pop stars – to Japanese society. The 2008 festivities also comprised the All-Japanese Russian Language Speech Contest, the Week of Russian Language in Japan, various activities corresponding with Leo Tolstoy’s 180\textsuperscript{th} birthday, film and cartoon festivals, and art and museum exhibitions. The 2009 Festival has consisted of similar performances and programs.\textsuperscript{142}

To maintain the momentum of bilateral cultural relations in the interim of the 2008 and 2009 Festivals of Russian Culture in Japan, the Russian Ministry of Culture – along with the Government of Moscow, Moscow Department of Culture, Russian Academy of Arts, Moscow Museum of Modern Art, and Embassy of the Russian Federation in Japan – sponsored and funded the display of a Russian art exhibition entitled “The Spring-Time of Russian Avant-Garde – Works from the Collection of the Moscow Museum of Modern Art” at four Japanese museums from August 2008 to March 2009.\textsuperscript{143} Over roughly the same period, Medvedev attended the Junior G8 summit in Hokkaido in July 2008 and discussed with the junior delegates the same matters that he would be discussing with his peers at the G8 summit in Hokkaido the next day; Medvedev also participated with the Junior G8 delegates in various cultural activities.
throughout the day. Moreover, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov traveled to Hakodate, a city in southern Hokkaido, in November 2008 to attend celebrations marking the 150th anniversary of the opening of Russia’s first consulate in Japan.

The Japanese government was involved in efforts to promote and disseminate Japanese culture throughout Russia during this time as well. In July 2008, the Japanese government and non-governmental organizations worked together to establish the Japan Foundation, Moscow (JFM). In 2009, the JFM began carrying out its activities as “The Japanese Culture Department ‘Japan Foundation’ of the All-Russia State Library for Foreign Literature”. Between July 2008 and June 2009 the JFM opened a library and hosted book exhibitions, lectures, literature seminars, and courses in Japanese. The foundation has gradually gained in popularity among Muscovites and inspired their growing interest in Japanese culture since its establishment in July 2008. Furthermore, in June 2008, the Japanese government and the Tokyo National Museum organized an exhibition entitled “Samurais: The Treasures of Japan’s Warrior Nobility” for display in the Kremlin. The program consisted of roughly 70 exhibits of Japanese weapons and crafts from the period between the 10th and 20th centuries.

CONCLUSION

Although the expansion of Russian political relations with Japan did not include progress on the territorial and peace treaty issues, the advancements that this particular sphere of the overall Russian-Japanese relationship did experience were nevertheless incredibly significant. To be certain, the continued commitment of Russian and Japanese leaders to cooperate in the five areas of interaction examined in this chapter will contribute undoubtedly to the eventual, albeit distant, resolution of the southern Kuriles dispute and peace treaty impasse. What is more, the current positive trajectory in these areas of bilateral engagement suggests that cooperation
and trust therein will continue to grow slowly, but surely, over time. This progress also will impact positively and facilitate the development of Russian relations with Japan in economic and military spheres of interaction. In this respect, Russian cooperation with Japan in the area of “low policy” political issues such as those discussed in this chapter holds potential promise for increased cooperation in “high policy” spheres – particularly the Southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues and, to a lesser extent, military relations.
Japanese prime ministerial terms last briefly compared to Russian presidential terms. The Russian presidential-parliamentary system provides for scheduled presidential elections that occurred every four years, now every six, whereas the Japanese parliamentary system allows for snap elections that occur at frequent, irregular, and short intervals. Since the end of World War II no prime ministerial term in Japan has lasted more than three years. Since the end of World War II no prime ministerial term in Japan has lasted more than three years. On average, prime ministerial terms in Japan last only one to two years, however, some terms have been as short as two months. From January 1992 – September 2009 Russia has had three presidents, the most recent of which, Dmitry Medvedev, has been in office for less than two years. Over the same period, Japan has had twelve prime ministers, all of which, with the exception of Junichiro Koizumi, have served in office for less than two years. Moreover, during Putin’s two presidential terms, Japan had four prime ministers, three of which served for only one year. Furthermore, within the first two years of Medvedev’s presidency Japan has had three prime ministers. (See “Prime Ministers in History: 31st – 60th (1934-1964),” Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet Website, accessed October 30, 2009. Retrieved from http://www.kantei.go.jp/foreign/cabinet/0031-60_e.html; “Prime Ministers in History: 61st – 90th (1964-2007),” Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet Website, accessed October 30, 2009. Retrieved from http://www.kantei.go.jp/foreign/cabinet/0061-90_e.html; “Archives: Previous Cabinets (Since 1996),” Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet Website, accessed October 22, 2009. Retrieved from http://www.kantei.go.jp/foreign/archives_e.html.)

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2009 included Britain’s Prince Andrew, Netherlands’ Economic Affairs Minister Maria van der Hoeven, Japanese
Prime Minister Taro Aso, Gazprom Chairman Alexei Miller, Royal Dutch Shell CEO Jeroen van der Veer, Mitsui
President and CEO Shoei Utsuda, and Mitsubishi President and CEO Yorihiko Kojima. (See John C.K. Daly,
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“Taking into consideration the lack of statistical data on Russian regional officials’ visits to Japan in the Putin era, it is likely that more than two such trips occurred. Moreover, it is likely that the majority of these trips involved regional political executives like governors or presidents of Russian sub-national republics.

As was the case with Russia, there is a lack of statistical data on Japanese regional officials’ visits to Russia in the Putin era. Consequently, it is likely that Japanese regional officials made several visits to Russia during the Putin era.


97 From 2000-2008, Russian and Japanese governments were most diligent in their efforts to combat poaching and properly dismantle Russian nuclear submarines. Indeed, Russian naval and coast guard patrols, with periodic assistance from their Japanese counterparts, have seized hundreds of ships and tens of millions of dollars worth of illegally caught fish, fish roe, and crab. Moreover, Japan, in concert with many other Western governments, has invested roughly USD $200 million over the last fifteen years in the dismantlement of Russian decommissioned nuclear submarines and proper extraction, treatment, and storage of their nuclear fuel. (See Ann MacLachlan, “Russia-Japan Trade Pact Said To Be Worth Billions,” Nucleonics Week, May 14, 2009.)

98 The only issue that Russian and Japanese governments do not continue to address is that of illegal logging and deforestation in the Russian Far East. From 2007-2009, the once significant amount of illicitly-felled timber exported to Japan from the Russian Far East subsided due to a combination of a drastic increase in Russian export tax on its unprocessed timber, escalated Russian law enforcement efforts, at federal, regional, and local levels to reduce illegal logging in the Russian Far East, and the Japanese government’s adoption of more eco-friendly domestic legislation to discourage the import of illegal wood from Russia.

99 In early July 2008, on the sidelines of the G8 summit in Hokkaido, Japan, Russian President Medvedev and then Japanese Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda agreed on the “urgent need” to address the “sharp decrease” in drift ice in the Sea of Okhotsk and protect the environment of the southern Kuriles. Towards this end, Medvedev and Fukuda to exchange information and create an integrated database on the ecosystem in the waters close to the southern Kuriles and northern Hokkaido. (See “Japan, Russia Agree to Protect Environment Near Disputed Islands,” Kyodo News Agency, July 8, 2008.) From May 20-21, 2008, a panel of Russian and Japanese government environmental specialists met in Tokyo and held the “First Japan-Russia Experts’ Meeting on Cooperation on the Preservation of the Ecosystem and its Sustainable Use in Areas of Japan and Russia”. (See “Results of the First Japan-Russia Experts’ Meeting on Cooperation on the Preservation of the Ecosystem and its Sustainable Use in Areas of Japan and Russia,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan Website, May 19 2008, accessed June 16, 2009. Retrieved from http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/2008/5/1180692_1010.html.)

100 NEASPEC and NOWPAP are both parts of United Nations’ regional environmental initiatives. NEASPEC is part of the United Nations’ Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP). NEASPEC membership comprises Russia, Japan, China, the Koreas, and Mongolia. NOWPAP is part of the Regional Seas Program of the United Nations’ Environmental Program (UNEP). NOWPAP members include Russia, Japan, China, and South Korea. Russia and Japan have extensive dealings and interaction with both organizations. For more information on NEASPEC and Russian and Japanese contributions to the organization, please see the NEASPEC website at: http://www.neaspec.org/index.asp. For more information on NOWPAP and Russian and Japanese contributions to the organization, please see the NOWPAP website at: http://www.nowpap.org/.


104 To take effect, countries producing at least 55% of the world’s greenhouse gases had to ratify the protocol. Prior to Russia’s approval, countries that had ratified the treaty accounted for only 44% of global greenhouse emissions. After the U.S. had rejected the accord in 2001, Russia, with its 17% share of global greenhouse emissions, was the only country that could ratify and activate the protocol. (See Peter Baker, “Russia Backs Kyoto to Get on Path to Join WTO,” The Washington Post, May 22, 2004, accessed September 26, 2009. Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A46416-2004May21.html); Japan sought EU


During Russia’s ratification of the Kyoto Protocol in October 2004, the Japanese government called on the Bush administration to follow suit and ratify the treaty. (See “Japan Calls on US to Follow Suit of Russia on Kyoto,” ITAR-TASS News Agency, October 8, 2004.) In late April 2005, two months after the activation of the Kyoto Protocol, Japan began requesting U.S., Chinese, and Indian participation and membership in a post-Kyoto environmental framework. (See “Japan Calls for Inclusion of U.S., China, and India in New Environmental Framework,” Kyodo News Agency, April 20, 2005.)


Ibid.


Agreements on cultural, education, and interpersonal exchange, as well as technical cooperation and economic relations, often occur at the regional and local level between Russian and Japanese governors and mayors, respectively. (See “Russia, Japan Boosting Economic and Cultural Ties,” Russian Economic News, August 21, 2001; “Russian, Japanese Regions Sign Cooperation Agreement,” ITAR-TASS News Agency, July 26, 2005.) In March 2007, the Embassy of Japan in Russia hosted the “Eighth Conference of Representatives of Regional Public Organizations Working for the Development of Japanese-Russian Ties”. Representatives, hailing from regions all across Russia, included cultural specialist, scholars, artists, dancers, writers, actors, and calligraphers. The attendees agreed to assist the Japanese government in organizing various Japanese cultural events all across Russia in 2007. (See Anna Pyaetskaya, “The ‘Russia-Japan’ Society on the Threshold of Its Jubilee,” The Diplomat: A Monthly for
In late January 2006, Japanese Ambassador to Russia Issei Nomura told Russia’s Mayak Radio in Moscow that in 2005 only 90,000 Japanese visited Russia and only 50,000 Russians visited Japan. Nomura noted that increased human exchange between Russia and Japan was fundamentally important to stable bilateral relations. (See “Russia, Japan Enjoy Best Period in Cooperation for 150 Years – Tokyo’s Envoy,” Radio Mayak (Moscow), January 20, 2006.) In early June 2007, President of the Japan Foundation, a Japanese government-sponsored organization specializing in Japanese international cultural exchange, Kazuo Ogoura, noted that historically Japan and Russia have focused on their differences and rarely paid attention to those things that united them or could unite them. He further noted that this tendency has fomented mutually negative perceptions among Russian and Japanese governments and citizens. Ogoura asserted that only “frank intellectual and political exchange” between each countries’ governments and citizens could dispel their mutual distrust for one another. (See Kazuo Ogoura, “Improving Japan-Russia Ties,” The Japan Times June 4, 2007.)

Putin became extremely interested in sambo – a Russian variant of judo – at a very young age. He eventually took up judo in his teens and has practiced it ever since. In 2004, Putin co-authored a book on judo entitled “Judo: History, Theory, Practice”. For more information on Putin’s experience with judo please see his 2000 autobiography First Person: An Astonishingly Frank Self-Portrait by Russia’s President (New York: Public Affairs, 2000).


Ibid.


Ibid.


“Ibid.


Ibid.


“Ibid.


“Ibid.


Ibid.

Ibid.


140 Ibid.


147 Ibid.


CHAPTER 7

RUSSIAN ECONOMIC RELATIONS WITH JAPAN FROM 2000-2010
Economic cooperation has remained one of the most stable components of Russia’s relationship with Japan in the Putin-Medvedev era. It is the only sphere of Russian interaction with Japan in which substance has far exceeded symbolism on a relatively consistent basis and in which progress has been abundant and tangible. Two developments accounted for this distinctive, positive trend in Russian-Japanese relations from 2000-2010. First, the countries’ economic relationship experienced historically unprecedented growth at this time – the foremost indicators of which were trade turnover and Japanese investment in Russia. Apart from a brief contraction in 2009 due to the global economic crisis, trade between Russia and Japan increased continuously and impressively throughout the past decade; significantly expanded investment in Russia over the last few years culminated in Japan’s designation as one of its top 10 foreign investor countries in 2007 and 2009. Second, the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues impacted economic relations between Russia and Japan only minimally in comparison to other spheres of bilateral interaction during this period.

These developments encouraged the view among Russian political leaders that economic relations with Japan had expanded dynamically since the turn of the millennium. They further encouraged the view among Russian political leaders that this dynamic expansion in bilateral economic cooperation mitigated substantially the effect of the territorial and peace treaty issues on Russia’s overall relationship with Japan. Finally, these developments convinced Russian political leaders that intensive, diversified economic relations with Japan would serve as the principal means of establishing the trust necessary to resolve the southern Kuriles and peace treaty impasses. Not surprisingly, the Russian leaders’ perspectives were not entirely congruent with those of their Japanese counterparts. Indeed, Japanese political leaders did not espouse as
sensationalistic an understanding of these three matters as their Russian partners. At the same
time, however, they did not dismiss these Russian views altogether.

Instead, Japanese leaders were keen to adopt a more cautious, if not realistic, outlook on
the nature and extent of their economic cooperation with Russia and its impact on the resolution
of the territorial and peace treaty issues. In this regard, Japanese leaders were by no means as
confident as their Russian counterparts that greater economic cooperation would facilitate a
resolution to the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues. After all, an almost 600% increase in
trade turnover between Russia and Japan from 2000-2008 had resulted in very few, if any,
remarkable Russian concessions to Japan over the southern Kuriles dispute during this period.
Not only did Russian-Japanese relations not experience progress in these two important issue
areas despite historically unprecedented expansion in bilateral trade and investment, in fact they
experienced a regression in that Putin essentially adopted the Soviet view that there exists no
territorial dispute between the two countries. This lack of forward movement, however, has not
disillusioned completely Japanese leaders from acknowledging the effect of economic
cooperation on the territorial and peace treaty issues. Rather, it has compelled them to embrace
more sober and realistic expectations than their Russian partners as to how extensively
collaboration in the economic sphere can influence substantive change in the political sphere –
specifically in respect to settling the southern Kuriles and peace treaty impasses.

A careful assessment of Russian-Japanese economic relations from 2000-2010
demonstrates that the Japanese perspective more closely approximated the reality of the two
countries’ interaction in this sphere over the last decade than did the Russian view. Accordingly,
this chapter argues that Russian economic cooperation with Japan expanded considerably, albeit
not dynamically, during the Putin-Medvedev era. This chapter further confirms that enhanced
and mutually beneficial economic interaction between Russia and Japan clearly has not cultivated the trust and positive perceptions of one another necessary to resolve the southern Kuriles dispute and peace treaty impasse. To be certain, bilateral economic cooperation can have this desired effect only if both sides properly incorporate it into the more comprehensive agenda for reconciliation outlined in the 2003 Japan-Russia Action Plan. This chapter therefore demonstrates that the neoliberal argument for the virtues of expanded economic cooperation between states applies only moderately to the Russian-Japanese case-study. It also demonstrates the continued dominance of neorealism, “high policy” concerns for territorial security in general Russian policy toward Japan.

Whereas the first argument concerning the unprecedented development of Russian-Japanese economic cooperation from 2000-2010 is fundamentally quantitative, those concerning the impact of this cooperation on the territorial and peace treaty issues are more or less qualitative. Confirmation of the latter argument depends to a great extent on the substantiation of the first. As such, this chapter focuses primarily, although not exclusively, on establishing, qualifying and analyzing the expansion in economic cooperation that occurred between Russia and Japan over the past decade. Toward that end, this chapter discusses the following important aspects of Russian-Japanese economic relations since the turn of the millennium: myths surrounding the nature of the Russian-Japanese economic relationship, the historical background of the two countries’ current economic ties, Russian-Japanese bilateral trade and Japanese investment in Russia. This chapter concludes with qualitative commentary on the impact of expanded Russian-Japanese economic relations since 2000 on the territorial and peace treaty issues.
MYTHS OF RUSSIAN-JAPANESE ECONOMIC RELATIONS

Prior to discussing the more substantive aspects of Russian-Japanese economic relations in the Putin-Medvedev era, it is first necessary to dispel five common myths surrounding the nature of Russian-Japanese economic relations. First, this section considers the claim that “economic complementarity” makes Russia and Japan “natural” economic partners. Second, this section refutes the argument that economic incentive facilitates cooperation over competition in Russian-Japanese relations. Third, this section addresses the widely held misperception that the southern Kuriles dispute and the peace treaty impasse hinder cooperation between Russia and Japan in the economic sphere. Fourth, this section contests the notion that Japan is inclined to use economic power to gain concessions from Russia in regard to their territorial dispute over ownership of the southern Kurile Islands – Iturup, Kunashir, Shikotan and the Habomai Islets. Finally, this section clarifies the misconception typical among Russian leaders that Russia’s economic relations with Japan expanded dynamically from 2000-2010.

ECONOMIC COMPLEMENTARITY MAKES RUSSIA AND JAPAN “NATURAL” ECONOMIC PARTNERS

Like their Soviet predecessors, Russian leaders are quick to assert that “mutually complementary” economic capacities and needs make Russia and Japan “natural” economic partners. Japanese leaders generally share this view, although they subscribe to a more realistic understanding of the limits of economic cooperation with Russia despite complementarity in this sphere of interaction. The conception of economic complementarity between Russia and Japan presupposes fundamental, yet distinct economic characteristics of each country. On one hand, Japan is a country deficient in many natural resources, which Russia retains in abundance –
including those most critical to the perpetuation and expansion of its advanced economy, specifically oil and gas/LNG. Herein lay Japan’s economic need and Russia’s economic capacity. On the other, Russia lacks the advanced technology and expertise, as well as the financial means, necessary to realize the following objectives in Siberia and the Russian Far East: socio-economic development, industrial and infrastructural modernization and the successful exploitation of Russia’s vast natural resources in these regions. Japan is Russia’s only potential partner in Northeast Asia that possesses this economic capacity on a scale large enough to help Russia accomplish its goals in Siberia and the Russian Far East. Herein lay Russia’s economic need and Japan’s economic faculty. Russian and Japanese leaders additionally have touted the two countries’ “geographic proximity” as an important variable that simultaneously reinforces and perpetuates their economic complementarity and partnership, respectively.

During the Cold War, scholars of Soviet-Japanese relations regularly dismissed the argument that the mutually complementary economies of the two countries made them “natural” economic partners. Moreover, these experts questioned the idea that geographic proximity either encouraged or predetermined a natural economic partnership between the Soviet Union and Japan. The consensus among these commentators was that Soviet-Japanese economic relations from 1946-1992 were, at least for Japan, more a matter or function of convenience, as well as international supply and demand, than complementarity. They also were of the same mind that geographic proximity added substantially to this convenience, but they did not regard this variable as a causal factor in Soviet-Japanese economic cooperation after World War II. According to these scholars, their respective economic needs and capacities created a “mutual economic complementarity” between the Soviet Union and Japan that was neither unique nor “rare in the world.”
Indeed, many countries existed in the Western, developed world beyond Japan that also were in need of Soviet natural resources. Conversely, the Soviet Union was not the only country that possessed the resources that Japan required to sustain its economic development.\textsuperscript{13} To be certain, modernization in transportation greatly reduced the impact of geographic proximity of Soviet-Japanese economic relations because it allowed Japan to ship the same resources from elsewhere abroad at lower cost, more consistently and with less hassle than it could from the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{14} That Soviet and Japanese trade with one another typically accounted for very little of their overall annual international trade turnover during the Cold War clearly demonstrates the minimal effect that economic complementarity and geographic proximity had on Soviet-Japanese economic relations over this period.\textsuperscript{15} Accordingly, scholars of Soviet-Japanese relations ultimately concluded that economic complementarity constituted an “important precondition” for an interdependent economic partnership between the Soviet Union and Japan, but, in and of itself, it did not “necessarily provide a sufficient condition” for such a relationship to emerge.\textsuperscript{16} And, although a desirable characteristic in an intensive economic partnership, geographic proximity was neither necessary nor sufficient.

In the 1970s and 1980s, complementarity and territorial proximity became even less significant factors in the Soviet-Japanese economic relationship. The further diminution in these variables’ impact on economic cooperation occurred as a result of the rapid and radical structural reforms that Japan implemented after the “successive oil shocks” in 1973 and 1974. In particular, the 1973 and 1974 oil crises exposed to Japan and the international community the extreme vulnerability of the Japanese economy to fluctuation in world energy prices and its dependence on Middle Eastern fossil fuels. To effectively manage its intense susceptibility to the availability and cost of oil and gas, the Japanese government set out to transform its economy
from a “‘smoke-stack,’ heavy manufacturing-based economy” to one predominantly based on “high-quality information, knowledge and value-added industries” including “electronics, robotics, new materials, bioengineering, and supercomputers.” As a consequence of this successful structural change in its economy, Japan no longer consumed to the considerable extent that it once had, the natural resources that it imported from the Middle East or the Soviet Union.  

Despite the constructive and highly beneficial structural modifications that Japan made to its economy in response to the oil shocks of the early 1970s and its reduction in fossil fuel consumption, the Japanese government did not change the nature of its dependence on Middle Eastern product. To this day, Japan continues to receive most of its oil and gas from the Middle East. Since the first Gulf War ended in 1991, however, Japan has sought to diversify its oil and gas supplies. The Japanese effort became more urgent after the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001, the beginning of the Iranian nuclear crisis in August 2002 and the U.S. invasion of Iraq in March 2003. The cumulative impact of these three developments signaled to Japan that instability in the Middle East was starting to rise at a seemingly exponential rate. This realization had critical strategic implications for Japan because Japan continued to obtain almost all of its energy from this increasingly volatile region. As such, the Japanese government intensified its campaign to expand its energy procurement portfolio to regions outside of the Middle East – including Central Asia, Latin America, Africa and the Russian Far East.  

Of these regions, the Russian Far East quickly is becoming Japan’s most valuable and abundant source of non-Middle Eastern oil and gas/LNG. Japan has invested tens of billions of dollars in helping the Russian government exploit its vast natural resource base in Siberia and the Russian Far East and transport it via pipeline, rail and ship to the Northeast Asian market.
Toward this end, the two biggest ventures in which Japan is currently participating with Russia, and a number of other countries, are the Sakhalin II oil and gas project and the Eastern Siberia-Pacific Ocean oil pipeline. Many years in the making, these two ventures came online in February 2009 and February 2010, respectively. It is evident from the increased rate of exchange in these particular areas of interaction that economic complementarity has become a more relevant and influential factor in Russian-Japanese economic cooperation in the Putin-Medvedev era than it was during the Cold War or under Yeltsin. Notwithstanding its increased relevance and influence, economic complementarity remains only one of many variables that can create conditions sufficient for the inception and maintenance of a highly interdependent economic relationship between Russia and Japan.

To be certain, Russia and Japan are by no means on the cusp of establishing such a partnership – even though official commentary on both sides infers otherwise. Rather, these two countries currently find themselves on a path of increasing economic interconnectedness that, if traversed properly, will eventually transform into an interdependent economic relationship in the medium-term. Further contributing to the establishment of Russian-Japanese economic interconnectedness in the Putin-Medvedev era has been the geographic proximity of Russia to Japan. Russian energy supplies to Japan are only hundreds of miles away and thusly require less capital and time to ship to Japan. With a public debt that approximates 190 percent of its GDP, and a relentlessly sluggish economy, the Japanese government likely welcomes the significant reduction in cost that Japan’s closeness to energy sources in the Russian Far East affords it. Moreover, Japan avoids the risk of transporting oil and gas from its suppliers in the Middle East through the international shipping lanes inundated with pirates such as the Gulf of Aden, the Gulf of Oman, the Arabian Sea and the Malacca Strait. And, although the economic
complementarity and geographic proximity do not necessarily make Russia and Japan “natural” economic partners in the absence of other important factors, they currently are assuming formative roles in the creation of such a relationship between the two countries.

**ECONOMIC INCENTIVE ENCOURAGES COOPERATION OVER COMPETITION IN RUSSIAN-JAPANESE RELATIONS**

Another myth surrounding the nature of Russian-Japanese economic interaction is that the prospect of economic gain encourages cooperation over competition in Russian-Japanese relations. That such an incentive facilitates conciliatory, as opposed to confrontational, Russian behavior toward Japan is only partially accurate. In the Putin-Medvedev era, the promise of mutual economic benefit has engendered a remarkably positive atmosphere in the sphere of Russian economic exchange with Japan. The historically unprecedented expansion of bilateral trade from 2000-2010 and the extent of Japanese investment in Russia during this same period has confirmed that Russia’s desire for economic gain has motivated it to pursue a cooperative agenda in its economic relationship with Japan – especially in regard to the exploitation of Siberia and the Russian Far East’s vast natural resource base. Nevertheless, not even the powerful incentive of substantial monetary gain guarantees the permanency of the favorable environment that currently characterizes Russia’s economic partnership with Japan.

Indeed, the history of Russian relations with Japan is replete with instances in which the former forewent virtually assured and abundant financial returns from economic cooperation with Japan in favor of greater strategic objectives in Northeast Asia. Such instances typically included the outbreak of political-military conflict or the perpetuation of dysfunctional relations between the two countries – the 1895 Triple Intervention, the 1905 Russo-Japanese War, the lapse in official Soviet-Japanese diplomatic ties from 1918-1925, Soviet intransigence over the
territorial dispute throughout the Cold War and post-Soviet Russia’s disinclination to engage in extensive or substantive dialogue concerning the ownership of the southern Kuriles. In these many cases, political and financial incentives actually encouraged Russia to compete economically with Japan and, at times, confront Japan militarily. Fortunately, the Russian-Japanese relationship has not experienced the latter, more intensive form of competition since the end of World War II. However, just because the prospect of economic benefit has helped Russia avoid military conflict with Japan over the last 65 years, does not mean that it has precluded Russia from competing economically with Japan in the Putin-Medvedev era.

Gazprom’s highly controversial takeover of the Sakhalin II oil and gas project in late December 2006 – in which the Russian government effectively hijacked the Japanese-, British- and Dutch-financed multibillion dollar venture on the auspices of environmental concerns – is the most convincing and explicit, if not egregious, confirmation of Russia’s capability and willingness to compete with Japan economically when it deems such a course of action necessary and practicable. Another example of Russia’s capability and willingness in this regard was the ongoing debate over the initial route of the East Siberia-Pacific Ocean oil pipeline from 2003-2008 in which the Russian government flip-flopped frequently in an effort to extract greater economic assistance for the project from both China and Japan. Finally, the Russian government has established further precedent for its potential to sacrifice economic gain in the pursuit of seemingly more critical political-military and strategic objectives in its relations with Japan through its actions elsewhere abroad, particularly in its use of gas and oil exports to Ukraine and Belarus from 2005-2010. It is therefore evident that the desire for financial gain has encouraged Russia to cooperate and compete with Japan in the pursuit of economic and strategic objectives for the duration of their relationship. Moreover, it is apparent that this trend has continued in the
Putin-Medvedev era with cooperation, for the time being, as the dominant Russian policy preference toward Japan.

**THE SOUTHERN KURILES AND PEACE TREATY ISSUES HINDER RUSSIAN-JAPANESE ECONOMIC COOPERATION**

A third myth about Russian-Japanese economic relations is that the southern Kuriles dispute and the continued absence of a World War II peace treaty hinder cooperation between the two countries in the economic sphere. To be certain, the question as to whether the territorial and peace treaty issues have obstructed the two countries’ economic cooperation has been a source of debate and speculation among Russian and Japanese officials and scholars since the late 1940s. Regardless of whether officials or scholars on either side were proponents or opponents of this misconception, none deny the existence of economic cooperation between the Soviet Union and Japan from 1946-1992 and post-Soviet Russia and Japan from 1992-2010. These commentators therefore differed in respect to the degree to which they thought the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues restricted, not precluded, Soviet/Russian-Japanese economic exchange over this 65-year period.

Proponents of this statement would argue that the persistent inability of the Russian and Japanese governments to settle the territorial impasse and, either concurrently or subsequently, sign a bilateral peace treaty has delayed indefinitely the full development and maturation of the two countries’ economic partnership. Proponents would further contend that the continued absence of a peace treaty will deprive Russia and Japan of the opportunity to experience the full potential of this important aspect of their relationship. Opponents of this misconception would cite specifically the expansion of bilateral economic interaction throughout the Cold War, despite the ongoing controversies surrounding the matter of ownership of the southern Kuriles and lack
of a World War II peace accord, as irrefutable evidence that these two matters hindered in no significant way the cultivation of Soviet- and Russian-Japanese ties in this area.

That the southern Kuriles and peace treaty impasses did not prohibit economic cooperation between the Soviet Union or Russia and Japan from 1946-2010 is obvious. The extent to which these dysfunctional variables stunted the expansion of Soviet- and Russian-Japanese relations in this sphere, if at all, however, is not discernable. Only after a decade or so of Russian-Japanese economic interaction subsequent to the signing of a bilateral peace accord would one be able to investigate – and even then only tentatively – the impact of fully normalized relations on Russian cooperation with Japan in this sphere. Until then, any commentary on the matter is almost entirely inferential or speculative. Still, others interested in this area of conjecture in Russian-Japanese economic relations contemplate the following questions: Would the signing of a bilateral peace treaty facilitate a remarkable improvement and expansion in Russian economic relations and cooperation, respectively, with Japan? If not, what economic benefit could either side gain from acceding to such an accord? Must the territorial and peace treaty issues always be regarded as necessarily negative variables in Russian-Japanese economic relations?

Some, but certainly not all, Russian and Japanese officials and experts share the opinion that the resolution of the southern Kuriles dispute and the conclusion of a peace treaty would not improve economic relations between their countries substantially. To support this argument these commentators cite the nearly 600% increase in Russia’s annual trade turnover with Japan from approximately $5 billion in 2000 to roughly $29 billion in 2008 notwithstanding the ongoing nuisance of the territorial and peace treaty issues. However, even in the event that Russia and Japan finally settled these two fundamental, outstanding political issues and their
relationship experienced a considerable expansion in the economic sphere in neither the short-nor medium-term, a peace accord nevertheless would remain critical to the cultivation of mutually beneficial economic ties in the long-term. The acute sensitivity of world markets to the threat of conflict, as exhibited all too frequently when North Korea reengages in saber-rattling and provocative acts toward the South, Japan or the U.S., is testament to the economic value of peace and stability.

In the final analysis, stable, if not peaceful, relations will be of far greater economic advantage to states’ relationships than enmity and conflict. Moreover, the persistence of the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues has not always impacted Russian-Japanese economic relations in a necessarily negative manner. Indeed, Japan’s desire to build a trusting, lasting partnership with Russia so as to resolve the southern Kuriles dispute on terms favorable to its interests has inspired Japan, perhaps in a misguided sense, to expand and deepen economic cooperation with Russia in Siberia and the Russian Far East since the end of the Cold War. In this respect, the territorial and peace treaty impasses have had the opposite of the presumed effect – that is to say, a constructive, albeit relatively ill-gotten, impact – on economic cooperation between Russia and Japan.

JAPAN IS INCLINED TO USE ECONOMIC POWER TO GAIN TERRITORIAL CONCESSIONS FROM RUSSIA

Still another myth surrounding the nature of Russian-Japanese economic relations is that Japan is inclined to use economic power to gain concessions from Russia in the southern Kuriles dispute. Excepting the period of “seikei fukabun” from 1979-1993, during which the more hawkish elements in Japan’s political and military establishment made Japanese economic interaction with the Soviet Union contingent on progress toward a resolution of the southern
Kuriles dispute, Japan resisted the temptation to link the economic and political spheres of its relationship with the Soviet Union and Russia in the postwar era. In the three decades between the end of World War II in late 1945 and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in late 1979, Japan maintained a “de facto ‘separation of economics and politics’” that facilitated growth in Soviet-Japanese trade and in Japanese investment in the exploitation of timber, non-ferrous metals, oil and gas in Siberia and the Russian Far East. Particularly noteworthy behavior in its economic policy toward the Soviet Union during this time was Japan’s effort to preserve and extend trade links in the absence of a formal bilateral economic agreement for almost a decade – from late 1945 to 1957.\textsuperscript{26}

Following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, however, the separation of political influences from Japan’s foreign economic policy toward the Soviet Union began to subside. Specifically, Japan implemented economic sanctions against the Soviet Union in response to this act of aggression and also under political pressure from its primary strategic benefactor, the U.S. – which had taken the lead in levying similar unilateral, punitive economic measures against the Soviets. Japan followed the U.S. lead once again in imposing a second round of sanctions on the Soviet government after the declaration of martial law in Poland in 1981. Unlike other U.S. allies, however, Japan’s implementation of such economic penalties in its economic relations with the Soviet Union served a secondary, more self-interested purpose: it rebuked the Soviet military build-up on the southern Kurile Islands after the signing of the Sino-Japanese Peace Treaty in 1978. Despite the increasing “inseparability of politics and economics” (i.e., “seikei fukabun”) in its Soviet policy, Japan did not overtly utilize its vast financial resources to extract concessions from the Soviets over the southern Kuriles dispute until the late 1980s and early 1990s.\textsuperscript{27}
The Japanese campaign in 1990 and 1991 to exploit the Soviet Union’s impending financial collapse was relatively successful in that it extracted substantive international recognition of, and support for, Japan’s claim to the southern Kuriles. The Japanese government further managed to gain from then-Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, acknowledgement of the existence of a territorial dispute between the Soviet Union and Japan over Iturup, Kunashir, Shikotan and the Habomai Islets. Ultimately, Japan’s abstention from allocating financial assistance to the Soviet government devoid of conditions for compromise on the territorial impasse evoked escalating criticism from the international community from 1990-1991, particularly from its partners in the G7. As a result, Japan began to distribute economic aid to the Soviet Union in a manner that did not suggest so blatantly the underlying political purposes for its provision. This trend in Japanese assistance continued into the post-Soviet era. By 1993, however, Japan’s policy of seikei fukabun toward Russia had become increasingly unpopular at home and a liability in its overall relationship with post-Soviet Russia and, to a certain extent, the U.S. Since abandoning seikei fukabun in 1993, the Japanese government has consistently confirmed and, more importantly, demonstrated to the Russian government its commitment to the separation of political matters, principally the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues, from bilateral economic cooperation.

RUSSIAN ECONOMIC RELATIONS WITH JAPAN EXPANDED DYNAMICALLY FROM 2000-2010

The final and most recent myth concerning the nature of Russian-Japanese economic relations is that Russia’s interaction with Japan in this sphere expanded dynamically from 2000-2010. Russian economic relations with Japan expanded significantly, but not necessarily dynamically, over the last decade. Although a survey of Russian and Japanese official and
expert qualitative commentary and a topical, quantitative analysis of trade and investment statistics may insinuate otherwise, economic cooperation between Russia and Japan has not developed dynamically since the turn of the millennium. The difference between a “significant” and “dynamic” expansion in this instance is more than a matter of semantics. Indeed, each term has its own distinct qualities and attributes the application of which to a description of Russian-Japanese economic relations in the past 10 years have important analytic implications for the overall state of Russia’s relationship with Japan. With regard to expanding economic cooperation, the term “dynamic” suggests far-reaching and fundamental changes in the economic relationship of the countries involved whereas the term “significant” intimates impressive and remarkable improvements and advances but not as radical.

A closer, more thorough examination of Russian economic relations with Japan from 2000-2010 reveals that the two countries’ partnership has built on, and thus improved and advanced greatly, their preceding relationships in this sphere in the Yeltsin and Cold War eras. However, the substance and scope of bilateral trade and Japanese investment in Russia remains very much the same as it did in the past. In particular, Russia predominantly exports raw materials and natural resources to Japan and generally imports finished mechanical and other hi-tech products from Japan. Apart from the recent construction and opening of a Toyota car-manufacturing plant outside of St. Petersburg, Japanese investment in Russia typically does not extend beyond the contours of the energy sector. Moreover, Russia and Japan’s trade with and investment in one another as a percentage of their overall annual figures in these areas have not surpassed 2 and 3 percent, respectively. Had the expansion of Russian-Japanese economic relations since 2000 been truly “dynamic,” exports and imports would have come to include products atypical to the normal Russian-Japanese exchange, Japan would have diversified its
investment in the Russian economy beyond the energy sector, and the two countries’ economic exchange would have accounted for a greater share of their overall foreign exchange on a consistent, annual basis. It is the principal purpose of this chapter to illustrate these points.

THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF RUSSIAN-JAPANESE ECONOMIC RELATIONS

A thorough examination of Russian economic relations with Japan in the Putin-Medvedev era must include a discussion of the historical evolution of Russian-Japanese interaction in this sphere. This discussion is necessary because it identifies and establishes the experiences and trends, respectively, that helped shape Russia’s current economic relationship with Japan. Accordingly, this section analyzes historical experiences and trends in Russian-Japanese economic relations from the Soviet and post-Soviet Yeltsin eras. This section divides commentary on the Soviet era into two categories, the experiences that occurred and trends that existed in Soviet-Japanese economic relations before World War II and after World War II.

SOVIET-JAPANESE ECONOMIC RELATIONS BEFORE WORLD WAR II: FROM 1925-1941

Russia’s economic relationship with Japan from 2000-2010 is rooted in Soviet-Japanese economic relations. The Soviet Union’s economic dialogue and interaction with Japan did not begin in earnest, or officially, until the signing of the Soviet-Japan Basic Treaty in late February 1925.\(^29\) During its participation in the Allied Intervention in Siberia during the Russian Civil War, the Japanese government supported anti-Soviet “White” Russian forces and even played an instrumental part in creating and maintaining, for a short while, the Provisional Priamur Government (PPG).\(^30\) Consequently, Japan did not cultivate formal economic relations with the Soviet government from 1917-1925. Despite the evacuation of its military from the Soviet Far
Eastern mainland in October 1922, Japan maintained a troop contingent in northern Sakhalin until January 1925 – one month prior to the conclusion of the Soviet-Japan Basic Treaty. Japan’s occupation of northern Sakhalin after Soviet victory in the Russian Civil War in the latter half of 1922 remained a point of contention between the two governments. Not surprisingly, Japan’s continued presence in northern Sakhalin after 1922 delayed the inauguration of formal diplomatic, and thusly economic, relations between the Soviet Union and Japan until the promulgation of the Soviet-Japan Basic Treaty in late February 1925. Accordingly, interaction between the Soviets and Japanese in the economic sphere for the duration of this eight-year period likely was minimal at best.

Although the 1925 Basic Treaty established the basis for formal economic cooperation between the Soviet Union and Japan, the document itself included only “transitory provisions” for interaction in this sphere, particularly in the area of trade. The Soviet and Japanese governments intended these provisions as temporary means for economic exchange until they could negotiate a comprehensive and mutually beneficial and acceptable bilateral economic agreement. The two sides finally drafted such an accord and planned on signing and ratifying it in 1941, but the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union during the same year precluded Japan – a staunch, albeit de facto ally of Germany – from pursuing comprehensive, long-term economic relations with the enemy of its friend. As a result, the impending Soviet-Japanese economic accord “did not get off the ground.” Notwithstanding the outbreak of war between Germany and the Soviet Union or the persistent absence of a detailed bilateral economic accord, the Soviet Union and Japan, as per their 1941 Neutrality Pact, did maintain a moderate amount of economic interaction. As the tide of war in Europe changed in the Soviets’ favor in 1943, however, the Soviet government began to scale down the extent and scope of its trade with Japan.
SOVIET-JAPANESE ECONOMIC RELATIONS AFTER WORLD WAR II: FROM 1946 TO 1992

Soviet-Japanese Economic Relations in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s

The Soviet Union and Japan did not conclude a formal bilateral economic agreement for more than a decade following the end of World War II. Nevertheless, Soviet-Japanese economic cooperation persisted, predominantly in the form and area of trade, from 1946 – 1957 in the absence of such an accord. Japan became the first major trading partner of the Soviet Far East after World War II. That official economic relations between the Soviet Union and Japan did not recommence until after the signing of the Soviet-Japan Joint Declaration in mid-October 1956 – the document that formally discontinued Soviet-Japan World War II hostilities and re-established the two countries’ diplomatic ties with one another – seems logical. Signed in early December 1957, the Treaty of Commerce between the Soviet Union and Japan granted to the former from the latter “most-favored nation” status. Despite the two governments’ ability to negotiate and ratify a mutually advantageous trade pact in 1957 and a number of supplemental accords thereafter, they did not sign a “long-term agreement for economic cooperation” for the duration of the Cold War. The disinclination of the Japanese government to accede to such an agreement with the Soviets accounted for this trend. The Japanese government chose not to become party to long-term accords of this sort with its Soviet counterpart because it regarded the impact of such treaties on the expansion of economic cooperation as “minimal.” It further contested the need for a long-term economic agreement with the Soviets as unnecessary because Soviet-Japanese cooperation in the sphere had been proceeding “smoothly without a formal agreement.”
In the first decade of Soviet-Japanese economic cooperation, trade between the two countries developed at a remarkable rate. From 1957-1968 trade turnover between the Soviet Union and Japan climbed from $21.6 million in 1957 to $642.5 million in 1968 – a 32-fold increase in only 11 years and a rate of expansion virtually “unequalled in Japan’s trade with any other country” at the time. This figure rose to nearly $700 million by the end of 1969. The latter half of this cycle of expansion in Soviet-Japanese trade was particularly impressive given the fact that bilateral turnover in this area did not surpass the $250 million threshold from 1957-1963. Moreover, in these first seven years of their formal economic relationship, Soviet trade accounted for less than 1 percent of the Japanese annual total. Throughout the 13 years spanning the period from 1957-1970, Japan imported more goods from the USSR than it exported to the USSR. The lower rate of Soviet-Japanese commercial exchange in the 1950s and early 1960s also is largely attributable to the concurrent abstention of major Japanese trading firms and corporations from bilateral trade. In these relatively formative years in Soviet-Japanese economic trade relations, large Japanese business entities abstained from involvement therein because they had “close commitments” to the U.S. government and therefore could not “openly participate” in trade with the Soviet Union during the Cold War. As a result, these corporate entities acted through “dummy firms,” subsidiaries and umbrella organizations – such as the Federation of Economic Organizations (FEO), the most powerful economic organization in Japan during the Cold War – in order to conduct business with the Soviet government.

Trade with the Soviet Union remained the purview of small- and medium-sized Japanese firms until the mid-1960s. At this time, the Soviet government floated the possibility of access to the USSR’s vast raw material and natural resource base in Siberia and the Soviet Far East to major Japanese corporations. Particularly interested in this offer were the corporations of the
Japanese steel industry that sought to procure significant amounts of coal from these resource-rich eastern regions of the Soviet Union. An especially influential faction within the FEO, the Japanese steel industry was “the main driving force” behind the active involvement of the Federation in trade with the Soviet Union that began in the mid-1960s. The “private visits” of several Japanese business groups to the USSR to meet with Soviet political, economic and business officials culminated in 1965 when a delegation representing the Japanese steel industry traveled to Moscow and signed a memorandum on the establishment of the Soviet-Japanese Economic Committee (SJEC), also known as the Soviet-Japanese Business Cooperation Committee, and its Japanese counterpart, the Japanese-Soviet Economic Committee (JSEC), also called the Japanese-Soviet Business Cooperation Committee. The two groups convened to discuss matters of mutual significance in a forum called the Soviet-Japan Joint Cooperation Committee (SJJCC), otherwise known as the Soviet-Japan Economic Conference. The first meeting of the SJJCC occurred in 1966 in Tokyo.39

The SJEC became the arm of the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations in matters of trade and economic cooperation with Japan. The JSEC became the arm of the FEO in matters of trade and economic cooperation with the Soviet Union. Whereas the SJEC constituted little more than a mouthpiece for the Soviet government by way of the Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations, the JSEC enjoyed a substantial degree of autonomy from the Japanese government. Following its inception in 1965, the JSEC became the principal organization involved in lobbying the Japanese government to adopt policies conducive to expanded economic cooperation with the Soviet Union. More importantly, the JSEC became the “primary conduit” for managing economic relations between Japan and the USSR. The relative autonomy of the JSEC in terms of its administration of trade and economic cooperation with the USSR was
a result of a conscious effort on behalf of both the FEO and the Japanese government to base Japan’s economic relationship with the USSR on the leadership and initiative of the private-sector.40

Of course, the Japanese government remained the sole arbiter of all economic dealings between Japanese firms and the Soviet government. Out of an interest in maintaining a credible separation of economics and politics, however, the Japanese government delegated to the JSEC the day-to-day management of activities of bilateral economic interaction with the USSR – under the strict supervision, but not interference or interruption, of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of International Trade and Industry. This formula of delegation and oversight allowed the Japanese government to cultivate strong, legitimate economic relations with the Soviet government without having to concern itself over the risk of the southern Kuriles dispute or the U.S.-Japanese security alliance obstructing Japan’s economic partnership with the USSR. Because the JSEC represented a rather exclusive, “specialized segment of the Japanese big business community,” only a handful of corporate leaders managed economic relations with the Soviet Union. An important reason for the predominance of big business in Japanese economic exchange with the Soviet Union was that large Japanese trading companies were the only private financial entities that had the “organizational capacity” and “financial resources” necessary to manage the sizeable orders and protracted time frames involved in “doing business” with the Soviet foreign trade bureaucracy. Soviet officials further encouraged the “big business bias” in conducting trade with Japan because they used this trade as a vehicle for resource and socio-economic development in the Soviet Far East.41

Combined with the stagnancy of personnel turnover in the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations (MFER), trade and other forms of bilateral economic interaction became a
“highly personalized affair.” Accordingly, “personal connections” between the Soviet MFER and the JSEC came to govern economic cooperation between the two countries. Prior to the 1965 establishment of the SJEC and JSEC, the Soviet government sought to set up a joint chamber of commerce with a number of organizations in the Japanese private sector and concurrently coax the Japanese government into assuming the leading role in this arrangement. The success of the Japanese government in avoiding such an entanglement greatly frustrated the Soviets. Nevertheless, with the SJEC and JSEC in place and joint meetings between them in the format of the SJJCC occurring on a near-annual basis, trade and other forms of Soviet-Japanese economic cooperation expanded and became more structured and advantageous to both sides. That bilateral trade nearly doubled from 1966-1970 attests to the benefits of the increased institutionalization of the Soviet-Japanese economic relationship in the mid-1960s. Another notable, relatively immediate result of this institutionalization was the signing in late July 1968 of the “General Agreement” in which Japan agreed to supply the Soviets, on credit, with roughly $160 million worth of machinery and equipment for logging and timber harvesting in the Soviet Far East. The Soviets balanced this credit by providing timber of various types and qualities of approximately the same value.

The 1968 General Agreement was one of numerous large “compensation trade deals” that the Soviets entered into with the Japanese. In these arrangements, Japanese producers supplied the “plant and equipment” – all of which were manufactured in Japan – required for resource development projects in Siberia and the Soviet Far East in exchange for predetermined amounts of coal, oil, natural gas and timber, among many other natural resources and raw materials. The amounts were more or less equal to the value of the Japanese machinery and equipment that the Soviets received for these development projects. To be certain, the structural composition of
Soviet trade and economic cooperation with Japan during the Cold War differed remarkably from those in its interactions with Western Europe. Specifically, in its economic relations with Japan, the Soviet government dealt primarily, if not exclusively, with Japanese large corporations or conglomerates thereof under the auspices and virtual dominance of the FEO and JSEC. In its economic relations with Western European countries, the Soviet government typically interacted and struck deals with a number of smaller firms and companies. Soviet economic cooperation with Japan in the 1960s and 1970s contributed significantly to the development of fishing, timber, shipping and coal-mining industries in the Soviet Far East. This cooperation further encouraged the “exploration and assessment” of oil and natural gas resources and deposits in the Soviet Union’s resource-rich eastern regions during this period.49

**Soviet-Japanese Economic Relations in the 1970s**

Soviet economic relations with Japan came into “full swing” in the 1970s, particularly in the first half of the decade.50 Indeed, the momentum in this relationship that had been building in the late 1960s had broken into full stride from 1970-1975. A number of indicators and data confirm the “rapid expansion”51 of Soviet-Japanese cooperation in this sphere, most notably in the areas of trade and Japanese investment in natural resource development and exploration in Siberia and the Soviet Far East. In regard to bilateral trade, turnover increased from $717 million in 1970 to $3.4 billion in 1976 – a growth rate of nearly 500 percent in six years.52 That the latter half of this period (1973-1976) accounted for almost all of this growth, approximately 450 percent, was especially impressive.53 In 1978, Japan became the USSR’s “second biggest” non-socialist trading partner behind West Germany with trade estimated at $3.9 billion.54 By 1980, Soviet-Japanese trade turnover totaled roughly $4.5 billion – making for a more than 600
percent increase in bilateral trade within a decade.\textsuperscript{55} Soviet-Japanese Siberian Development Cooperation projects contributed substantially to trade growth from 1970-1980.\textsuperscript{56}

In addition to significant growth in Soviet-Japanese trade during the 1970s, Japanese investment in resource development in Siberia and the Soviet Far East also expanded considerably. Soviet economic cooperation with Japan in this respect experienced “real progress” when the two sides concluded general agreements for four major Siberian Development Cooperation projects between 1974 and 1975. The four joint-ventures included one timber-harvesting project, one natural gas exploitation project in Yakutia, one coal exploitation project in Yakutia and one oil and natural gas prospecting and exploitation project on Sakhalin Island. The Soviet government and relevant Japanese business conglomerates conducted these four joint-projects on a compensation-model similar to that which they utilized in the 1968 General Agreement concerning forestry exploitation. Substantial loans from the Japan Export-Import Bank, which became available to the USSR in the 1970s – arguably the “most important development” in Soviet-Japanese trade of the decade – made these compensation-based joint-ventures possible. The impact of these projects and Japanese investment on Soviet Far Eastern resource development in the 1970s was extensive. By the end of the decade, the Japanese government committed approximately $4 billion to the Soviet government for such projects. The bilateral trade that these joint-ventures generated accounted for roughly 32 percent of Japanese exports to, and 25 percent of imports from, the USSR throughout the 1970s.\textsuperscript{57}

Notwithstanding the impressive, indeed unprecedented expansion in Soviet-Japanese economic cooperation that transpired in the 1970s, there arose a number of problems for the Soviets in this sphere of their relationship with the Japanese. The foremost negative
development for the Soviets in economic interaction with Japan during the 1970s occurred as a result of the back-to-back “oil shocks” in 1973 and 1974. These crises in world oil supply, demand and pricing awakened natural resource-deficient Japan to its extreme sensitivity and vulnerability to interruptions in its procurement of fossil fuels and other critical sources of energy and materials to sustain its economic growth. Consequently, Japan embarked on a fairly radical campaign of structural reform to its economy – successfully changing it from a heavy-industry model to a more high-tech, energy-efficient and knowledge-based model. These structural reforms noticeably reduced Japan’s need for the massive amounts of raw materials on which it once depended from the Soviet Union. This had an especially negative effect on the Soviet Far Eastern economy, as well as on Soviet trade with Japan. That Japanese exports to surpassed Japanese imports from the USSR for the first time in 1974 suggests the immediate effect of Japanese economic reforms in the mid-1970s.

Further problems for the Soviet Union in its economic relationship with Japan during the 1970s arose in the forms of the brevity of the Siberian Development Cooperation projects, a growing trade deficit and economic sanctions. One of the major setbacks of the Soviet-Japanese joint-ventures in Siberian and Soviet Far Eastern resource development and exploitation was the relatively short lifespan of each agreement. Specifically, the period following Soviet preparation of the project in which the Soviets compensated the Japanese for their assistance in funding it typically lasted for 5-10 years. Therefore, projects that the two sides began in the mid-1970s and designed to benefit Japan’s then heavy-industry economy essentially became obsolete to Japanese economic needs in the late 1970s and early 1980s because of the sweeping structural economic reforms that Japan had implemented in the latter half of the 1970s. An ancillary consequence of Japan’s decreasing need for Soviet raw materials was trade imbalance that grew
to the overwhelming disadvantage of the Soviet Union from 1974-1989. The economic sanctions that Japan levied against the USSR in solidarity, and under diplomatic pressure from, the U.S. in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in late 1979, although not immediately disruptive to Soviet-Japanese economic relations, eventually undermined Soviet trade and investment cooperation in the early 1980s.

Soviet-Japanese Economic Relations in the 1980s

Although Japan accompanied the U.S. in its application of sanctions against the USSR for its invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the Soviet government maintained trade and investment relations with JSEC, the FEO and other large Japanese corporations into and throughout the 1980s. In terms of contraction and expansion, the scope and depth of Soviet-Japanese cooperation in these areas experienced multiple instances of rather drastic and sporadic fluctuation during this period. To be certain, the peculiar and inconsistent trajectory of Soviet interaction with Japan in the economic sphere from 1980-1990 was largely attributable to a number of events that occurred within and without the immediate domain of the Soviet-Japanese relations. Specific events that influenced Soviet trade, investment and other areas of economic cooperation with Japan negatively, included the implementation of U.S. economic sanctions on the USSR in December 1981 for the declaration of martial law in Poland – yet another instance in which Japan applied similar punitive measures against the USSR in solidarity with the U.S. Additional, more intensive U.S. economic sanctions on the USSR in June 1982, to which Japan was also a party, constituted another specific negative development for Soviet cooperation with Japan in this sphere. Perhaps the most detrimental specific incident that affected Soviet economic relations with Japan in the early 1980s, however, was the shooting down of civilian Korean Airlines flight 007 by Sakhalin-based Soviet combat aircraft less than 100 miles from the
northernmost point of Japan, Cape Soya in Hokkaido. All 28 Japanese passengers on board the flight perished.

Beyond these more specific instances, three other general negative trends influenced the Soviet Union’s economic partnership with Japan in the first half of the 1980s. First, as a result of U.S. pressure on Japan to tow a more rigidly conservative line in global affairs, particularly in the context constraining Soviet power abroad, hard-line political officials and factions within the Japanese government, military and bureaucracy became increasingly dominant in the administration of Japanese relations with the USSR. The impact of this trend in Japanese politics was especially disadvantageous to Soviet economic cooperation with Japan. Up until the 1980s, the more progressive and liberal elements of the Japanese government, principally the Ministry of International Trade and Industry, and business community had maintained strenuously the separation of economics from politics in relations with the Soviet Union – much to the extreme discontent of the hawkish Soviet desk at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan and Japan Defense Agency, as well as extremely conservative factions in Japan’s primary political organization, the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan (LDP). This triumvirate of conservative government forces in Japan firmly believed that Japan should use rapidly growing economic power to pressure the Soviet government on the southern Kuriles dispute.

The second general negative trend that adversely affected Soviet economic cooperation with Japan in the early to mid-1980s was the latter’s experience of an economic slowdown from early 1980 to late 1984 – during which Japan temporarily endured a recession from 1981-1982. Japan’s brief economic slump in the first few years of the 1980s fomented recession among the major corporations and business conglomerates in the Japanese steel and machine industry that enjoyed a de facto monopoly on relevant large-scale joint resource development projects in
Siberia and the Soviet Far East throughout the late 1960s and 1970s. Accordingly, these firms became increasingly cautious in their business dealings with the Soviet government. This deprived the Soviets of a critical resource for the capital and machinery necessary to develop Siberia and the Soviet Far East and underwrite the massive subsidies that the Soviet government was utilizing to maintain its civilian and military presence in these vast, yet sparsely populated regions of the Soviet Union. Exacerbating this growing absence of commercial contact was the discontinuation of institutional economic dialogue between the two countries via the Soviet-Japan Joint Cooperation Committee from 1980-1984 – indeed, a third negative trend in this sphere of the Soviet-Japanese relationship in the first half of the 1980s.

The third trend proved most detrimental to bilateral economic interaction between the Soviet Union and Japan, particularly in the areas of trade and Japanese investment in the Soviet Far East, was Japan’s continued fusion of economics and politics in its relations with the Soviets. The Japanese government’s application of this hard-line, conservative policy – also known as “seikei fukabun” – was most visible and damaging to Soviet economic interests in developing its eastern regions in the late 1980s. It was during this time that Japan – the GDP of which had more than doubled from $1.35 trillion in 1985 to $3.02 trillion in 1990 – sought to exploit, more aggressively than it had in the recent past, the incredibly weakened state of the Soviet economy by making financial assistance and cooperation dependent upon Soviet concessions to Japan in regard to the southern Kuriles dispute.

Another trend that undermined Soviet-Japanese economic interaction in the late 1980s was Japanese government resistance to participating in G7 economic assistance to the Soviet Union - a partial consequence of “seikei fukabun.” The final trend that damaged Soviet economic relations with Japan in the latter half of the decade was the continued Soviet military
build-up in the Soviet Far East. Despite Gorbachev’s overtures to Japan for peace and deeper economic cooperation in his 1986 Vladivostok and 1988 Krasnoyarsk speeches, the massive expansion of Soviet military presence in Asia-Pacific did not inspire confidence among Japanese political, military or business communities. The only isolated incident that occurred in the second part of the 1980s that adversely affected Soviet economic relations with Japan was the 1987 Toshiba scandal. This controversy transpired when the U.S. discovered that a subsidiary of Japanese technology giant Toshiba illegally sold advanced machinery to the Soviet government that would allow it to produce quiet submarine propellers for traditionally loud Soviet submarines. Obviously, Soviet acquisition of such technology and the resultant tactical and strategic benefits of traversing the world oceans in greater silence posed an enormous threat to U.S. national security.

With respect to the events that took place in the 1980s that positively impacted Soviet economic relations with Japan, a number of experiences deserve mentioning. The most significant development for Soviet-Japanese economic cooperation that occurred from 1980-1985 was the passing of the Soviet “gerontocracy.”72 The successive deaths of Brezhnev, Andropov and Chernenko in 1982, 1984 and 1985, respectively, culminated in the ascendancy of Mikhail Gorbachev to power in the Soviet Union. Not only did Gorbachev’s rise to Soviet leadership evoke a new tone in Soviet diplomacy vis-à-vis Japan, it also, and perhaps most importantly, facilitated sweeping economic reform in Soviet domestic and foreign policy in the latter half of the decade. Accordingly, the second event, or rather trend, that constructively affected Soviet-Japanese trade and other areas of economic cooperation was Gorbachev’s implementation of “perestroika” and “new thinking” in 1986.
The liberalization of Soviet society, government, economy and international relations under Gorbachev provided for the promulgation of Soviet legislation in 1987 that granted Soviet industrial ministries and multiple Soviet enterprises the right to “deal directly with foreign exporters.” Notwithstanding these new permissions in economic interaction with foreign business entities, the Soviet trade bureaucracy maintained almost complete control over export commodities. In substantially streamlining the gauntlet of bureaucratic obstacles once associated with engaging in trade with foreign firms and companies, another set of reforms in April 1989 afforded an increasingly large number of Soviet enterprises to expand their business activities and interactions with foreign partners. These changes in the Soviet foreign economic cooperation model engendered smaller and medium-sized Japanese firms and corporations to participate in trade and investment opportunities with Soviet counterparts – essentially breaking the grip of Japanese super-corporations and organizations like the JSEC on economic cooperation with the Soviet trade bureaucracy.  

The cumulative impact of these many positive and negative incidents and trends on Soviet economic relations with Japan in the 1980s, especially in the areas of trade and investment, was mixed. Three sets of Japanese sanctions in place against the Soviets in the early 1980s threatened to delay or shut-down large-scale oil and natural gas exploration and exploitation projects on Sakhalin Island and in Yakutia – both joint Soviet-Japanese Siberian Development Cooperation ventures begun in the mid-1970s. As a consequence of these economically punitive policies, the Japanese government canceled $1.4 billion worth of credits to the Soviet Union in 1981. This withholding of funds did not affect earlier Soviet-Japanese deals as these credits were “cut-off” to new projects only. Therefore, the Japanese government allowed joint projects started before the implementation of the sanctions to continue. By
gradually lifting these sanctions, which included those of 1979, though, Japan allowed itself to continue participating in these lucrative projects throughout the 1980s. After 1981, however, the Soviet Union and Japan did not conclude any major business deals involving large-scale resource development projects in Siberia and the Soviet Far East until the late 1980s. Indeed, many Japanese businessmen were confident that the recession that the country was experiencing from the early to mid-1980s would have precluded Japanese firms from winning major contracts from the USSR for resource development projects anyway.

Interestingly enough, Japanese exports to the USSR continued to expand despite the sanctions against the Soviet government in the earlier part of the decade – by 12.9 percent in 1980, 17.3 percent in 1981 and 19.7 percent in 1982. Moreover, Soviet-Japanese trade in the 1980s peaked in 1982 when the trade turnover amounted to $5.6 billion. Soon thereafter, total Soviet-Japanese trade dropped somewhat precipitously when Japanese exports to the USSR fell by 23 percent and annual turnover depreciated to $4.3 billion in 1983. The reduction in trade turnover between the Soviet Union and Japan in 1983, however, was not necessarily a result of sanctions, but of a decrease in Japanese imports and only later in Japanese exports to the USSR. This decrease was principally attributable to “cyclical and structural factors” in the Japanese economy that had substantially reduced Japanese need for Soviet natural resources and raw materials from 1980-1985. By the end of 1984, Japan ranked fifth among Western states that traded with the USSR – a notable drop from its ranking as second in this regard only six years earlier in 1978. Nevertheless, bilateral trade levels “recovered” after Gorbachev came to power in March 1985. The recovery of Soviet-Japanese economic cooperation under Gorbachev was largely a function of the impact of perestroika and new thinking on Soviet domestic and foreign economic policy. Perestroika evoked serious Soviet demand for technologically advanced
Japanese machinery and equipment, along with significant Soviet consumer interest in obtaining Japanese cars. The reforms that Gorbachev introduced under the auspices of perestroika and new thinking in 1987 and 1989 further accounted for the steady increase in Japanese imports of Soviet raw materials from 1986 onward. Japanese imports of these goods reached record levels from 1987-1990.\textsuperscript{81}

\textit{Soviet-Japanese Economic Relations in the 1990s}

The reforms to foreign economic policy that Gorbachev implemented in 1987 and 1989 allowed for Japan’s role in the development of Siberian and Soviet Far Eastern resources to grow even more expansively in the early 1990s than it had in the latter half of the 1980s.\textsuperscript{82} Despite this expansion in Japan’s role in the development of the USSR’s eastern regions, Japan’s economic presence was negligible compared to other Pacific Rim countries, especially the U.S. and Canada. Proximity aside, Japan ranked only third in terms of Pacific states involved in joint-ventures with the Soviets with just 21 such projects.\textsuperscript{83} Similar U.S. and Canadian projects, on the other hand, totaled 102 and 75, respectively.\textsuperscript{84} This comparably low-level of economic interaction between the Soviet Union and Japan was further evident in the percentage of exports and imports for which each country accounted in the other’s overall annual trade turnover in 1990. Soviet exports to Japan in 1990 in this regard were particularly unremarkable – they constituted only 2 percent of Japan’s cumulative imports for that year and created a profound trade deficit in Japan’s favor.\textsuperscript{85} Japan’s share of overall foreign investment in Siberia and the Soviet Far East of only 35 percent in the early 1990s left almost as much to be desired as Japan’s imports of Soviet goods.\textsuperscript{86} That more intensive Japanese economic cooperation with, and assistance to, the Soviets was not forthcoming without greater “flexibility” on the southern
Kuriles dispute only exacerbated this negative trend in Soviet-Japanese trade and investment relations.\textsuperscript{87}

To be certain, seikei fukabun – the inseparability of economics and politics – remained a major obstacle to constructive Soviet interaction with Japan in the economic sphere. The relative intransigence of hawkish and conservative actors and factions in the Japanese government in respect to the territorial-economic quid pro quo formula made efforts to secure further Japanese investment in Siberia and the Soviet Far East and general economic assistance extraordinarily difficult for Soviet officials in 1990 and 1991. Although seikei fukabun was present in virtually all major economic and business considerations between the Soviet Union and Japan at this time, it became particularly manifest at the 1990 G7 Houston Summit. At this international meeting, Japanese Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu offered only Japan’s technical help to Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. Kaifu made this proposal contingent on Gorbachev’s assurance that the Soviet government would commit itself to the resolution of the southern Kuriles dispute in the near future.\textsuperscript{88}

Seikei fukabun and its political benefactors in the Japanese government continued to determine the nature of Japanese policy toward the Soviet Union even in the face of the mounting requests and criticism of its G7 partners, as well as the Soviet government, to join the G7 in contributing significant financial aid to the USSR – aid that was “untied” to progress on the territorial impasse. Notwithstanding this pressure, the Japanese government insisted financial assistance of any kind to the Soviet government would be contingent on Soviet concessions in the territorial dispute. A partial consequence of Japan’s almost complete refusal to supply the USSR with any substantive economic aid in 1990, the Soviet government “fell behind” in its payments to Japan for steel imports. In response to the Soviet government’s
default on these payments, four major Japanese steel corporations temporarily discontinued their shipments to the Soviet Union in 1990.\textsuperscript{89}

The Soviet government’s failure to balance its accounts with these Japanese companies was indicative of the Soviet government’s growing debt burden and its inability to pay it down. A clear indication of this occurred in the fall of 1990 when the Japanese government commissioned, but in reality “forced,” a consortium of five Japanese banks to extend to the Soviet Foreign Economic Bank an “emergency loan” of $400 million to cover payment obligations to Japanese creditors. By May 1991, the Soviets had accumulated approximately $515 million in unpaid bills to Japanese companies – Japanese banks subsequently suspended the issuing of all new loans to the USSR. At the same time, the Japanese Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) provisionally withheld Japanese government trade insurance for major contracts between Soviet and Japanese corporations. Accordingly, large Soviet-Japanese trade deals reminiscent of those in the late 1960, 1970s and early 1980s became practically “unfeasible” without sufficient and official external financing. What had become more apparent at this time, however, was that the “chronic” trade deficit that the Soviet Union had been running with Japan at the end of the 1980s had “deteriorated” into a “full-fledged balance of payments crisis in 1990 and 1991. In these first two years of the 1990s, the number of Soviet firms delaying, missing or outright defaulting on payments to Japanese exporters increased significantly.\textsuperscript{90}

Toward the end of 1991, a series of developments occurred that prompted Japan to extend an unprecedented loan of $2.5 billion to the Soviet government in October 1991 as part of a larger G7 aid package.\textsuperscript{91} First, Boris Yeltsin and other high-ranking governmental officials from the increasingly powerful Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic engaged in multiple
initiatives regarding the resolution of the southern Kuriles dispute. Second, international pressure from Japan’s G7 partners was growing in respect to the need for Japan to contribute more financial assistance to the Soviet Union regardless of the state of progress in negotiations over the territorial issue. Third, the abortive coup in the Soviet Union in mid-August 1991 intimated to the Japanese government the precariousness of the deteriorating political and socio-economic situation in the Soviet Union, as well as the important role that Japanese economic aid could play in helping to stabilize it. Fourth, the concerns of Japanese big business weighed heavily on the Japanese government as the tumultuous political and economic conditions in the Soviet Union were decimating these companies’ and creditors’ investment in the Soviet Far East at the time.

The Japanese government reflected its special attention to these private domestic interests by conditioning the disbursement of these funds to the Soviet government on its commitment to use these finances, in part, to repay the debts that Soviet government and private corporate entities owed to their Japanese counterparts. Taking into consideration the situation surrounding the gaping Soviet trade-deficit to Japan in the early 1990s, it was “not surprising” that Soviet exports to and imports from Japan “plummeted” in the latter half of 1991. By the end of 1991, outstanding Soviet “trade liabilities vis-à-vis Japan” had increased by 55 percent to $800 million. As a result of the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991, however, Soviet debtors never got the opportunity to utilize these sizeable funds granted only two months earlier to pay down their balance to Japanese patrons.
POST-SOVIET RUSSIAN-JAPANESE ECONOMIC RELATIONS
FROM 1992-2000

Immediately following the Soviet break-up, the Japanese Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) “froze” almost all of the $2.5 billion that it initially intended to provide to the Soviet government. Instead, the Japanese government utilized the withheld funds to “cover payments owed to Japanese firms.” MITI also suspended the doling out of new credits to Russia in 1992 until these necessary parties determined which entities, government or private, or both, were to be held “liable” for the past debts of the Soviet government. Making the situation worse was the moderate, but noteworthy rejuvenation of the hard-line element in Japanese government that preferred exploiting the economic destitution of the fledgling Russian Federation to reacquire the southern Kurile Islands. To be certain, the Japanese government continued its appreciably vehement resistance to calls from its G7 partners to join them in “increased contributions” of collective financial assistance to Yeltsin’s young, struggling government. This course of action drew significant criticism from Western Europe and Russia. Both bemoaned Japan’s unwillingness “to contribute its fair share.” Japan’s only allocation of financial aid to Russia was a “paltry” $50 million in “emergency humanitarian aid” in January 1992. Notwithstanding the difficulties in macroeconomic cooperation and interaction between the post-Soviet Russian and Japanese governments in the early 1990s, a “new joint-venture law” and the opening of Russian ports in the Russian Far East, such as Vladivostok and Nakhodka, facilitated a “dramatic growth” in border trade between Khabarovsk, Primorsky and Sakhalin and Hokkaido. At the end of 1992, some 75 percent of Russian Far East exports were going to Japan. The political effect of this increased “border trade” was a call among these Russian Far Eastern maritime regions and Hokkaido for the creation of a “Japanese Sea Economic Zone.”

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Despite the impressive expansion in border trade between the Russian Far East and Hokkaido, it had become undeniably apparent to Japan toward the end of 1992 that its policy of fusing economic assistance to Russia to progress on the territorial dispute was “plunging into disaster.” Japan essentially abandoned its policy of seikei fukabun in mid-April 1993 when it announced at the July 1993 G7 Tokyo Summit its input of an “unprecedented” $1.8 billion into a collective aid package of some $43.4 billion from the G7 to Russia. The inspiration for this dramatic shift in Japan’s Russia policy was the highly successful, first Yeltsin-Clinton summit a few months earlier in mid-April 1993. As in October 1991, a number of pressure groups encouraged Japan to contribute a considerable amount of economic support to Russia in July 1993. These groups included Japan’s Western European G7 partners, as well as, and perhaps more importantly, the Japanese public and the U.S. government. More influential on Japan’s decision in this instance than Japanese public opinion against seikei fukabun was probably the deeper, more substantive U.S. commitment to post-Soviet Russia under Clinton. Indeed, U.S. political pressure on Japan to help ease Russia’s socio-economic plight became increasingly noticeable after the Yeltsin-Clinton April 1993 Summit in Vancouver.95

The Japanese government, however, attempted to save some diplomatic face in order to downplay its basic coercion into assisting Russia at this time. It did so by admitting after the July 1993 G7 Tokyo Summit that “the stability of Russia” was crucial to the resolution of the territorial dispute and, as such, the “only action that Japan” could take was to assist in the success and consolidation of Russia’s political and economic liberalization. The $1.8 billion that Japan had pledged at this conference constituted an integral part of this commitment. In addition, Japan did not miss the opportunity to verbally protest U.S. efforts to make Tokyo “bear the burden” of assisting Russia. Furthermore, Japan criticized the Russian government for
failing to treat Japan as an “equal partner” and “grabbing” Japanese money without hesitation or intention to reciprocate the gesture via concessions on the territorial dispute. That the “bulk” of this assistance was to pass through international organizations like the IMF, WB and European Banks of Reconstruction and Development also allowed Japan to disqualify this aid as direct bilateral assistance. Due to Russia’s subsequent inability, or perhaps unwillingness, to meet the necessary conditions – as per the stipulations of the 1993 G7 Tokyo conference – Japan and its G7 partners delayed the transfer of the crucial funds. For Japan’s part, Russia had been unwilling to draft a “repayment arrangement” that satisfied Japanese business interests – consequently, the amount that Russia owed to Japanese firms steeped to $1.5 billion by June $1993. In some instances, Russia was able to resume payments of interest on certain credits owed to Japanese banks, albeit in a manner that was neither consistent nor satisfactory to these institutions.96

A few months after the July G7 Tokyo Summit in October 1993, Yeltsin paid his first official visit to Japan. During this visit, Yeltsin asked for the help of Japanese companies in expediting then-current natural resource development projects in Russia, especially in Siberia and the Russian Far East, at a luncheon with Japanese business leaders. Yeltsin remarked that Russia and Japan should construct a “new partnership” based on economic cooperation and trade relations similar to the U.S.-Japan economic relationship. In response, Japanese business leaders noted that while “potentially excellent projects” existed for Japanese businesses in Russia, the lack of Russian federal, regional and local legislation encouraging and protecting Japanese investments in joint-ventures, particularly in the complex tax laws governing foreign economic activity in Russia, as well as “inadequate infrastructure,” discouraged Japanese corporations from seeking to operate in Russia.97
Unlike their government, Japanese business leaders were neither subject nor necessarily vulnerable to international political pressure to the extent that it coerced them into engaging in high-risk joint-ventures in Russia. Nevertheless, some Japanese investors did negotiate gas and oil exploration contracts with Russia in 1993. Although Yeltsin did not depart Tokyo in October 1993 with a portfolio full of freshly inked commitments of Japanese business leaders promising to engage in joint resource development projects in Siberia and the Russian Far East, he did manage to sign with the Japanese government a memorandum – apart from the more notable Tokyo Declaration concerning the southern Kuriles dispute – expressing the two countries’ mutual intention to cooperate in such economic sectors as energy, forestry, transportation, communication and the conversion of military plants into industrial complexes for civilian usage and production of consumer goods.

Notwithstanding the importance of the memorandum on increased Russian-Japanese economic cooperation that Yeltsin signed in Tokyo in October 1993, the reluctance of Japanese business to commit their finances and time to risky endeavors in Russia understandably persisted. Trade statistics in 1992, 1993 and 1994 reflected this reluctance, as well as Japan’s frustration with Russia’s slow rate of economic reform. Russian trade turnover with Japan amounted to $2.3 billion and $2.4 billion in 1992 and 1993, respectively. The low level of trade growth from 1992-1993 was largely attributable to a 67 percent reduction in Russian imports of Japanese machines and technical goods. Russian export deliveries to Japan in 1993, however, amounted to $1.2 billion – consisting primarily of raw materials.

Russia’s trade with 22 Asian partners reached nearly $20 billion in 1993 – a 33 percent increase from roughly $15 billion in 1992. This was notable because Russia’s worldwide trade decreased significantly by almost 24 percent in 1993. Japan was Russia’s second most important
trading partner in Asia in 1993. Total turnover increased from $2.4 billion in 1993 to $3.4 billion in 1994. And, although the growth in trade from 1993-1994 was significant, the Russian government was by no means satisfied with the overall level of trade with Japan because it believed that the two countries’ combined economic potential was far greater than these figures demonstrated. Essentially, the Russian government felt that the Japanese government and business community were exercising too much caution and restraint in respect to investing in strategic sectors of the Russian economy, most notably the energy sector.102

In 1995, Russian trade turnover with Japan reached its highest point—attaining a record $6 billion in bilateral exchange. This figure represented an almost 80 percent increase in trade turnover in one year—Russian-Japanese trade in 1994 totaled almost $3.4 billion. The increase was attributable to record growth in Russian raw materials exports to Japan, specifically oil and gas. By 1996, however, this figure had depreciated approximately 17 percent to $5 billion. Total trade turnover between the two countries remained at basically the same level rising only 1 percent in 1997 and thus resting at nearly $5 billion. The stagnation that bilateral trade experienced from 1996-1997 was the result of only a slight increase in Russian exports to Japan in 1997 and small drop in Russian imports from Japan. Specifically, Russian exports to Japan rose by 1.9 percent to nearly $4 billion in 1997, whereas imports from Japan decreased by 7 percent to roughly $1 billion. Russian exports included raw materials and products like non-ferrous and precious metals, timber, fish, minerals and ore.103

Moreover, in 1997, Russian exports accounted for only 0.8 percent of Japan’s total imports and Japan’s exports amounted to only 3 percent of Russian imports. Additionally, Japanese investment in Russia in 1997 amounted to only 1.2 percent of all foreign capital investments in Russia; Russia ranked 13th among the countries in which Japanese companies
were investing in 1997. A positive development among these generally downbeat indicators in Russia’s economic relationship with Japan in 1997 was a sizeable diminution in Russian debt. In particular, Russia’s debt to Japan in 1997 had decreased from almost $5 billion in late 1994 to a little over $2 billion in late 1997. In mid-May 1997, Russia and Japan exchanged notes on the settlement of this debt within the framework of the “Paris Club” of creditor countries. Another important development in Russian-Japanese economic relations occurred during the first Yeltsin-Hashimoto no-necktie summit in Krasnoyarsk in November 1997. Keeping with the theme of his new “Eurasian Doctrine” in focusing more heavily on economic cooperation with Russia than on the territorial impasse, Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto informed Yeltsin of the intention of Japan’s Export-Import Bank to open a new line of credit to Russia for roughly $166 million to finance the gas and oil exploration and exploitation project on Sakhalin Island known as Sakhalin II.104

Japanese economic assistance to Russia continued under Hashimoto’s Eurasian Doctrine in 1998. In a further measure of cultivating confidence and good-faith between Russia and Japan, Hashimoto informed Yeltsin at the leaders’ second no-necktie summit in Kawana in April 1998 of Japan’s plan to extend to Russia $1.5 billion to assist in realizing the success of the difficult economic reform process.105 This loan was further significant in that its disbursement was not “tied” to Russian concessions on the southern Kuriles dispute.106 Out of the total amount of the $1.5 billion in new credit that Japan had promised to Russia at the Kawana leaders’ summit in April 1998, Russia only had received $400 million in July 1998 to restructure its coal industry.107 Subsequent distribution was suspended after the Russian financial crisis in August 1998.108
Indeed, the Russian financial crisis that occurred in mid-August 1998 – as a combined result of the 1997 Asian financial crisis and its detrimental impact on world commodity prices – had a profoundly negative impact on Russian-Japanese economic relations. The severe drop in world commodities prices, especially in respect to oil and gas, hit the Russian economy particularly hard because raw materials including oil and gas accounted for roughly 80 percent of Russia’s total annual exports at that time. This shocked Japanese investors in Russia and encouraged Japanese banks to reduce their “ruble accounts” practically “to naught” almost overnight.\textsuperscript{109} The Japanese government had attempted to stave off the Russian financial crisis by providing a loan, in tandem with the IMF and World Bank of $22.6 billion to prop up the crumbling ruble in July 1998.\textsuperscript{110} By late November 1998, Japan ranked as Russia’s second “creditor country” from among the world’s seven wealthiest states.\textsuperscript{111}

Due to the 1997 Asian and 1998 Russian financial crises, bilateral trade between Russia and Japan had dropped 23 percent to $3.87 billion in 1998 from approximately $5 billion in 1997.\textsuperscript{112} The structure of bilateral trade in 1998 was somewhat alarming in that it indicated little to no change in the substance of exchange between Russia and Japan for more than 30 years. Specifically, Russian exports to Japan consisted almost entirely of the same types of raw materials that the Soviet Union had exported to Japan in the late 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s, whereas Japan’s had diversified to include more advanced machinery and hi-tech equipment.\textsuperscript{113} Total Russian-Japanese trade turnover recovered slightly in 1999 and rose 3 percent to $3.99 billion.\textsuperscript{114} Russian imports from Japan shrank to $443 million in 1999, while exports to Japan grew by some 23 percent to $3.54 billion.\textsuperscript{115} The Russian government believed trade turnover between the two countries to be “too low” and unsatisfactory.\textsuperscript{116} Nevertheless, economic interaction and cooperation, as well as planning, continued between Russia and Japan
in 1999. After a fourth session of a bilateral sub-commission for issues of economic relations between the Russian Far East and Japan in mid-March 1999, the two sides agreed to “carry out” six joint projects in the Russian Far East.¹¹⁷ These included the building of four new gas pipelines in Sakhalin, Kamchatka, Khabarovsk and Yakutia.¹¹⁸ At this session, however, the Japanese side called on the Russian side to “improve the investment climate in Russia,” specifically in regard to adopting investor-friendly legislation such as taxation privileges.¹¹⁹ A number of high-ranking Russian and Japanese government and business officials and leaders were in attendance.

What is more, in early September 1999, Russia and Japan signed a memorandum on economic cooperation that provided for the release of the “untied” loan to Japan of $1.1 billion ¹²⁰ - part of a $1.5 billion dollar loan that it had made available to Russia in late spring 1998, but had suspended due to the Russian financial crisis in August 1998.¹²¹ This memorandum also provided for increased economic cooperation in the development of energy resources in the Russian Far East and Japan’s technical assistance to Russia in its bid to join the WTO.¹²² Despite the signing of this agreement in September 1999, Russian-Japanese trade turnover remained far below levels satisfactory to Russian government officials as did the minimal extent of Japanese investment in Russia. As of late 1999, Japanese investments in Russia amounted to only $350 million. This frustrated Russian officials because the Russian government had estimated Japan’s investment capacity in “promising fields” of the Russian economy, particularly oil and gas exploitation, at between $70-90 billion. Russian government and business officials increasingly regarded the fuel and energy sector as “the main strategic sphere of economic cooperation” between Russia and Japan. By the end of 1999, 20 joint Russian-Japanese projects on the modernization of Russian energy enterprises existed.¹²³
RUSSIAN-JAPANESE TRADE AND INVESTMENT RELATIONS FROM 2000-2010

The past decade witnessed a quantitatively new era in Russian-Japanese economic relations. Although the structure, scope and substance of bilateral trade between Russia and Japan from 2000-2010 remained basically similar to those present in the Soviet-Japanese economic relationship from the late 1960s to the early 1990s, the rapidity with which Russian-Japanese trade turnover expanded during this period was highly significant and thusly merits consideration here. That Russia’s economic relationship with Japan over the last decade, however, did not qualify as “dynamic” is largely attributable to the more fundamental problems that existed in crucial spheres of bilateral economic interaction and exchange. Two spheres of interaction and exchange that reveal the extent of, yet lack of depth and dynamism in, Russian-Japanese economic relations from 2000-2010 are bilateral trade and Japanese investment in Russia.

Bilateral trade between Russia and Japan experienced considerable growth in the 2000s, the rise and crest of which occurred from 2004-2008 when world oil prices appreciated greatly in value. To the simultaneous content and dismay of Russian government officials, the expansion of trade remained effectively linear in respect to sectors in which exports and imports had increased. Specifically, Russia exported to Japan raw materials analogous to those of its Soviet predecessor during the Cold War – though oil and gas assumed a higher profile in Russian-Japanese trade portfolios in the new millennium – and imported from Japan finished goods such as advanced machinery and other hi-tech equipment necessary for modernizing Russia’s economy, industry and infrastructure. Going into the new millennium, Russia’s total annual trade turnover with Japan climbed steadily from $3.99 billion in 1999 to approximately $5
billion in 2000 – an impressive increase of 25 percent and a five-year high. This increase was remarkable because it corrected the relative decline in trade that existed from 1995-1999.

In 2000, for the first time in many years, Russian exports to, and imports from, Japan rose. Russian exports to Japan grew by 24 percent from 1999 to roughly $4.6 billion. At the same time, Russian imports from Japan increased 22 percent from the previous year to $571 million. Nevertheless, most of Russia’s exports to Japan were “non-ferrous metals” – such as aluminum, copper, nickel and titanium – and “primary commodities.” Russian “machinery and equipment” accounted for only .02 percent of its total exports to Japan. Imports from Japan in 2000, however, primarily consisted of important, finished consumer goods such as cars and electronics. Russian and Japanese government trade officials concurred that bilateral exchange in this sphere was “on the low side” with a “clear potential for growth,” noting that Japanese trade with the U.S. and China in 2000 totaled $250 billion and $85 billion, respectively. Despite these shared observations and perspectives, in September 2000 Russian Deputy Prime Minister Viktor Khristenko expressed his deep satisfaction with the state of bilateral economic relations. To be certain, Khristenko’s comment contrasted substantially with Russian Trade Minister Mikhail Fradkov’s lament in early February 2000 in which he asserted that the Kremlin could not be “satisfied” with the low volume of trade between the two countries given their vast, mutually complementary economic potential.

The growth spurt that occurred in Russian-Japanese trade turnover in 2000 depreciated from $5 billion to $4.59 billion in 2001. In early December 2001, the Russian and Japanese governments signed a memorandum at the fifth meeting of the Russian-Japanese Intergovernmental Commission on Trade and Economic Issues in Tokyo. The highest ranking Russian and Japanese officials at this conference were co-chairmen Russian Deputy Prime
Minister Viktor Khristenko and Japanese Foreign Minister Makiko Tanako. In the memorandum, the Russian government expressed its intention to “create favorable conditions for developing trade and for improving the investment climate” in the Russian Federation, and particularly in the Russian Far East where a majority of Japanese business and economic activity is focused and located. The agreement further noted the “significant progress” that Russia and Japan had made in the implementation processes of the Sakhalin I and II oil and gas projects.\textsuperscript{127}

And, even though this agreement addressed issues of investment and pertinent legislation in Russia, one of Russia’s principal reasons for concluding the accord with Japan was to stave off or slow the downward trend in overall bilateral trade turnover. Whether this Russian effort was successful is indiscernible as the two countries’ trade volume dropped only 5 percent in 2002 to $4.4 billion.\textsuperscript{128} What is more, in 2002, Japan accounted for a paltry 3 percent of Russia’s overall annual exports; Russia accounted for less than 1 percent of Japan’s foreign trade.\textsuperscript{129} The substance of Russian exports to Japan remained the same – comprising “Raw materials, seafood products and timber.”\textsuperscript{130} That the Russian government took lightly neither this slight decrease in trade turnover nor either country’s negligible statistical presence in the overall trade turnover of the other was made apparent in mid-October 2002. It was at this time when Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Aleksandr Yakovenko commented that in order to “stimulate trade” and “promote specific business cooperation projects,” Russia and Japan needed “new forms of trade and economic collaboration” that more fittingly responded to the “political and economic realities” of the time.\textsuperscript{131}

After a two-year decline from $5 billion at the end of 2000 to $4.59 billion in 2001 to $4.4 billion in 2002, Russian-Japanese trade turnover rebounded approximately 25 percent to $5.5 billion at the end of 2003. This impressive recovery in bilateral trade in 2003 was
attributable to a considerable expansion in Russian-Japanese cooperation in the energy sphere, especially in the areas of joint oil and gas exploitation and Japanese consumption. Indeed, 2003 marked the first year in which Japanese power companies received deliveries of Russian oil and committed to purchasing sizeable amounts of Russian natural gas. Japanese investment in Russia’s oil and gas sectors had increased so greatly from mid-2002 to the end of 2003 that Japan’s total foreign direct investment in Russia had doubled by early 2004 to nearly $1 billion. 132

The former Japanese ambassador to Russia, Takehiro Togo, cited the progress made in 2003 as “an important turning point” in the future of Russian-Japanese economic relations. 133 He emphasized the role of the major energy development projects in the Russian maritime provinces, specifically Sakhalin II, in facilitating this remarkable upsurge in trade turnover and Japanese investment in Russia. 134 The problem, however, was that the structure and substance of Russian exports to Japan, although shifting more and more to the provision of energy resources, remained in the area of raw materials and commodities – all of which were highly vulnerable to fluctuations in world prices and supply-and-demand “shocks.” Moreover, Russia was not trading on an equal footing with Japan because Japan was not purchasing Russian machinery or technology concurrently with Russian oil and gas. Nevertheless, the increase in turnover was good news for both sides, but for Russia most importantly. Toward this end, Putin acknowledged in mid-June 2004 the “positive trend” in Russian-Japanese economic relations as the first such tendency in this aspect of the Russian-Japanese relationship in “years.” 135

The positive trend that Putin had observed in mid-June 2004 continued throughout the rest of the year and resulted in an annual total trade turnover between Russia and Japan of $8.85 billion. This sum equated to a more than 50 percent increase from the 2003 figure of $5.5
billion. Notwithstanding this incredibly momentous achievement in its economic relationship with Japan at the end of 2004, the Russian government remained fairly disillusioned and unsatisfied with the more fundamental issue at hand: Russian-Japanese cooperation in the economic sphere still not had begun to reflect or approach its full potential. In mid-January 2005, Russian Industry and Power Engineering Minister Viktor Khristenko brought attention to a number of discouraging facts that offset the 2004 record-breaking trade turnover in Russian-Japanese economic relations. First, he stressed that the volume of Japanese exports to Russia in 2004 were more than twice that of Russian exports to Japan. Second, Khristenko noted that the “nature” of Russian exports to Japan remained “regrettably” the same (i.e., raw materials). Finally, he reminded Russia-Japan-watchers that the considerably low level of “investment cooperation” between the two countries reflected poorly on their overall economic partnership. By the end of 2004, Japanese investment in Russia amounted to merely 1 percent of the total foreign investment in the country.  

Even with persistently low levels of bilateral investment and proportionately low trade turnover, cooperation in the latter sphere continued to expand into and throughout 2005. Total annual trade between Russia and Japan rose 13 percent from $8.85 billion in 2004 to about $10 billion in 2005. In addition to the significance of yet another year of uninterrupted growth in trade turnover, Russia and Japan signed an important memorandum in late April 2005 in which the two countries resolved “pending bilateral trade issues,” the settlement of which was a prerequisite for Russia’s completion of its negotiations with Japan for accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO). Beyond helping to pave the way for Russia’s entrance into the WTO, resolving these matters in the trade of goods and services between themselves established firm grounds on which Russia and Japan could expand their economic relationship to include
cooperation in other, non-traditional sectors of their respective economies. Furthermore, there is little doubt that the April 2005 memorandum assisted Russia and Japan in realizing still another year of consistent growth in trade. Indeed, Russian-Japanese turnover in 2006 approximated $12.5 billion.\textsuperscript{139} What came as a shock to Russia in 2006, however, was that Japan began “posting a trade surplus” with Russia.\textsuperscript{140} Typically, Russia’s raw material exports to Japan provided Russia with a trade surplus. This changed in 2006. At the same time, though, the 25 percent increase in bilateral trade turnover also was partially a result of high oil and gas prices on the world market. Moreover, in 2006, Japan had nearly 302 companies operating in Russia as opposed to only 5 in 1999.\textsuperscript{141}

By the end of 2007, Russian-Japanese trade turnover had jumped more than 70 percent to an unprecedented $21.26 billion.\textsuperscript{142} Additionally, the number of Japanese companies that had entered Russia grew to 349 from only 5 in 1999 and 85 in 2000.\textsuperscript{143} Like virtually every other annual trade cycle between Russia and Japan since the early 1990s, the actual proportion of how much each country’s exchange accounted for the other’s total continued to underscore the lack of intensity and dynamism in the Russian-Japanese economic relationship despite seemingly exponential annual growth rates in bilateral trade turnover. Accordingly, Russia accounted for only 1.6 percent of Japan’s entire foreign trade in 2007 and Japan accounted for 3.5 percent of Russia’s total trade turnover in 2007.\textsuperscript{144} Further buoyed by skyrocketing oil and gas prices – both commodities of which Russia was selling in abundance to Japan – this figure increased almost 50 percent to a historic $29 billion dollars in 2008.\textsuperscript{145}

Due to the global economic crisis and the concurrent, if not resultant, precipitous drop in world oil and gas prices – as well as the relative decline in Russia’s and Japan’s general purchasing power – Russian-Japanese trade turnover plummeted by 60 percent from $29 billion
in 2008 to only $12.09 billion in 2009. Interestingly enough, in 2009, as Russian-Japanese trade essentially “halved,” Japan’s investments in Russia doubled from roughly $4 billion in 2008 to $8.3 billion in 2009. Despite this impressive trend, the Russian government still called on Japan to expand its cooperation and investment in the region. As of July 2010, however, drastically increased Japanese purchases of Russian raw materials, especially oil and steel, as well as Japan’s vastly expanded exports of cars to Russia, has facilitated the recovery of Russian-Japanese bilateral trade to “pre-recession” levels. Nevertheless, the Japanese only are increasing their investments in projects that seek to exploit Russian natural resources, specifically oil and gas, and consequently are not facilitating any type of dynamic trajectory in the Russian-Japanese economic relationship. Rather, the Japanese are perpetuating, with the tacit endorsement of the Russians, the similar situation that the Russian government has complained about since the late 1950s, namely Japan’s interest in Russia lies primarily in her raw materials and likely will not expand beyond that at any point in the near future.

CONCLUSION

This chapter demonstrated that Russia’s economic relationship with Japan expanded considerably, albeit not dynamically during the Putin-Medvedev era. Although trade turnover grew to historically unprecedented proportions between the two countries and their respective business communities in the new millennium, neither the structure nor substance of their relationship changed. That is to say, the trend of Soviet exports of raw materials to Japan and Soviet imports of essentially finished goods like machinery from Japan has persisted into the Putin-Medvedev era. And, because the post-Soviet Russian-Japanese trade and investment relationship has not graduated, or rather diversified, beyond this relatively economically linear form of exchange and interaction, it has not developed dynamically. That the extent to which the
two countries trade with one another is so consistently negligible in terms of their individual overall annual trade total is further testament to the non-dynamic nature of this relationship. Accordingly, the relationship that existed between Russia and Japan economically from 2000-2010 was one of interconnectedness with the potential to become more interdependent in the future. Whether the Russian-Japanese trade and investment relationship matures from one of interconnectedness to interdependence, however, depends on the resolution of the territorial dispute – a dispute that Russia and Japan do not yet seem to have established the necessary amount of trust, politically or economically, to settle. In this instance, Russia’s neorealist concerns for territorial and, to a lesser extent, economic security undermined a deepening of exchange in economic goods and services with Japan, the most promising and progressive sphere of interaction between the two countries to-date.
NOTES


11 Ibid.

12 Kimura, Japanese-Russian Relations under Gorbachev and Yeltsin, p. 243.

13 Kimura, Japanese-Russian Relations under Brezhnev and Andropov, pp. 6-7.


15 Kimura, Japanese-Russians Relations under Brezhnev and Andropov, pp. 4-7.

16 Kimura, Japanese-Russian Relations under Gorbachev and Yeltsin, p. 244.

17 Ibid., pp. 244-245.

18 Although Sakhalin II and the Eastern Siberia-Pacific Ocean (ESPO) oil pipeline came online in February 2009 and February 2010, respectively, this does not mean that Russia and Japan constructed pipelines traversing the floor in the Seas of Okhotsk and Japan. Rather, Sakhalin II energy is transported Prigorodnoye in Aniva Bay in southern Sakhalin and then transferred to ships that deliver it to ports in Japan. The ESPO pipeline carries oil from central Siberia to the port at Kozmino near Nakhodka where it is transferred to barges and then transported to Japan. (See Jun Hongo, “Aso-Medvedev Summit Expected to Sidestep Isles,” The Japan Times, February 17, 2009; “Tanker with East Siberia Oil Sails from Kozmino to Japan,” ITAR-TASS, February 26, 2010.)

19 Kimura, Japanese-Russian Relations under Gorbachev and Yeltsin, p. 244.


22 Ibid.


43 Ibid.


46 Ibid., p. 420.

58 Kimura, Japanese-Russian Relations under Gorbachev and Yeltsin, p. 244.
59 Ibid.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid., pp. 417-420.
63 Ibid., pp. 417-418.
66 Ibid., p. 413.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
82 Trenin and Mikheev, “Russia and Japan as a Resource for Mutual Development,” p. 9.
84 Ibid.
85 Ibid., p. 1171.
86 Trenin and Mikheev, “Russia and Japan as a Resource for Mutual Development,” p. 10.
88 Ibid., p. 422.
91 Ibid., p. 422.
92 Ibid.
93 Ibid., pp. 424-425.
94 Ibid., p. 425, 427-428.
105 Ibid.
106 Ibid.
115 Ibid.
116 Ibid.
118 Ibid; “Russia, Japan Discuss at Least Six Joint Ventures,” ITAR-TASS, April 17, 1999.


“Ibid.”

“Ibid.”

“Ibid.”

“Ibid.”

“Ibid.”

“Ibid.”


“Ibid.”

“Ibid.”


CHAPTER 8

RUSSIAN MILITARY RELATIONS WITH JAPAN FROM 2000-2010
At first glance, it appears that Russian-Japanese military relations leave much to be desired. Indeed, they neither have expanded nor deepened to an extent commensurate with the strategic partnership Russia seeks to establish with Japan. Upon closer examination, however, it becomes evident that Russian-Japanese military relations are nevertheless surprisingly extensive given the continued existence of two politically “irritating elements” between them – the highly contentious southern Kuriles territorial dispute and the enduring absence of a bilateral peace treaty. Despite the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues, Russian-Japanese military relations expanded considerably, yet cautiously during the Putin era. This trend persists in the Medvedev era. In fact, when compared to other cases in which a territorial dispute and lack of peace treaty continue to preclude the normalization of diplomatic ties between two countries, such as Greece and Turkey, India and Pakistan, and China and India, Russian-Japanese military relations appear rather exemplary.

Nevertheless, the developments in Russian military relations with Japan from 2000-2010 – although encouraging and indicative of a somewhat uncharacteristic thaw in this sphere – were more symbolic than substantive. Accordingly, they facilitated neither a profound expansion nor diversification of Russia’s military relationship with Japan. Instead, they intimated the pervasiveness of neorealist concerns for self-preservation, security maximization and territorial defense in Russian military policy toward Japan since the turn of the millennium as well as the negative impact of the two countries’ mutually reciprocal threat perceptions on cooperation in this sphere. At the same time, however, the Russian government’s inclination to continue engaging in a military relationship with Japan that was noticeably more symbolic than substantive displayed its faith in the confidence-building process in this sphere. It also displayed Russia’s willingness to maintain open dialogue with Japan over certain military matters so as to
avoid or at least temper the emergence and potential consequences of threat misperception, misrepresentation and miscommunication as well as prisoner’s-dilemma-like military scenarios. This chapter presents evidence to support these arguments. The following subsections seek to provide an understanding of Russian-Japanese military relations from 2000–2010. These subsections include threat perception, the evolution of military cooperation, and dialogue and personnel exchange. From a theoretical perspective, this chapter examines the impact of threat perception on Russian-Japanese military cooperation and confirms the primacy of security issues in the two countries’ relationship.

**THREAT PERCEPTIONS**

Russian and Japanese threat perceptions of one another have changed noticeably in the two decades following the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the post-Soviet era, especially since the turn of the millennium, each government gradually has begun to shed its perception of the other as a relatively direct and actual threat. Instead Russia and Japan have attempted to adopt a more pragmatic and conciliatory view of one another’s military posture and defense policy. Moreover, each has tried to obtain a better understanding as to how they factor into the other’s strategic and national security considerations. In this instance, Russian and Japanese officials essentially have discarded the perspective that their counterparts’ armed forces pose immediate, seemingly inevitable external dangers to their states’ respective security. In place of their dated Cold War anxieties, Russian and Japanese political and military leaders in the Putin-Medvedev era have concerned themselves with the other state’s military potential. That is to say, each government has become preoccupied with the other’s capacity to expand the strength and scope of its military in the two countries’ extensive border area – in the vicinity of the southern rim of
the Sea of Okhotsk and the northern region of the Sea of Japan. Russia remains primarily concerned with Japan’s potential to rapidly expand its military capabilities in the region of Russia most vulnerable to external aggression and Japan’s close military relationship with the U.S. And, though well aware of Russia’s much diminished military power and presence in the Russian Far East, Japan has become increasingly anxious over Russia’s renewed strategic commitment to, and military activity in, the Russian Far East, particularly in the area of the southern Kuriles.

RUSSIAN THREAT PERCEPTIONS OF JAPAN

The end of the Cold War diluted, but by no means discontinued, Russia’s perception of Japan as a threat to the territorial and economic security of the Russian Far East. To be certain, Russian cooperation with Japan in military and trust-building spheres has experienced significant, commendable progress since 1992. Despite this progress, the Russian government in the Putin-Medvedev era remains suspicious of Japanese ambitions in Northeast Asia and highly sensitive to the manner in which they impact, or may impact, Russian security interests in the region. Several factors account for current Russian suspicions and threat perceptions of Japan, not least a history of complex, relatively dysfunctional military relations between the two countries in the Czarist and Soviet eras. These factors include Russia’s demographic and military vulnerability in the Russian Far East after the collapse of the Soviet Union, continued Japanese claims to the disputed southern Kurile Islands in the post-Soviet period, the persistence of the U.S.-Japanese security alliance in the absence of a Soviet threat in Northeast Asia, increased U.S. demands for Japan to take on more responsibility for its own security and defense following the end of the Cold War, and the promulgation of special anti-terrorism laws in Japan allowing for deployment of Japanese military forces abroad in the wake of 9/11.
The Impact of Japanese Aggression in the Late Czarist and Early Soviet Periods

Russian threat perceptions of Japan in the Putin-Medvedev era are deeply rooted in a history of complex, often dysfunctional Russian-Japanese military relations. Negative Russian political-military experiences with Japan in the late Czarist and early Soviet periods\(^1\) – in which Russia was frequently the victim\(^2\) of Japanese military aggression – had a particularly traumatic, lasting impact on the Russian national psyche and perpetuate Russia’s suspicion toward Japan to this day. In the late Czarist era, these experiences comprised imperial competition between Russia and Japan in Korea and Manchuria from 1860-1905,\(^3\) Russia’s defeat in the Japanese-initiated Russo-Japanese War in 1905, Russia’s loss of southern Sakhalin and strategic preeminence in Northeast Asia to Japan as per the terms of the 1905 Treaty of Portsmouth, and the Japanese annexation of Korea in 1910. Similar instances in the early Soviet period consisted of Japanese occupation of Siberia and the Russian Far East during the Russian Civil War from 1918-1925,\(^4\) Japan’s signing of the Anti-Comintern Pact with Nazi Germany in 1936,\(^5\) Japanese support for and encouragement of revanchist White Russian military elements in Manchukuo in the late 1930’s,\(^6\) Soviet-Japanese border conflicts at Lake Khasan in 1938 and Khalkin Gol in 1939,\(^7\) and the Japanese government’s brief consideration of abrogating the 1941 Soviet-Japan Neutrality after the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941.\(^8\)

These experiences demonstrated to Stalin the extreme military vulnerability of the Soviet Union in Northeast Asia and prompted him to transform the Soviet Far East into the largest, most heavily militarized buffer state – internal though it may have been - in history.\(^9\) The Soviet government regarded the Soviet Far East as its “military bulwark in the Pacific”\(^10\) and afforded it priority status as such in Soviet domestic and foreign policy. The Soviet Union put forth an extensive campaign to militarize, industrialize and populate the Soviet Far East from 1923 –
During World War II, Siberia and the Soviet Far East became vital territorial assets in the perpetuation of the Soviet war effort against the Nazi menace in the West. In particular, the Soviets transferred a majority of the pre-war military-industrial, human resource and agricultural base located in European Soviet Russia to the east of the Urals. The Urals proved a critical, formidable geographic buffer against the Nazi and Nazi-allied forces occupying much of European Soviet Russia at the time. Further enhancing to the strategic importance of Siberia and the Soviet Far East, particularly the latter, from June 1941 to May 1945 was its use as a crucial air and rail pipeline between the USSR and the U.S. as part of the U.S. lend-lease program to its then-ally the USSR.

In addition to the 1941 Soviet-Japan Neutrality Pact, the strategic indispensability of Siberia and the Soviet Far East to the Allied operation against the Nazis in the two abovementioned respects contributed significantly to the strengthening of the Soviet position in its eastern territories and the development of the Soviet Pacific regions. The strategic importance of the Russian Far East currently resonates among Kremlin leaders for many of these same reasons that it did to their Soviet forbearers. As such, the Russian government remains concerned with the viability of their conventional and nuclear deterrents in the Russia Far East and Northeast Asia as a critical means by which to enhance Russian territorial security in the region against Japan, China and the U.S. To be certain, the past experiences of Russia and the Soviet Union with Japan continue to offer adequate historical precedent for these misgivings.

*The Impact of the End and Aftermath of World War II*

After the Nazi surrender in the European theatre to the Allies in early May 1945, Stalin no longer concerned himself with any potential Japanese or Japanese-allied military threat to the Soviet Far East. Rather, he became increasingly preoccupied with the geopolitical landscape of
continental and maritime East and Northeast Asia after inevitable Allied victory over Japan. In particular, Stalin feared an expansive U.S. political-military and economic presence in the region – in China, including Taiwan, Japan and the Korean peninsula – that would either contain or exclude Soviet influence in or from, respectively, Northeast Asia in the aftermath of Japan’s defeat. Stalin further worried that the U.S. would consolidate its position on the four main Japanese islands so as to launch a new campaign for hegemony in the region at the expense, and in spite, of Soviet interests. In this campaign, Stalin anticipated that the U.S. would utilize Japan as a base for its efforts to dominate the political-military and economic destiny of China and Korea in the post-war period and well beyond.

Stalin’s apprehension in regard to this anticipated campaign was neither misguided nor absent substantial historical precedent. On one hand, the U.S. did intend to leave and perpetuate its political, strategic and economic footprint on Northeast Asia by way of occupying Japan after its capitulation to Allied terms at the end of the war. An immediate incentive for this U.S. objective was to isolate Soviet influence and presence in Northeast Asia in the post-Japanese power vacuum that would ensue. On the other hand, the U.S. had made a distinct practice of flexing its diplomatic, military and economic muscle in Northeast Asia, especially through its relationship with an at times reluctant Japan, in order to frustrate Russian imperial ambitions in the region. In this instance, Stalin harbored misgivings and resentment of the U.S. highly similar to those of his Czarist predecessors.

Beyond concerns over U.S. intentions vis-à-vis Japan (and China and Korea) and their implications for Soviet territorial security in the Soviet Far East, Stalin vehemently opposed U.S. strategic designs on post-war Northeast Asia for another, if not more, important reason: his own ambition for Soviet political-military and economic power in the region. Specifically, Stalin
aspired to Soviet hegemony in Northeast Asia after the war and had designated the area as the bastion of Soviet dominance in Asia in the newly emerging postwar world order. Toward this end, Stalin coveted an expansive Soviet military presence in China, Korea and Japan in the period directly following Japanese surrender to the Allies so as to preempt the expected U.S. attempt to limit Soviet influence in Northeast Asia – effectively beating the U.S. to the “strategic” punch. Indeed, Soviet satellization of China and Korea in the East both would emulate and complement its satellization of Eastern Europe in the West.

That Stalin warned and railed emphatically against U.S. “imperialism” and strategic opportunism in Northeast Asia in the wake of World War II is particularly contradictory given his own motives and aspirations for postwar Soviet expansionism in the region. In a manner almost entirely reflective of the czars, Stalin harbored profound and extensive territorial and geopolitical ambitions for Soviet power and presence in Northeast Asia and the Pacific. The dissolution of the Japanese political-military monolith provided the ideal conditions for Stalin to bring these ambitions to fruition. To be certain, Soviet and U.S. leaders and senior policymakers regarded their joint campaign to defeat Japan in the months following the Nazi surrender in Europe more accurately as concurrent, individual efforts to secure spheres of influence in Northeast Asia immediately prior to coercing Japan into unconditional capitulation to the Allies. Accordingly, the two governments understood their descent upon the collapsing Japanese empire in August 1945 as a “race against the enemy” to fill the looming strategic power vacuum in Northeast Asia. In this specific case, the U.S. constituted the Soviets’ enemy and vice-versa.

On August 8, 1945, the USSR declared war on Japan and the following day began the Manchurian Strategic Offensive – also known as Operation August Storm. This operation served as the Soviet complement to the U.S. thrust north from Iwo Jima and Okinawa. Emulating the
Nazi blitzkrieg strategy, the Soviet and Mongolian armies moved with striking swiftness across northern China, into northern Korea and down through southern Sakhalin – then known as Japanese Karafuto – and the entire Kurile archipelago stopping just short of putting Red Army boots on the ground in Hokkaido. At this time, Stalin seriously entertained the option of occupying the northern half of Hokkaido in an effort to force postwar Japan into a benevolent neutrality vis-à-vis the USSR or even bring it into the budding Soviet camp in Northeast Asia. U.S. President Truman quickly rejected Stalin’s request to him to this effect. Truman and his generals were aware of the negative impact that any Soviet military presence on Japan’s four main islands, even on the more remote and comparatively underdeveloped island of Hokkaido, would have on Japanese territorial security and political independence as well as U.S. strategic interests in Japan and Northeast Asia. The rapid pace of the Soviet advance through Manchuria, northern Korea, Karafuto and the Kurile Archipelago in August 1945 demonstrated to the U.S. the urgency with which Stalin sought to establish a Soviet presence in the region to counter and limit that of the U.S. Consequently, the U.S. set about deploying some 20,000 military personnel and constructing numerous bases, airfields and radar stations throughout Hokkaido for the expressed purpose of protecting the island from Soviet invasion.

In the wake of the following postwar developments, the U.S. and Japanese government signed the 1951 Basic Security Treaty in September of that year concurrently with the Treaty of San Francisco: Stalin’s overt desire to realize a Soviet military presence in Hokkaido in August 1945 and the resultant continuous fear of Soviet invasion of the island, Soviet official annexation of southern Sakhalin and the Kurile Archipelago in the latter half of the 1940s, the Soviet-assisted Communist victory in the Chinese Civil War and subsequent establishment of the People’s Republic of China in October 1949, the February 1950 Soviet-PRC alliance, the Korean
Communist invasion of southern Korea and outbreak of the Korean War in late June 1950, and Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe. The Soviets looked upon the September 1951 U.S.-Japan Basic Security Treaty with great disapproval and disdain.\textsuperscript{18} The Soviets accurately interpreted the treaty as a military alliance between the U.S. and Japan designed to undermine Soviet strategic interests and ambitions in Northeast Asia.\textsuperscript{19} Moreover, the Soviets understood this pact as the cornerstone of an emergent U.S.-allied and -dominated strategic, maritime cordon sanitaire of the Soviet Union in Northeast Asia. The Soviets remained especially skeptical of the treaty’s provisions stipulating the long-term deployment and stationing of substantial quantities of U.S. military personnel and materiel in Japan.

The Soviet government, principally Stalin, perceived this concerted U.S. strategy as yet another instance of repetition in the grand historical effort of the U.S. to assert its exclusive prerogative in Northeast Asia by way of Japan. That neither Japan nor the U.S. recognized Communist China, Communist North Korea and Soviet dominion over southern Sakhalin and the Kurile Archipelago further exacerbated Soviet anxieties over the long-term intentions of the nascent postwar U.S.-Japan security alliance. Two additionally disconcerting developments in the early years of the postwar era were Japan’s continued, unapologetic claim to the southern Kurile Islands and the role of the U.S. in perpetuating and tacitly endorsing these Japanese claims. Finally, the U.S.-initiated, albeit limited, remilitarization of Japan in light of the significant Communist gains on the mainland also incensed the Soviet leadership in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The Soviet leadership was well aware of the rapidity with which the U.S. could renew Japan’s military and industrial prowess in the region if it deemed this course of action necessary to counter Soviet and Communist Chinese influence therein.
Indeed, the first decade of the postwar era had a lasting, pronounced impact on Soviet, now Russian, threat perceptions of Japan as an agent of U.S. ambition in Northeast Asia. In particular, the U.S.-Japan security alliance not only remained intact throughout the Cold War, but persisted and became more deeply integrated in the post-Cold War period as well. The Russian government regards with intense dissatisfaction the preservation and expansion of the U.S.-Japan security alliance in the post-Cold War period because there no longer exists a Soviet threat to necessitate and justify its continuation. Although Russia does not hold the perpetuation of the U.S.-Japan special relationship since the collapse of the Soviet Union in such high contempt as the persistence and enlargement of NATO in the West, it nevertheless condemns the exclusivity of the alliance and its military superiority to Russian forces in the Russian Far East. Japan’s continued irredentist claims on the Russian-administered southern Kuriles add to Russia’s anxiety over its conventional military capacity to retain control of these disputed islands should Japan seek to forcefully annex them. Beyond its further integration, the U.S.-Japanese security alliance has remained intact since its inception over a half-century ago and persists as the most immediate source of Russian threat perceptions of Japan in the Putin-Medvedev era.

The Impact of the Cold War

Russian-Japanese military relations during the Cold War proved comparatively less dysfunctional than they had in the late Czarist and early Soviet periods, particularly in the sense that the two governments avoided military conflict with one another for almost 50 years after the end of the Second World War. Notwithstanding the two sides’ impressive abstention from military confrontation from 1946 - 1991, each continued to regard the other as a serious threat to its territorial security. Soviet nuclear weapons targeted Japanese civilian population centers and U.S. military bases throughout Japan, including in Okinawa, for much of the Cold War and
extensive Soviet conventional military forces – air, naval, land and amphibious branches –
loomed like a strategic Sword of Damocles above Hokkaido in the former Japanese buffer
provinces of southern Sakhalin (Karafuto) and the Kurile Archipelago (the Chisima Islands).
Despite the sizeable U.S. troop and materiel presence throughout the country and its protection
under the U.S. nuclear umbrella, Japan did not dismiss the possibility of Soviet invasion in the
north. For its part, the Soviet government remained especially sensitive to, and suspicious of,
Japan primarily because of its political-economic closeness and military alliance with the U.S.
The Soviet government understood and approached its relations with Japan through the prism of
Soviet-U.S. global confrontation for the duration of the Cold War. Consequently, the Soviets did
not have a strategy to engage Japan that existed independent of Soviet policy toward the U.S.

A number of Japanese actions reinforced Soviet anxiety over U.S.-Japanese intentions in
Northeast Asia from 1946-1991 and continue to render present-day Russian leaders seriously
preoccupied with a possible threat to the strategically vulnerable post-Cold War Russian Far
East. These actions included the signing of the 1951 U.S.-Japan Basic Security Treaty; the
establishment of the Japanese Self-Defense Force in 1954; the signing of the 1960 U.S.-Japan
Security Treaty (after the restoration of Soviet-Japanese relations in October 1956); concurrent
diplomatic recognition of the PRC with the U.S. in 1972; the promulgation of the Sino-Japanese
Treaty of Peace and Friendship in August 1978, including the anti-Soviet hegemony clause in
Article II, and the resultant Sino-Japanese détente in the late 1970s and early 1980s; the Japanese
government announcement in early 1983 of its intention to use the Maritime Self-Defense Force
(i.e., the Japanese navy) to defend Japanese security and commercial interests in sea lanes up to
1,000 nautical miles from Japanese coasts; Japanese Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro’s
January 1983 assertion that the Japanese Archipelago should serve as an “unsinkable aircraft
carrier” in assisting the U.S. to limit Soviet power and influence in Northeast Asia;\textsuperscript{20} covert Japanese assistance to the mujahedeen during the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan;\textsuperscript{21} the Japanese agreement to help the U.S. in the research and development of the Strategic Defense Initiative in 1987; and unrelenting Japanese claims to right ownership of the southern Kurile Islands and efforts in the early 1990s to essentially blackmail the Soviets into returning these territories to Japan for desperately needed Japanese financial assistance to the USSR. Japan’s actions in regard to its relations with the PRC from 1960 – 1985 were significant strategically to the Soviet government during this time period primarily as a result of the Sino-Soviet split.

These Japanese activities and policy choices were a source of great concern among the Soviet political and military elite during the Cold War. However, the only two developments in Japanese policy toward the Soviet Union from this period that persist in the post-Cold War era are the U.S.-Japan Security Alliance and Japanese irredentist claims on the southern Kuriles. As such, the Russian government currently regards with relative unease the continuation of Japan’s Cold War policy toward Russia in these two instances. Indeed, Japan’s security agreement with the U.S. and its claims to the southern Kuriles remain two of the most influential strategic determinants of Russian policy toward Japan in the post-Cold War era, particularly since the turn of the millennium. An increasing effort in the upper echelons of the Japanese government in the 1980s to augment Japan’s pacifist constitution to allow for an increased military presence in the international community, albeit in a strictly non-combative role, also underscored a trend in Japanese politics that has persisted and worried Russian leaders in the Putin-Medvedev era.

**Russian Threat Perceptions of Japan in the Post-Soviet Era**

Russian threat perceptions of Japan have subsided noticeably in the post-Soviet era. To be certain, the absence of the Soviet military colossus in the Russian Far East and the willingness
of both governments to establish genuine bilateral trust and normalized relations, as well as limited military cooperation, have prompted Japan to soften its once rigid approach to relations with Russia. This has allowed for a reduction in the extent to which each sees the other as a military threat to its strategic and economic interests in Northeast Asia. That the Japanese military threat to Russia in the post-Soviet era has become less salient, substantive and intimidating, however, does not intimate its complete dissolution. Indeed, Russian misgivings over Japan’s seemingly perpetual alliance with the U.S. and its sustained challenge to Russian ownership of Iturup, Kunashir, Shikotan and the Habomai Islets continue to inform its perception of Japan as a lesser, albeit still very real, threat to the territorial security of the Russian Far East – not to mention the maintenance of Russian strategic nuclear forces at Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky on the central eastern coast of the Kamchatka Peninsula. Russian threat perceptions of Japan in the post-Soviet era further have stemmed from intensive U.S.-Japanese military-technical cooperation in the area of joint research and development of ballistic missile defense technology and weapons systems and unmanned predator drones.

Additionally, the enactment of “special measures” laws in the Japanese National Diet providing for the deployment of Japanese military personnel and materiel abroad, even though primarily in non-combat supportive capacities, has drawn the attention of Russian policymakers in the post-Soviet era, especially in the Putin-Medvedev era. The Russian government does not necessarily regard as a threat the deployment of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces beyond the designated strategic perimeter of the Japanese Archipelago, particularly when its purpose is to realize an objective in the international community acceptable or beneficial to Russian interests abroad. These purposes would comprise development and reconstruction efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan and in anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden. When the nature of such a
Japanese deployment works against Russian interests, such as in the instance of Japanese refueling missions for U.S. Air Force operations in Afghanistan so as to expand U.S. military prowess in that country as well as in Central Asia, the Russian government looks down upon Japanese efforts to circumvent its pacifist constitution.

Japan’s potential to become a formidable military power with a global reach and agenda in a relatively short period of time resonates as a distinct threat among Russia’s senior political and military leadership in the post-Soviet era. In this respect, Japan retains one of the most professional, well-trained, lean and modernized conventional militaries in the world with a domestic high-tech industrial base to enhance this military capacity. Furthermore, and perhaps most disconcerting to the Russian government in the post-Soviet era, Japan has the capability to develop sophisticated nuclear weapons as well as these weapons’ requisite short-, medium- and long-range (i.e., intercontinental) delivery systems in approximately six months to a year, if not sooner. What is more, virtually all of Japan’s technological capacity and know-how for rapid conventional and nuclear military modernization and expansion is indigenous to Japan. That is to say, Japan is not dependent on other governments, including the U.S., to produce, operate and maintain these weapons and military capabilities.

Finally, Russia does not perceive Japan as a necessarily immediate threat in the Putin-Medvedev era. Specifically, the Russian government does not believe that Japan intends to invade and militarily annex the southern Kuriles in the near future. Japan has reiterated its commitment to a peaceful, diplomatic resolution of the matter and consistently rejected the notion of regaining the four islands by force or offensive military action. Despite Russia’s periodic saber-rattling in response to Japanese public claims to the islands, a preemptive Russian strike against Japan, most likely in Hokkaido, to preserve the territorial security of the southern
Kuriles for Japanese revanchist design does not seem probable in the near future. The improbability of such Russian action is in large part attributable to the medium-level threat that Japan poses to Russia by continuing to claim and call for the return of the southern Kuriles.

Notwithstanding the diluted Japanese threat to Russia in the post-Soviet era, Russia does not appreciate Japan’s perpetuation of a larger trend of other countries’ territorial claims on Russia. Nor does Russia appreciate the manner in which Japan’s close military alliance with the U.S., though predominantly directed toward the containment of China, facilitates a sizeable U.S. military presence in Russia’s resource-rich, yet strategically vulnerable backyard. Moreover, Russia does not welcome the impact of the U.S.-Japanese Security Alliance on the modernization and expansion of Chinese military power in Northeast Asia. Even though China is buying substantial amounts of arms and weapons systems from Russia and enriching Russia in the process, an increasingly armed and militaristic China is not a presence that Russia seeks to encourage on its strategically vulnerable Far Eastern border. That Russia could estimate the approximate quantity of weapons that China has as a result of its sales to the Chinese People’s Liberation Army and knows the tactical weaknesses of the arms and weapons systems that it is selling to China does not alleviate Russian anxiety in this regard.

Despite Russia and Japan’s historically dysfunctional military relationship, it is China that remains Russia’s greatest threat in Northeast Asia and will remain as such into the near and distant future. Accordingly, any action that Japan takes directly or indirectly to augment this threat is met with intense disapproval and condemnation from Russia. As a result, it is Japan’s military potential and the implications of its ongoing security alliance with the U.S. for China’s increasing assertiveness in Northeast Asia that pose the most realistic threats to Russia’s territorial security in the Russian Far East.
The Potential Impact of a Future Deterioration in U.S.-Japanese Relations on Russian Military Policy toward Japan

Russia’s disdain for the continuation of the U.S.-Japan security alliance in the post-Cold War era is largely attributable to its understanding of this formidable defense compact as a strategically necessary evil. The Kremlin likely remains conflicted about the importance of this compact to Russia’s strategic interests in Northeast Asia. On one hand, the Kremlin appreciates neither U.S.-Japanese containment of Russian power in the region nor the presence of tens of thousands of highly mobile, well-equipped U.S. and (hundreds of thousands of) U.S.-aligned Japanese troops in proximity to its militarily vulnerable Far Eastern flank. On the other, the U.S.-Japan defense partnership is critical to the territorial security of Siberia in that it is the only political-military entity capable of balancing what Russia perceives as a rising Chinese threat to its interests in Northeast Asia. Accordingly, the Russian government necessitates a sizeable U.S. military presence in the region and in Japan specifically, in addition to its own conventional and strategic (nuclear) forces, to effectively pursue its defense priorities in balancing the military potential of China and Japan (italics added). Indeed, Russia would find itself in a far more precarious situation strategically in Northeast Asia in the event of the dissolution of the U.S.-Japan security alliance – such would be the most immediate and alarming consequence for Russia were there a significant future deterioration in U.S.-Japanese relations.

Why would Russia find itself in such a situation if relations between the U.S. and Japan experienced a significant deterioration? First, the U.S.-Japan security alliance is the cornerstone of these two countries’ relationship and any intensive friction in their overall partnership would likely become reflected, if not expressly manifest, in dysfunction in the sphere of defense cooperation. Severe dysfunction in this central aspect of their relationship hypothetically could
result in the dissolution of the U.S.-Japan security alliance. Second, was Japan to find itself “on its own” in terms of providing for the defense and national security of the Japanese archipelago, it likely would embrace harness its military potential and embark on a path of relatively rapid military modernization and aggrandizement – including the development of its own, potentially intercontinental, nuclear deterrent. Although Japan probably would initiate such a campaign to protect itself against more immediate threats like China and North Korea, it would inevitably target Russia as well. The Russian government would be incredibly wary of an independent remilitarized Japan perched on its perennially vulnerable Far Eastern flank. In the absence of U.S. strategic conservatorship, Japan may once again adopt an outwardly assertive and nationalistic military posture in Asia-Pacific. Russia therefore, albeit implicitly, appreciates the U.S. as an effective restraint on those circles in the Japanese government and military that advocate for a greater regional and global military presence.

Third, the dissolution of the U.S.-Japan security alliance would encourage an expansion of Chinese political-military power in Northeast Asia – a development that would provide Japan further reason to rapidly enhance it military capability and presence in the region. In particular, the discontinuation of the U.S.-Japan defense compact would deprive the U.S. of critical bases for its military in Northeast Asia, essentially leaving South Korea as the only staging area for the forward deployment of U.S. forces in the region. Anti-U.S. military sentiment is already fairly acute among the younger generations in South Korea and likely would preclude the stationing of more U.S. troops and materiel in the country to offset the eviction of U.S. forces from Japan. China likely would seek to take advantage of the quasi-power vacuum that would ensue by increasing its military profile in the region. Russia would not welcome a new strategic environment of this sort in Northeast Asia because it possesses neither the technological nor
economic resources to compete in an arms race against China and Japan. What is more, the termination of the U.S.-Japan defense alliance may prompt China to reconsider the necessity of its strategic partnership with Russia. That is to say, China may seek to establish hegemony in the region and amend its partnership with Russia accordingly. In any of these events, Russia likely would come to perceive Japan as a more immediate threat to the territorial and economic security of the Russian Far East than it did from 1992-2010.

How would Russia respond to this new, more immediate Japanese threat? The Kremlin would have three basic options in this scenario: compete/confront, cooperate or employ a strategy combining elements of both. To be certain, if Russia sought to adopt a predominantly competitive or confrontational military policy toward a non-U.S. aligned Japan it could either re-target its nuclear missiles on the Japanese main islands or attempt to increase the presence of its already underfunded and overstretched conventional forces in the region. In this instance the strategic value of the Southern Kuriles Islands would increase exponentially. Or, the Kremlin could pursue a highly conciliatory and cooperative approach to Japan by suggesting joint-land military exercises and military-technical cooperation and perhaps even intimate that Russia may consider abandoning its strategic partnership with China in favor of one with Japan. The Japanese government, however, likely would look on such proposals with great suspicion and skepticism. The likely strategy that the Russian government would choose if the U.S. and Japan were to dissolve their roughly 60 year-old security alliance would be that which combined elements of competition and cooperation as this would be the most pragmatic and strategically sensible policy orientation. Regardless of which strategy that the Kremlin would elect to use in its military policy toward Japan, the discontinuation of the U.S.-Japan defense partnership would exacerbate and perpetuate the current dysfunction that pervades this sphere of the Russian-
Japanese relationship. An investigation into the 1993, 2000 and 2010 Russian Military Doctrines helps to understand why the Kremlin would pursue such a policy toward Japan.

The 1993, 2000 and 2010 Russian Military Doctrines and Japan

Notwithstanding the end of Cold War tensions between Russia and Japan and the largely pacifist post-World War II Constitution of Japan, the Russian government under Putin and Medvedev continues to perceive Japan as a threat to Russian interests in Northeast Asia, particularly the territorial security of the Russian Far East and continued Russian sovereignty over the region’s vast natural resource base in and around the Sea of Okhotsk. The enduring nuclear crisis on the Korean Peninsula and the rising, albeit currently tempered, threat from China aside, Russia has taken very seriously Japan’s residual claim to sovereignty over Iturup, Kunashir, Shikotan and the Habomai Islets in the Putin-Medvedev era. U.S. support of Japan’s claims to the four islands and the expressed commitment of senior U.S. policymakers to help facilitate the return of the southern Kuriles to Japan on a number of occasions since the collapse of the Soviet Union has further aggravated Russian suspicions of Japanese and U.S. intentions in Northeast Asia should Japan acquire any significant territory in the southern Kuriles – read: any part of either Iturup or Kunashir Islands.

Although implicitly and indirectly, post-Soviet Russian military doctrines have consistently qualified Japan’s assertions of sovereignty over the southern Kuriles, close military cooperation with the U.S. and inadequate investment in the socio-economic development and industrial modernization of the Russian Far East as threats to Russian national security in Northeast Asia. Unlike Japan, the Russian government does not issue publicly annual assessments of the strategic environment in which it finds itself in the region. Moreover, in the comprehensive, albeit sometimes vague, documents that the Russian government does issue, it
generally does not specify the states or organizations that it perceives as potential or actual
threats to Russian national security. Instead, the Russian government identifies and explains the
qualities and criteria that determine whether a state poses or eventually will pose a challenge to
Russian strategic interests in a given region, especially those along its periphery. An
examination of Russian military doctrines in the post-Soviet era will explain the manner in which
each alludes to Russia’s continued perception of Japan as a threat to Russian strategic interests in
the Russian Far East.

In the post-Soviet era, the Russian government has drafted and ratified three official
“military doctrines” in which it has articulated the nature of principle external military threats to
the Russian Federation. The Russian government approved and adopted the first such document
– entitled the “Principle Guidance on the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation” (PGMD)
– during a session of the Russian Presidential Security Council in early November 1993. The
PGMD identified as the primary source of “external military danger” for Russia the “territorial
claims of other states on the Russian Federation and its allies.” This included, and applied to,
Japan’s assertion of sovereignty over the southern Kuriles in the immediate post-Cold War era.
In 2000, Russian President Vladimir Putin enacted by way of presidential decree a revised and
This document augmented the primary “main external threat” to include “territorial claims
against the Russian Federation” and foreign “interference in the Russian Federation’s internal
affairs.” To be certain, each of these clauses in the 2000 version of the Russian Military
Doctrine alluded to Japan, albeit not specifically. On one hand, Japan continued to emphasize its
rightful dominion over the Russian-administered southern Kuriles. On the other, Japanese
efforts to encourage residents on the four islands to consider the benefits of Japanese, instead of
Russian, governance bordered on sedition and, according to the Russian government, essentially amounted to interference in its “internal affairs.”

In February 2010, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev affirmed the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation of 2010. This latest version of the Russian military doctrine maintained previously articulated threats and incorporated newly defined dangers to the security of the Russian Federation. The 2010 Doctrine echoed its predecessors from 1993 and 2000 by citing “territorial claims to the Russian Federation and its allies” and foreign governments’ intrusion into its internal affairs as “basic external military dangers” to the Russian state. These provisions continue to qualify Japan as a threat to Russia in the Putin-Medvedev era because of its claims to the southern Kuriles. The 2010 Doctrine, however, is distinct from its 1993 and 2000 forerunners in that it establishes more accurately the different types of foreign threats currently facing the Russian Federation and expresses more clearly the resources and manner in which Russia may employ and respond, respectively, to these challenges. Many of these newly determined and explained “dangers” and Russia’s policy prescriptions for managing them apply to Russian threat perceptions of Japan in the Putin-Medvedev era.

The 2010 Doctrine qualifies the “development” or “growth” of the “military contingents of foreign states” in the territories or regions contiguous to Russia and its allies, as well as within “adjacent water areas,” as one of the foremost “basic external military dangers” to Russia. Such “growth” includes the development and deployment of ballistic missile defense systems that could seriously undermine Russia’s nuclear deterrent. Although senior Russian policymakers likely intended NATO expansion and an increased U.S. military presence in Central Asia, the Caucasus and Afghanistan as the principal targets of these threat criteria, it also is probable that these same criteria apply to Japan. First, the four main islands of the Japanese
Archipelago are situated in areas almost immediately adjacent to the coastal and maritime provinces of the Russian Far East – including Primorsky Krai, Khabarovsk Krai, Kamchatka Krai and Sakhalin Oblast which comprises the Russian-administered, yet Japanese-claimed disputed southern Kurile Islands. Second, the Japanese Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) constitute one of the most technologically advanced militaries in the world and retain a capacity for rapid growth and development that distresses Russian political and military leaders.

In the Putin-Medvedev era, the Japanese government has not demonstrated a willingness to expand the size of its armed forces on an expedited basis. Since the end of the Cold War, and especially after 9/11, the Japanese government has exhibited its desire to bolster the presence of the JSDF in the international community and has taken the necessary domestic legal actions to pursue a more extroverted defense policy despite its heavily pacifist constitution. In this instance, it seems that the potential of a Russian border state to develop its military capabilities at a swift pace poses a strategic hazard to Russia that is almost as disconcerting as a border state that is actually engaged in this process. To be certain, the pace at which Japan could build up and assert its conventional military presence in the Sea of Okhotsk and along the Russian Pacific coast deeply concerns Russian political and military leaders. This sense of strategic hypersensitivity among the Russian leadership demonstrates, and arises from, these officials’ anxiety over the languishing state of Russia’s conventional military capabilities in the Russian Far East.

That the Russian government asserted its right to employ nuclear weapons preemptively and in response to an aggressor’s conventional military superiority in the 2010 Military Doctrine28 partially reveals the extent to which Russian leaders have become preoccupied with territorial security and strategic vulnerability in the Russian Far East. In asserting this right, the
Russian government hopes to discourage a conventionally superior Japan from entertaining thoughts of settling the southern Kuriles dispute by way of force. Therefore, even though the Russian government discontinued the targeting of its nuclear weapons on Japan in the 1990s, it has not surrendered its right to utilize them as a deterrent against potential Japanese aggression in the southern Kuriles. Indeed, some conservative elements in Russian society regard the Japanese claim to these islands as an act of war and would likely approve of, if not encourage, the use of nuclear weapons in dissuading or repulsing a Japanese campaign to recover said territories militarily. Accordingly, all versions of the Russian Military Doctrine, including the latest, lack a direct reference to Japan as a threat to Russian security. Nevertheless, there exist ample criteria to qualify and infer Japan as a continued threat to Russia – albeit less so in the post-Soviet era than during the Cold War.

**JAPANESE THREAT PERCEPTIONS OF RUSSIA**

Although Japan welcomed the inception of a politically and economically liberal post-Soviet Russian state into the global and Northeast Asian regional communities at the end of the Cold War, it nevertheless remained particularly skeptical as to the political-military intentions of the Russian Federation in Northeast Asia. Indeed, Stalin’s request to the U.S. for approval of Soviet occupation of the northern half of Hokkaido after World War II, Soviet occupation and annexation of southern Sakhalin and the Kurile Archipelago from 1945-1948, and the perpetual Cold War threat of Soviet invasion from the north resonated in the Japanese national psyche in the immediate post-Cold War period. Between early 1992 and late 2007, however, Japan’s anxiety vis-à-vis Russia’s strategic ambition in Northeast Asia slowly subsided. An assessment of annual Japanese Defense White Papers (entitled “Defense of Japan”) over this sixteen year
period attests to the diminution of the post-Soviet Russian threat in the perspectives of Japanese political and military leaders.

*Japan Defense White Papers 1980–2001*


Notwithstanding the removal of references to a “potential Soviet threat” in Northeast Asia from the 1990 and 1991 Japan Defense White Papers, these documents nevertheless continued to discredit Soviet Far East military forces as a source of amplified military tensions in Northeast Asia. Indeed, the Japanese defense establishment regarded Soviet Far East military forces with suspicion and disdain until the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, however, did not presuppose an immediate end to Japan’s perception of Russia’s continued, sizeable military presence in the Russian Far East as a threat to Japanese security. Although annual Japan Defense White Papers from 1992–1995
noted a reduction in force numbers in the Russian Far East, they also cautioned that Russian Far Eastern military forces retained “a massive war-fighting capability”. That the 1992–1995 White Papers described Russian Far East military forces as a “cause of instability” in Northeast Asia as a factor “contributing to military tensions within the region” denoted only a minimal, albeit important, downgrade in Japan’s post-Cold War threat perception of Russia.31

Further indication of a downgrade in Japan’s post-Cold War threat perception of Russia became evident in the 1994 Japan Defense White Paper. In particular, the 1992 and 1993 White Papers qualified the posture of Russian Far East military forces as the principal area of concern in Japanese defense policy and “the military situation around Japan.” In the 1994 version of this document, however, “military developments on the Korean Peninsula” replaced the posture of Russian Far East military forces as the principal area of concern in Japanese defense policy. Two developments in international relations accounted for this change. First, Russia and Japan signed the 1993 Tokyo Declaration – a bilateral agreement promoting security and military exchanges in hopes to help resolve the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues – and began to establish better relations. Second, North Korea’s withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in March 1993 fomented heightened military tensions on the Korean Peninsula. Military tensions on the Korean Peninsula remained the principal area of concern in Japanese defense policy and the “security environment surrounding Japan” from 1994–2009.32

The perception among Japanese political and military leaders of Russian Far East military forces as a threat to Japan continued to subside from 1996–2000. Indeed, Japan Defense White Papers over this five year period further downgraded Japan’s qualification of the Russian Far East military threat. Specifically, the 1996–2000 White Papers no longer referred to the presence of Russian Far East military forces in Northeast Asia as “a cause of instability”. Instead, they
described the “future tendencies” of Russian Far East military forces as “non-transparent”, at best. The White Papers over this period qualified the disposition of Russian armed forces in Northeast Asia as “non-transparent” primarily because of recurring domestic political uncertainties throughout Russia during Yeltsin’s second term.33

Although a moderately negative assessment of Russia’s strategic posture in Northeast Asia in the latter half of the 1990’s, the 1996–2000 White Papers’ description of military activity in the Russian Far East as “non-transparent” signaled a positive trend in Japan’s threat perception of Russia. In particular, Japan primarily based its designation of expected military behavior in the Russian Far East as “non-transparent” on an evaluation of domestic political uncertainties in Russia from 1996–2000, not on a preconceived Cold-War notion of Russian strategic ambition in Northeast Asia. That Japanese leaders incorporated domestic political realities in post-Soviet Russia into their threat assessment of Russian Far East military forces demonstrated a more objectively formulated Japanese defense policy vis-à-vis Russia during this five-year period.

Indeed, Japan’s increasingly objective analysis of Russian Far East military capacity and posture from 1996–2000 culminated in the discontinuation of Japan’s designation of Russia as a security threat in the 2001 Japan Defense White Paper. Specifically, the 2001 Japan Defense White Paper noted the unlikelihood of Russia’s reversion to a “cold war Soviet-type” military force in the Russian Far East “in terms of size or posture.” Russia’s rather destitute economic situation, the easing of tensions in Russian-Chinese and Russian-U.S. relations, and expanded Russian-Japanese security dialogue further convinced Japanese leaders at this time that Russian Far East military forces no longer posed an imminent threat to Japan. Of particular importance among these additional variables was the increased security dialogue between Russian and Japanese military leaders and organizations. Through regular engagement with their Russian
counterparts, leaders of Japan’s defense establishment “obtained a deeper understanding of tendencies for change within the Russian military.”

*Japan Defense White Papers 2002–2005*

By the end of 2001, it seemed that Japanese military leaders had shed their Cold War perception of Russian Far East military forces as a threat to Japanese security interests in Northeast Asia. The 2002 and 2003 Japan Defense White Papers confirmed and encouraged this trend. Whereas “military developments on the Korean peninsula” had replaced the posture of Russian Far East military forces as Japan’s principal area of strategic concern in the 1994 Japan Defense White Paper, the modernization of China’s armed forces replaced the posture of Russian Far East military forces as Japan’s secondary area of strategic concern in the 2003 Japan Defense White Paper. Indeed, the 2003 White Paper echoed the 2001 version of this document in stating that the “possibility” of Russian Far East military forces returning to the “size and structure” of their Soviet predecessor remained highly unlikely. The 2004 Japan Defense White Paper reiterated the tertiary ranking of Russian Far East military forces in Japan’s defense priorities in Northeast Asia. Moreover, it confirmed that Russian Far East military forces would enjoy neither the size nor structure that they had during the Soviet era at any point in the foreseeable future.

Despite sustained reduction in size and scope of deployment in the Russian Far East from 2000–2005, Russian ground, air, and naval forces remained operational and active during this period. Due to the downsizing of Russian military capabilities, especially in Russia’s Pacific coastal and maritime territories, as well as an increasing level of trust between Russian and Japanese defense establishments over these five years, the Japanese generally did not regard exercises such as “Vostok 2003”, “Vostok 2005”, and “Mobility 2004” as particularly menacing.
developments. Nevertheless, the 2005 Japan Defense White Paper noted that Russian Far East military training exercises and “other operations”, after having reached bottom in the early 2000’s, had been “gradually showing an upward trend in recent years.” Moreover, the 2005 White Paper underscored Russia’s increasing emphasis on the “inter-theater mobility of permanent combat readiness troops” for dealing with threats along its borders and stressed the need for the Japanese government to monitor future developments of these units and their impact on Japanese security interests in Northeast Asia. The 2005 White Paper further acknowledged that political and economic conditions in Russia remained “largely uncertain”. The Japanese Defense Agency, however, did not expect Russian Far East military forces to resume a “level and posture” identical to that of the Soviets during the Cold War.36

**Japan Defense White Paper of 2006**

Although Japan has essentially abandoned its conception and designation of the Russian military, especially its contingent in the Russian Far East, as a threat to Japanese security, Japanese Defense White Papers have consistently acknowledged subtle, albeit growing, concerns over the renewal of large-scale Russian army, air force, and naval exercises in the Russian Far East and Northeast Asia. In its overview of the security environment in Asia-Pacific, the 2006 Japan Defense White Paper asserted that many states in the Asia-Pacific region, due to recent intensive economic growth and increased defense budgets, had been “expanding and modernizing their military capabilities”.37 The document specified only China by name, leaving the identity of the other “many countries in Asia-Pacific” up to speculation. It is likely that Russia constituted one of the indirectly referenced countries in the region. Indeed, Russia had been experiencing significant economic growth, increasing its defense spending, and asserting its military prowess more actively in the region since 2003. The 2006 White Paper qualified the
expansion and modernization of individual state’s military capabilities, especially those of
China, as the second most critical area of concern to Japanese strategic interests in the Asia-
Pacific – the first remained stability on the Korean Peninsula.

It is possible that in drawing attention to China’s continued military aggrandizement, by
means of procuring substantial amounts of advanced weaponry from Russia, the 2006 White
Paper was hinting at Russia’s partially negative impact on regional stability in Asia-Pacific.
That the 2006 White Paper mentioned then Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi’s request
to then Russian President Vladimir Putin during their November 2005 Tokyo summit for greater
transparency in Russian-Chinese arms trade and that Russia execute such trade in “a careful
manner” in its section on China’s relations with Russia supports this argument. Essentially,
Japan has grown increasingly concerned over China’s pursuit of greater military influence in
Asia-Pacific, especially in Northeast Asia. The volume and sophistication of Russian arms
exports have enabled China’s expansion as a potential military threat to Japan. It is therefore
only logical that Japan would perceive Russia’s behavior in this regard as detrimental to
Japanese security interests in the region and indirectly refer to it as such in its 2006 Defense
White Paper.

Beyond indirect references to its growing concerns over Russia’s arms exports to China
and renewed military activities in Northeast Asia, the 2006 Japan Defense White Paper advanced
several important, direct observations about the level and posture of armed forces in the Russian
Far East. First, the 2006 White Paper estimated the level of armed forces in the Russian Far East
at 90,000 infantrymen (roughly 15 divisions), 270 warships (including 20 submarines and 20
major surface ships), and 630 combat aircraft. Although Russia’s conventional and strategic
military presence in its Far Eastern, particularly maritime, territories had decreased significantly
from its 1989 peak level during the late Soviet era, the 2006 White Paper noted that Russia had maintained the preparedness of its land-, air-, and sea-based strategic forces in the Russian Far East, improved the overall readiness of Russian troops in the region, and begun to modify existing military hardware to enhance its combat effectiveness and deployment capability.

Second, the increased readiness and improved capability of Russia’s Far East military forces drew Japan’s attention because approximately half of Russia’s contingent of armed forces in the region – 7 troop divisions, 10 airfields, and 3 naval bases – extended over a strategic arc of Russian maritime territories, including the coast of Primorsky Krai, southern Sakhalin, and the southern Kuriles, that encompassed Hokkaido’s western, northern, and eastern coasts. Given the proximity and improved capabilities of Russian armed forces in the Russian Far East, the 2006 Japan Defense White Paper was justified in its call to monitor future developments of Russian Far East military activities and posture.

Third, the 2006 Japan Defense White Paper ultimately reiterated the position of the Japanese government in previous versions of the White Paper that the return of Russian military forces in the Russian Far East to the scale and posture of their Soviet predecessors during the Cold War remained unlikely in the “foreseeable future”. Moreover, the 2006 White Paper repeated previous versions’ attribution of Russia’s non-threatening military posture in Northeast Asia to détente with the U.S. and strategic partnership with China. Notwithstanding Japan’s continued acknowledgement of Russia’s non-threatening military posture in its annual Defense White Papers from 1994–2006, the Japanese Defense Agency nevertheless emphasized that Russian military operations in the vicinity of Japan, “generally quiet” in the post-Soviet era, had partially recommenced.
In regard to Russian ground force exercises in “areas adjacent to Japan”, the 2006 Japan Defense White Paper noted that some had been “reactivated”. In addition, the 2006 White Paper observed that naval activities of Russian Pacific Fleet warships had also resumed. Resumed Russian warship activities in the Pacific and in the vicinity of Japan included surface ship and submarine long-sea deployment training and nuclear submarine patrols. In regard to Russian air force training, air exercises, and flights close to Japan’s territorial air space, however, the 2006 White Paper asserted that such activities had “decreased to the lowest level” in the post-Cold War period. That the Russia began improving the combat readiness and operational capability of its military forces in the Russian Far East became overwhelmingly apparent to the Japanese government by the end of 2006. Indeed, large-scale Russian military exercises such as “Baikal 2006”, which comprised 9,000 military personnel from ground forces, the air force, and Russian Interior Ministry and some 1,500 pieces of military hardware, exhibited the efficiency of Russia’s Far Eastern regional command and control structure. And, even though the 2006 White Paper confirmed this trend in Russian military activity in Northeast Asia, the Japanese government continued to maintain that Russia’s military presence in Asia-Pacific, particularly Northeast Asia, did not present a threat to Japanese security interests in the region.

*Japan Defense White Paper of 2007*

In January 2007, the Japanese government elevated the institutional status of the Japanese Defense Agency (JDA) from a sub-division within the Office of the Prime Minister of Japan to the level of ministry in the Prime Minister’s Cabinet. Thus the Japanese Defense Agency became the Ministry of Defense of Japan (MODJ) in early 2007. Notwithstanding its elevated institutional status, the MODJ continued many of the JDA’s functions and initiatives. These functions and initiatives included the drafting and issuing of the Japan Defense White Paper.

In regard to Russian Far East military forces, the 2007 Japan Defense White Paper echoed the 2006 White Paper in three respects. First, the 2007 White Paper indirectly referred to Russia as one of the “many countries” in Asia-Pacific that had “taken advantage of economic growth to expand and upgrade their military forces” by means of increased defense budgets, modification of existing hardware, and acquisition and deployment of “new weapons systems”. Second, the 2007 White Paper provided an almost identical estimation of the scale and posture of military forces deployed throughout the Russian Far East. The Russian Far East military contingent comprised roughly 90,000 personnel (15 divisions), 250 warships, 630 combat aircraft, and formidable land-, air-, and sea-based strategic nuclear arsenal. In regard to Russian military posture in Northeast Asia, the 2007 White Paper reiterated the combat readiness and increased operational capability of armed forces in the Russian Far East.45

Moreover, the 2007 White Paper encouraged the Japanese government to monitor future developments of Russian Far East military forces due to their increasing proficiency in inter-theater mobility throughout Russia and the Russian Far East and the potentially negative impact of the continued uncertainty of political and economic conditions in Russia. Indeed, exercises such as “Vostok 2007”, involving some 7,500 troops, 200 vehicles, 20 warships, and 6 combat aircraft, exhibited the growing proficiency of the Russian military’s “integrated strategic and operational capabilities” in the Russian Far East. Nevertheless, the 2007 report noted that
Russian Far East military forces will reestablish neither the scale nor posture of their Soviet predecessors. Third, the 2007 White Paper reiterated that Russian Far East military operations in the vicinity of Japan remained at 2006 levels, specifically stating that Russian Far East air force training, exercises, and flights close to Japan had “reached bottom”.

Like the JDA before it, the MODJ drafts the annual Defense White Paper in the first half of the year and submits it to the Prime Minister’s Office and National Diet for review and approval between July and August. As a result, the MODJ generally does not publish this document until August or September of that same year. Because the MODJ drafts and publishes its annual Defense White Paper in August or September developments that occur in the latter half of the year, especially from September through December, are often omitted. The omission of events in the latter half of the year did not alter the defense outlook speculated in JDA White Papers from 2000–2006. This changed when the MODJ issued its inaugural Defense White Paper in July 2007. In particular, the 2007 report observed that activities of the Russian Far East air force in the vicinity of Japan had “reached bottom”. This Japanese observation was both premature and inaccurate.

Three developments in the latter half of 2007 challenged the assessment that Russian military aircraft activities had “reached bottom” and suggested the likelihood of Russian air force exercises in areas near Japan’s territorial waters in the near future. First, Russian strategic bombers flew near the U.S. Pacific Ocean territory of Guam in July 2007 for the first time since the end of the Cold War. Second, the Russian air force also conducted an air and logistics readiness exercise in July 2007 called “Krylo 2007”. “Krylo 2007” simulated Russian combat aircraft scrambling and rapidly evacuating air fields in the Russian Far East that had come under missile attack from hostile state actors in Northeast Asia. Third, then Russian President
Vladimir Putin announced in August 2007 that the Russian air force would resume the “permanent combat patrolling of its long-range aviation unit’s strategic missile carriers” in the Atlantic, Pacific, and Arctic Oceans. Russia had unilaterally terminated strategic aviation long-range patrols in 1992.\textsuperscript{49}

Furthermore, despite Japanese claims that activities of the Russian Far East air force in the vicinity of Japan had “reached bottom” in 2007, Russian Far East air force exercises near Japan increased substantially from 2005-2007 inclusive. By the end of 2005, Japan had experienced roughly 110 instances in which its fighters had to scramble either to intercept or shadow Russian aircraft in areas close to Japanese airspace. This statistic remained relatively constant from 1999-2005. By the end of 2006, however, the number of instances in which Japanese fighters had to scramble to escort Russian aircraft operating in proximity to Japanese airspace nearly doubled from 110 to 200. By the end of 2007, this statistic had climbed to approximately 270. Some 82\% of Japanese military aircraft scrambles in 2007 occurred in response to Russian aircraft approaching Japanese airspace. Indeed, Russian air force exercises in July 2007, Putin’s announcement in August 2007 in regard to regular, resumed strategic bomber patrols, and the drastic surge in Russian military aircraft activity near Japanese airspace from 2005-2007 indicated a more assertive trend in Russia’s military posture in the skies of the Russian Far East and Asia-Pacific. This trend became increasingly evident in 2008.\textsuperscript{50}

\textit{Japan Defense White Paper of 2008}

Commentary on the scale and posture of Russian Far East military forces in the 2008 Japan Defense White Paper was relatively similar to that of the 2006 and 2007 versions of the report. The 2008 White Paper estimated the scale of armed forces and military hardware in the Russian Far East at a level identical to those established in 2006 and 2007. It further noted the
continued trend of modification to existing Russian weapons systems and logistics technology as an indication of Russian military efforts to improve the capabilities of its forces in the Russian Far East. This document also reiterated the importance of Russian strategic nuclear forces as an important supplement to Russia’s more problematic and deficient contingent of conventional forces. However, the 2008 White Paper differed from these two previous versions in the extent to which it more specifically and frequently cited instances suggesting an increasingly assertive Russian military posture in the vicinity of Japan.\textsuperscript{51}

Indeed, the 2008 White Paper was the first annual Japanese defense report in the post-Cold War era that recognized a discontinuation in the “declining trend” of Russian military exercise activities in the Russian Far East.\textsuperscript{52} This discontinuation applied to land-, air-, and sea-based Russian Far East conventional and strategic military forces. Beyond direct references to the July 2007 Russian strategic bomber flight near Guam, the “Krylo 2007” exercises, and Putin’s announcement of resumed long-range strategic bomber flights in August 2007, the 2008 Japan Defense White Paper also cited the February 2008 intrusion of two Russian Tu-95 MS Bear strategic bombers into Japanese airspace over Sofugan Island in the southern Izu Islands (400 miles south of Tokyo) – the first such incident in the area in roughly 30 years.\textsuperscript{53} The Japanese Air Defense Force scrambled 22 F-15’s and two AWACs to intercept the Russian bombers.\textsuperscript{54}

In a manner similar to previous Japan Defense White Papers, the Ministry of Defense of Japan (MODJ) drafted the 2008 White Paper in the first half of the year and submitted it to the Prime Minister’s Office and National Diet for review and approval between July and August.\textsuperscript{55} The MODJ published the 2008 White Paper in September 2008. The 2008 White Paper therefore omitted many significant trends and developments in Russian military behavior in the

Russia’s actions in its conflict with Georgia in August 2008 confirmed to the MODJ the development of three trends in Russian military behavior and conduct in the international community. These three trends were important to the Japanese because they established a template for anticipated Russian activities in the Russian Far East and Northeast Asia. First, the August 2008 Russian-Georgian conflict demonstrated to the MODJ that Russia had regained self-confidence as a “major power” in the international community and had therefore begun pursuing its interests abroad in a more independent and assertive manner, especially in its border regions. The MODJ further acknowledged as part of this trend the willingness of the Russian General Staff to use nuclear weapons, preemptively if necessary, to defend Russian and Russian-allied states’ national interests. The MODJ qualified the continued state of alert of Russian strategic nuclear forces in the Far East as a development that requires “close monitoring”.

Second, Russia exhibited its preparedness to incur strained relations with important partners in the international community, specifically the U.S., Europe, and their allies, including Japan, and tarnish its image globally in order to protect its interests abroad. Third, the Russian military displayed increasing proficiency in the operational capabilities of its conventional armed forces – even though its campaign against Georgian forces exposed many significant
weaknesses of the Russian army. The confluence of these three trends with developments in Russian military behavior in the Russian Far East in the latter half of 2008 had significant implications for Japanese security interests in Northeast Asia.

In late September 2008, roughly five weeks after the end of the Russian-Georgian conflict, the Russian military held a large-scale exercise in the Russian Far East called “Bereg 2008”. This exercise constituted the eastern contingent of a more comprehensive, country-wide set of military training exercises, Stability 2008. Bereg 2008 involved Russian Far East land-, sea-, and air-based forces and comprised multiple integrated activities. These integrated force activities included anti-submarine maneuvers, surface-to-air and coast-to-sea missile launches, simulated defense of Sakhalin and Kurile Islands infrastructure from “terrorist attacks”, and additional naval exercises to “guarantee safe navigation in the area” of the Sakhalin and the southern Kuriles. Under the surface, the latter two actions were likely intended to remind the Japanese of Russia’s determination to retain political-military control over Russian Far East maritime territories.

That the Bereg 2008 exercises took place so shortly after Russia’s confrontation with Georgia likely compounded Japanese concern over the increased scope and frequency of Russian military in the region. Beyond the Bereg 2008 military actions in the Russian Far East, the Russian government also updated and expanded the infrastructure of the Russian Far East armed forces in Vladivostok, the southern Kuriles, and Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky. These infrastructure projects signified to Japan the long-term commitment of the Russian government to its territories in the Russian Far East.
Japan Defense White Paper of 2009

The 2009 Japan Defense White Paper estimates the scale and posture of Russian conventional and strategic military forces in the Russian Far East at levels similar to those in 2006, 2007 and 2008. Approximately half of Russia’s 90,000 troops (15 divisions), 240 warships, and 600 combat aircraft in the region continued to loom north and west of Hokkaido. Russian military exercises in the region remained focused on renewing the operational proficiency of Russian Far East conventional naval and air forces. Moreover, these exercises persisted in their emphasis on the rapid, internal deployment of inter-theater permanent-readiness units from western and central Russia to the east as an important means of defense against threats to Russian territorial security in Asia-Pacific. The Russian military has scheduled large-scale exercises in the Russian Far East in June 2010 codenamed “Vostok 2010” at the cost of hundreds of millions of dollars. The 2009 Japan Defense White Paper also reiterated Russia’s commitment to maintaining the “immediate” combat preparedness of its nuclear deterrent in the Russian Far East, as well as Russia’s dependence on these particular strategic forces as a supplement to its relatively light conventional military presence in Northeast Asia. The proximity of Russian Far East conventional and strategic forces to Japan, particularly Hokkaido, and the gradually improving capability of these forces therefore continue to merit Japanese government calls to monitor future developments in Russian military behavior in the region. After North Korea and China, Russia remained the third greatest military threat to Japan in Northeast Asia in 2009.

 Despite similar commentary on the scale and posture of Russian Far East military forces, the 2009 Japanese Defense White Paper differs from the 2006, 2007 and 2008 versions of this document in three important ways. First, the 2009 Defense White Paper placed far greater
emphasis on the impact of Russia’s impressive economic growth under Putin and Medvedev on Russian military behavior abroad. Specifically, the 2009 Defense White Paper states that Russia has “recovered from the social and economic difficulties” of the Yeltsin era and that Russia’s national power is now “on the rise.” Once more recognizing Russia as a “strong state,” Japan asserts that Russia’s continued economic recovery encourages the Kremlin to develop a military posture commensurate with Russia’s renewed national strength in the international community.

The Ministry of Defense of Japan (MODJ) notes that the Kremlin’s desire to establish this new posture has become manifest in the increasingly global scope of Russian military deployment abroad. Indeed, Russia remains intent on exploiting its economic growth to modernize its armed forces and project this power well beyond its borders. Toward this end, the Russian government has been increasing its defense budget substantially since 2005. The 2009 Defense White Paper argues that the global financial crisis did not adversely affect the capacity of the Russian government to continue expanding and strengthening its military presence throughout the world, particularly on the “high seas.” Rather, the MODJ acknowledges that Russia’s relative international influence as one of many “multi-polar-oriented countries” will likely increase.

The second way in which the 2009 Japan Defense White Paper differs from its three immediate predecessors is its more detailed commentary on Russia’s growing reliance on its strategic nuclear arsenal to supplement its burdensome, underfunded and overextended conventional military forces, particularly in the Russian Far East. The 2009 Defense White Paper cites the 2000 Russian Military Doctrine and Russian National Security Strategy through 2020 when drawing attention to Russia’s policy of using nuclear weapons to retaliate against large-scale aggression by foreign powers. This document additionally mentions Russian plans
to draft and adopt a new Russian military Doctrine in 2009. The initial intent of the Russian government to classify the provisions of the 2009 Military Doctrine regarding the use of Russian nuclear weapons caused alarm in the international community. It is likely that Japan, with claims to Russian-administered territory, was deeply concerned with the lack of transparency and subtle brinkmanship in the Kremlin’s formulation of this aspect of its nuclear weapons policy. Indeed, Russian officials have cited Japanese claims to the southern Kurile Islands as a serious threat to Russian territorial security. Some Russian military personnel have gone so far as to qualify these claims as a “declaration of war.” Given the Kremlin’s persistent anxiety over the territorial security of the Russian Far East and its modified preemptive nuclear strike policy, it is understandable that the Japanese government, fearing potential nuclear attack, would allot greater attention to Russia’s growing emphasis on its strategic nuclear deterrent, especially in regard to managing threats in a region in which Russia’s conventional military presence is weakest. The Security Council of the Russian Federation approved the latest version of the Russian Military Doctrine in December 2009. The Russian government will likely adopt this document in the first half of 2010.

The third manner in which the 2009 Japan Defense White Paper differs from the 2006, 2007 and 2008 versions of this document is in its more attentive analysis of the role that current Russian President Dmitry Medvedev plays in Russian defense policy and Japanese threat
perceptions of Russia. Specifically, the 2009 Defense White Paper states that Medvedev is continuing Putin’s “policy stance” in regard to revitalizing the operational proficiency of Russia’s military and encouraging the projection of Russian military influence abroad, particularly in Russia’s international border regions. Evidence of Medvedev’s adaptation of Putin’s “strong-state” approach to Russian military behavior in the international community includes signing the more assertive, anti-Western Russian National Security Strategy through 2020, amending the Russian federal law “On Defense” as to provide legal bases for the deployment of Russian ground forces beyond Russia’s borders, approving the latest draft of the Russian Military Doctrine that enables Russia to carry out preemptive nuclear strikes against actual or potential threats, calling for more Russian military exercises like Stability 2008, Zapad 2009 and Vostok 2007, and defending the legitimacy of Russia’s military actions in Georgia in August 2008.\(^{83}\)

Beyond his personal views on Russia’s role in the world and his institutional influence on Russian defense policy, Medvedev’s decision to install Putin as prime minister also has, and rather obviously, impacted his continued pursuit of Putin’s objectives vis-à-vis military reform and the projection of Russian military power abroad. The 2009 Japan Defense White Paper does not speculate as to how Medvedev may come to differ from Putin over the next few years, however, it does assert that unseen, negative developments in the global economy, particularly a drop in energy and raw material commodities prices, could affect the Russian economy, the base of Russian military modernization and expansion in an adverse manner.\(^{84}\) As such, Medvedev could choose to refine the current scale of these processes of Russian military reform. Indeed, the 2009 Japan Defense White Paper argues that Russia will not pursue its military modernization at the expense of its socio-economic development.\(^{85}\) As it pertains to Medvedev,
Russian military exercises in the Russian Far East and Asia-Pacific will likely increase, but will not pose any direct or immediate threat to Japan. Japan will, however, due to proximity and a tense history of political-military relations with Russia, remain concerned with Russia’s military return to Northeast Asia and therefore continue to monitor this trend in Russian military behavior in the region.

**EVOLUTION OF MILITARY COOPERATION**

Russian and Japanese threat perceptions of one another have significantly influenced the evolution of Russian-Japanese military cooperation since the end of the Cold War. Notwithstanding the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russian and Japanese Cold War suspicions of one another persisted into the post-Soviet era. As a result of numerous, successful confidence-building measures between them, however, residual Russian and Japanese Cold War suspicions of one another subsided slowly, but surely from early 1992 to late 2007. Accordingly, Russian-Japanese military cooperation experienced modest, yet notable expansion during this period. In the last two years, though, each side has engaged in political and military behaviors in the region that have provoked renewed misgivings over the other’s intentions in Northeast Asia. Consequently, the expansion of Russian-Japanese military cooperation slowed noticeably from January 2008 – August 2009. Only recently, after the unprecedented Russian observation of Japanese Northern Army ground force exercises in Hokkaido in September 2009 did Russian-Japanese military relations experience renewed momentum. This section examines the development of cooperation between the armed forces of Russia and Japan in the post-Soviet period. It proceeds by providing a brief synopsis of the trend in this relationship from 1992-2010
and dividing its subsequent examination of this period into three separate units of recent historical analysis: the Yeltsin, Putin and Medvedev eras.

SYNOPSIS OF TRENDS IN THE RUSSIAN-JAPANESE MILITARY RELATIONSHIP IN THE POST-SOVIET PERIOD

Like the development of bilateral relations in other complex spheres of interaction, such as dialogue over the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues and economic ties, the evolution of Russian-Japanese military cooperation since the end of the Cold War has been particularly tortuous. In the early 1990s, the Japanese defense establishment was somewhat reluctant to commence in earnest exchanges and negotiations with their Russian counterparts due to the relative political instability gripping the fledgling Russian government at the time. As such, these Japanese officials approached the emergent relationship between the defense establishments of Russia and Japan with cautious optimism. For their part, however, senior Russian military officials were especially keen on establishing regular, high-level discourse and contacts with Japanese colleagues in the years immediately following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The hesitation of the Japanese military leadership to engage their Russian partners subsided in the mid-1990s and more expansive security dialogue and personnel exchanges and visitations ensued. As a result of the continued momentum that the two sides worked so hard to maintain, Russian-Japanese military cooperation crested from September 2000 – September 2005. Between late 2005 and late 2007, the wave of momentum in Russian-Japanese military relations receded and this aspect of the two countries’ relationship became remarkably tense. In the past year, however, the Russian and Japanese political and military leadership has worked to renew this momentum.
THE YELTSIN ERA

The first meeting between Russian and Japanese defense officials occurred in mid-July 1992 in the context of a regular meeting of policy planners from each government – the Japan-Russia Working Group on the Conclusion of a Bilateral Peace Treaty. The purpose of this meeting was to negotiate and articulate the terms of a “maritime accident prevention agreement” that Yeltsin planned to sign as a landmark, formative agreement with Japan during his upcoming trip to Tokyo in September 1992. The maritime accident accord stipulated that “commanders of Japanese and Russian battleships observe international rules for prevention of maritime collisions” during naval exercises in international waters in the Sea of Okhotsk, Sea of Japan and Northwest Pacific Ocean. The accord further prohibited “mock attacks on and interference” with Russian and Japanese “warships and warplanes” during such exercises and in general. The Russian government intended this accord to serve as an important preliminary confidence-building measure (CBM) with Japan and a significant diplomatic accomplishment for Yeltsin in the embryonic stages of the Russian-Japanese relationship. The two governments, however, did not conclude this important agreement until October 1993.89

Yeltsin’s last-minute cancellation of his planned first official state visit to Japan in September 1992 only two days prior to its commencement – a relatively egregious diplomatic faux pas – delayed the signing of the maritime accident prevention accord for more than a year. Notwithstanding the one-year deferment of this accord, its eventual endorsement in October 1993 signified a noteworthy accomplishment in the nascency of Russian-Japanese relations and military cooperation. Specifically, the Soviet Union and Japan had been distinct and highly antagonistic military rivals throughout much of the Cold War. That the Russian government and military – in which there remained substantial and influential clusters of conservative officials
and personnel, respectively, held over from the Soviet era – encouraged the promulgation of such an agreement with a recent enemy and traditional historic adversary like Japan intimates the extent to which it sought to change the nature of its relationship with Japan. In addition to the maritime accident prevention agreement, Yeltsin and Japanese Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa signed an accord designed to “further promote security dialogue as well as military exchanges” between Russia and Japan.90

Despite the emergence of an increasingly positive and constructive trajectory in Russian military ties with Japan, the Japanese government nevertheless persisted in its cautious and gradual approach to cooperation with Russia in this sphere of interaction. Japan cited as a primary reason for the continuation of its “step-by-step” policy in this aspect of its relationship with Russia the lack of “reciprocity” and transparency on behalf of Russian government and military leaders in disclosing such elementary information as the basic constitution and size of Russia’s “military power in the Russian Far East.”91 Because of the guarded attitude of Japanese political and military elite in respect to expanding defense cooperation with Russia, the requests of Russian military chiefs to their Japanese colleagues for “mutual visits of navy ships, giving notice of military exercises in advance and mutual inspections of military drills” fell on deaf ears in the formative years of post-Soviet Russian-Japanese relations.92 As of late October 1993, the Japanese Defense Agency (JDA) still had not developed an agenda for expanded interaction with the Russian Ministry of Defense of Russian armed forces.93 Indeed, it was not until late March 1994 that Russian and Japanese Foreign Ministers Andrei Kozyrev and Tsutomu Hata, respectively, had agreed to hold regular high-level discourse and exchanges in the spheres on defense and national security.94
After the Kozyrev-Hata meeting in late March 1994, Russian military ties with Japan began “developing quite vigorously.” Meetings between lower-level officials, such as deputy ministers of defense, over the next two years laid the foundation for the first-ever official visit of a Japanese military chief to Russia in the history of Russian-Japanese relations in late April 1996. The three-day visit of JDA chief Hideo Ushui to Moscow at this time culminated in an agreement with Russian Defense Minister Pavel Grachev to expand bilateral military cooperation and engage consistently in trust-building measures in this sphere of interaction. These measures included “informing each other of large-scale military exercises” in the two countries’ maritime border area as well as increasing contacts between the personnel of the Russian and Japanese defense establishments. By late January 1998, the Russian military threat to Japan had decreased so significantly that the JDA had cut the troop presence of the Japan Self-Defense Ground Forces (JSDGF) – also known as the Northern Army – on Hokkaido by approximately 20 percent. Specifically, the JDA reduced by half “two of the five ground divisions deployed in Hokkaido.”

Four aspects of this Japanese action were particularly demonstrative of the trust growing between Russia and Japan in this sensitive sphere of interaction and the latter’s desire to perpetuate this positive trend in the two countries’ relations. First, the Japanese Northern Army Group, along with its complementary naval and air forces, constituted the initial line of defense against a prospective Soviet amphibious invasion of Japan’s home islands from Soviet bases in Primorsky Krai, Sakhalin Island and the southern Kuriles during the Cold War. Accordingly, Hokkaido represented the bastion of Japan’s conventional military deterrent against Soviet aggression from the early 1950s to the early 1990s. It is likely that the Russian government and military elite – uneasy over the precipitous decline of the power of the Russian armed forces in
the Russian Far East, especially in southern Sakhalin and the southern Kuriles – welcomed this gesture. Second, the JDA’s 20 percent reduction of troop levels in Hokkaido took place as a result, and in the framework, of defense cooperation between Russia and Japan for the “1996-2000 period.” Third, JDA chief Masahiro Akiyama officially reported the details of this decision to Russian Defense Minister Igor Sergeyev during an unprecedented four-and-a-half-hour in-person meeting. Fourth, Akiyama assured Sergeyev that this sizeable cut in the personnel of the JSDGF Northern Army Group did not occur in anticipation of replacing these troops with U.S. military personnel from Okinawa.97

The diminution of JSDGF presence in Hokkaido in January 1998 was an important trust-building measure in the evolution of Russian-Japanese military cooperation in the Yeltsin era. Beyond indicating a significant change in Japan’s threat perception of post-Soviet Russia, it also signified the beginning of a new positive and conciliatory direction in bilateral military ties. To be certain, Japan’s decision to unilaterally reduce the scope of its armed forces’ deployment on Hokkaido facilitated further constructive Russian-Japanese military interaction in the late 1990s. Perhaps the most visible and remarkable benefit of Japan’s gesture in January 1998 in this regard was the two countries’ conclusion of the 1999 “Memorandum on the Creation of the Foundations for the Development of Dialogue and Contacts” between Russia and Japan.98 The signing of this memorandum constituted an especially notable achievement in Russian-Japanese relations because it established the basis for military cooperation during the transition of political power in Russia from Yeltsin to Putin. Moreover, it promoted continuity in Russian policy toward Japan in the military sphere in the post-Yeltsin era as well.
Yeltsin’s abrupt resignation and transfer of presidential power to Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin on December 31, 1999 did not precipitate any major setbacks in Russian-Japanese military cooperation. In fact, the momentum and scope of interaction that the two governments had worked so diligently to achieve in this sphere in the late 1990s continued and expanded, respectively, during Putin’s first term as president of the Russian Federation. That the chief of the Russian Defense Ministry’s Main Directorate for International Cooperation, Colonel-General Leonid Ivashov, described Russian defense cooperation and dialogue with Japan as “developing dynamically” and “entering a qualitatively new stage” only two weeks after Putin’s first official state visit to Japan in early September 2000 confirms this argument.\(^99\) Ivashov further confirmed the enduring success of the two countries in maintaining this positive direction in military ties by stating that the Russian and Japanese defense establishments had started “moving from suspicion to cooperation in resolving military and humanitarian issues” that were affecting the overall relationship of their governments.\(^100\) More importantly, however, Ivashov’s statement indicated an emerging, progressive sea-change in Russia’s threat perception of Japan in the post-Cold War era. Given the paranoia of Russian government and military officials regarding the strategic vulnerability of the Russian Far East, the role of Japan’s historic acts of aggression in nurturing this intense anxiety, and the ongoing absence of a post-World War II bilateral peace treaty, Ivashov’s observations at this time were particularly remarkable.

During Putin’s first term, Russian and Japanese government and military officials put forth a genuine, sustained effort to build on the trust and perpetuate the forward movement that developed in the two countries’ defense cooperation in the late 1990s. Specifically, they took
measures to ensure that bilateral contacts were “maintained on a planned basis” and that the two sides were gradually consolidating “the legal foundation for cooperation” in the military sphere. From 2000-2004, contacts between Russian and Japanese military personnel included interaction at the levels of “chiefs of military agencies, representatives of general headquarters and naval subunits.” Actual bilateral military cooperation and consultation over this four-year period involved joint sea-rescue exercises, calls by Russian and Japanese naval vessels on one another’s commercial ports and naval bases, increased visits of young and junior officers from each country to the other, and the holding of Russian-Japanese seminars and conferences on issues pertinent to the maintenance of security in Asia-Pacific and Northeast Asia.  

Despite the impressive scope and depth of Russian-Japanese military dialogue and interaction in Putin’s first term, progress in more vital and sensitive areas of military ties, specifically in the field of military-technical cooperation, remained problematic and elusive. The field of military-technical cooperation generally comprises the sharing and trading of advanced military technology and know-how between countries as well as collaboration in researching, designing, building and producing new sophisticated weapons and weapons systems. The continued lack of trust in this field from 2000-2004 was mutual and probably arose from hesitancy on both sides to share their respective technological expertise in the development of weapons and armaments.  

On one hand, Russia likely feared that Japan could utilize its own expansive technological capacity and know-how to modify Russian armaments or relevant technology and create a better, more highly sophisticated weapon. Moreover, Russia may have worried that Japan would make such equipment, research and information available to its staunchest political-military ally and strategic benefactor, the U.S. – the military superiority of which had greatly
distressed Russia since the end of the Cold War. On the other hand, Japan may have suspected that Russia would adapt Japan’s advanced military and civilian technology for strategic purposes similar to those that likely precluded Russia from sharing such information and hardware with Japan. The Japanese government also was well aware that Russia coveted advanced Japanese technology, both military and civilian, for multiple reasons and therefore probably decided not to distribute it so as to retain it as a means of leverage in its relations with Russia. It is further possible that Japanese weapons technology and military hardware incorporated information and equipment that Japan had acquired from the U.S. through its own extensive military-technical cooperation with the U.S. military. Accordingly, Japan’s reluctance to pass such materiel and know-how on to the Russians may have stemmed from its desire not to share vital U.S. weapons technology and expertise with Russia. Presumably, neither Russia nor Japan wished to undermine its security vis-à-vis the other by engaging in military-technical cooperation. As a result, Russia’s expressed aspiration to sell arms to Japan in late November 2000, although a significant development in the overall context of Russian-Japanese military relations, neither piqued sustained Japanese interest nor instigated forward momentum in this field of bilateral military interaction.103

Notwithstanding Russia and Japan’s mutual reluctance to cultivate extensive ties in the area of military-technical collaboration in Putin’s first term, defense cooperation between the two governments during this period nevertheless progressed in a cumulatively positive direction and increasingly trusting atmosphere. To be certain, Russian-Japanese defense cooperation experienced a high point – arguably its highest point in Putin’s first term – in mid-January 2003 when Putin and Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi mutually endorsed and signed the Japan-Russia Action Plan (JRAP). The JRAP was a comprehensive agreement between the two
governments that stipulated and encouraged intensive cooperation between Russia and Japan in multiple spheres of interaction so as to cultivate each state’s trust and confidence in the other for the purpose of resolving the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues. One of the spheres of bilateral interaction stipulated in the JRAP comprised defense and security.

In the section discussing defense and security, the JRAP acknowledged the “remarkable expansion” of Russian-Japanese military relations in the post-Soviet era and further noted that the vigorous development of interaction in the sphere had become an “important factor” in the strengthening of mutual confidence. To maintain this positive trajectory in military ties, the JRAP called for the continuation of discourse, visits and consultations between high- and mid-level Russian and Japanese defense officials, as well as reciprocal port-calls by the two countries’ naval vessels and joint exercises for the purpose of “search-and-rescue on the high seas.” The JRAP additionally stipulated personnel exchanges between Russian and Japanese “military research institutions and educational establishments;” regularly held meetings of the joint working group of the Russian Ministry of Defense and the Japan Defense Agency at the deputy ministerial level; and expanded collaboration in combating international terrorism, international organized crime (i.e., illegal arms sales and transport, drug trafficking and excessive poaching of fish and other marine life), and maritime safety in the Russian-Japanese border regions of the Seas of Japan and Okhotsk. Although its treatment of the subject is relatively brief, the section in the JRAP concerning Russian-Japanese cooperation in the sphere of defense and security provides the first officially endorsed and recognized agenda and guidelines for military interaction between the two countries in nearly a century. Equally as noteworthy as the historical significance of the JRAP’s provisions for future Russian-Japanese
defense cooperation were the conciliatory and progressive political atmosphere and venue in which Putin and Koizumi signed the accord.  

The state of relations between Russia and Japan immediately following the conclusion of the JRAP in January 2003 was especially optimistic. In an official meeting with Japan Defense Agency chief Shigeru Ishiba in Moscow only four days after Putin and Koizumi initialed the Action Plan, Russian Defense Minister – and long-time Putin ally, confidant and fellow silovik – Sergey Ivanov proposed more deeply integrated military cooperation with Japan and collaboration in the area of missile defense. He even alluded to Russia’s conditional participation in the Japan-U.S. effort to develop a “strategic missile defense system.” Ivanov proposed these ideas while requesting Japanese accession to a bilateral accord with Russia geared toward the seemingly nebulous objective of preventing “dangerous military activity” in the Asia-Pacific region. He noted that the signing of such an accord would raise Russian-Japanese relations a “new level.”

Although Ishiba’s response was not forthcoming, he expressed interest in Ivanov’s request in principle. Ishiba was likely cool to his counterpart’s suggestion because of the implications it could have had in respect to Japan’s partnership with the U.S. in researching and developing a global ballistic missile defense system at the time. Nevertheless, Ivanov discussed Russian disapproval of the U.S. withdrawal from the ABM Treaty and the issue of potential Russian-Japanese cooperation in the area of both strategic (global) and tactical (theatre/regional) missiles with Ishiba “in sufficient detail.” By the end of their meeting, Ivanov had accepted Ishiba’s invitation to Japan for an official visit before the end of 2003 and, in turn, had asked Ishiba to attend as an official observer the first large-scale Russian military land, air and naval exercises in the Russian Far East since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Furthermore, both
officials concurred that the cultivation of sound, transparent military relations between Russia and Japan were advantageous not only to their individual security, but to Northeast Asia regional and global security and stability as well.\textsuperscript{108}

Russian-Japanese military relations during Putin’s first term ended on a promising note: the Japanese closing of its Cold War “air and sea listening post” in its northernmost city of Wakkanai. Located only 40 miles south of Sakhalin Island and across the narrow La Perouse Strait dividing Sakhalin and Hokkaido, the radar and military observation installations at Wakkanai Air Station served as the trip-wire for a Soviet invasion of Hokkaido from land, air and naval bases in the Soviet Far East from the late 1940s to the early 1990s. Wakkanai hosted members of both the U.S. and Japanese air forces throughout much of the Cold War and remained the front-line in the de jure state of war that existed between Japan and the Soviet Union until its shutting down in mid-February 2004. Indeed, U.S. and Japanese military historians and experts qualified Wakkanai as Japan’s demilitarized zone – comparable to those border areas born of the Cold War that continue to separate the Koreas and China from Taiwan. When measured against the incredibly tense situations that endured along the 38\textsuperscript{th} parallel on the Korean Peninsula and the opposite coasts of the Taiwan Strait, the threat the Soviet Union posed to Japan seemed as immediate as that which North Korea and China posed to South Korea and Taiwan, respectively.\textsuperscript{109}

The Korean and Chinese situations since the end of World War II, however, have remained exceptionally unstable and thusly should not diminish the strategic anxiety that had existed on both sides of the La Perouse Strait until the early 1990s.\textsuperscript{110} Due to the Soviet Union’s overwhelming strategic and tactical military presence, Japan’s anxiety in this respect likely exceeded that of the Soviet Union. To be certain, the Northeast Asian maritime theatre –
particularly in the waters surrounding southern Sakhalin and the southern Kuriles – was not
without incidents of provocation and potentially incendiary actions, predominantly from the
Soviet side, during the Cold War. Of particular notoriety, was the Soviet Air Force’s downing of

The Soviet aircraft that shot down KAL 007 scrambled to intercept the flight from a
Soviet Air Force base on Sakhalin named Dolinsk-Sokol – a military installation only 140 miles
north of Wakkanai. And, the Soviet fighters downed the flight only miles from the Wakkanai air
station with 269 passengers, 28 of which were Japanese citizens. That KAL 007 managed to
pass over the Soviet strategic nuclear submarine base at Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky on the
southeastern coast of the Kamchatka Peninsula unscathed prior to intruding into Soviet airspace
over Sakhalin was extraordinary given that location’s strategic importance in comparison to
southern Sakhalin. Accordingly, Japan’s decision in February 2004 to further contribute to the
demilitarization of the Russian-Japanese maritime frontier indicated growing trust between the
two countries and a significant, positive change in Japan’s threat perception of Russia. What is
more, Wakkanai has become a critical commercial port-area linking the increasingly
interdependent provincial economies of Sakhalin and Hokkaido. The transformation of this once
alarmingly dysfunctional Russian-Japanese military frontier demonstrated the impressive rate at
which the two governments had partially shed almost half of a century of profound suspicion and
reciprocal distrust in favor of expanding mutually advantageous economic ties. Japanese
scholars and military personnel intimated that the area’s shift from potential military flashpoint
to budding Russian-Japanese commercial hub has occurred as a result of the change in threats to
Japan in the region. Specifically, they remarked that the threat to Japan was changing “from
Russia to North Korea, and probably later on to China.”
The Evolution of Russian-Japanese Military Cooperation in Putin’s Second Term

The gradual, yet simultaneous demilitarization and commercialization of the Hokkaido-Sakhalin maritime border region denoted an increasingly remarkable trajectory in Russian-Japanese military relations during the period of transition from Putin’s first to second term as President of the Russian Federation. Despite the continued absence of a bilateral post-World War II peace treaty, it appeared to government officials and expert commentators from both countries that the Russian-Japanese military relationship was slowly, but surely, advancing toward some type of strategic partnership. If cultivated carefully, Russian and Japanese leaders and Western commentators believed that such a partnership could balance effectively a mutual threat rising in the region from China. The historically significant events and actions that characterized bilateral military relations between Russia and Japan early in Putin’s second term, particularly in 2005, accounted for the exhilaration of officials on both sides regarding the impressive strides their governments and defense establishments had made in this sphere since 1992.

At the time, these accomplishments merited the exhilaration of Russian and Japanese political and military leaders. Retrospectively, however, the leaders’ ambition to forge a strategic partnership against China that accompanied and resulted from these accomplishments was at once naïve and premature. To be certain, the Russian and Japanese officials who harbored this grandiose expectation had disregarded the confrontational, acrimonious and distrustful history of Russian-Japanese military relations from the late 19th to the late 20th century – the impact of which continued to undermine and retard the expansion of trust and cooperation in this sphere of bilateral interaction, particularly in the form of the pervasively corrosive and unresolved southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues. As a result, the diplomatic euphoria
surrounding the intensive, but brief period of reconciliation in the two countries’ cooperation in the areas of defense and security in 2005 abated by the end of the year. For better or worse, more pragmatic perceptions and expectations of the Russian-Japanese military relationship developed on both sides and the pace and extent of cooperation in this sphere slowed and contracted, respectively, from early 2006 to late 2009.

Notwithstanding the unrealistic elite expectations that arose from cooperation between the Russian and Japanese defense establishments in 2005, these experiences constituted the most significant and sustained – albeit only for a short period of time – expansion of Russian-Japanese military cooperation in more than a century. Consequently, these experiences warrant brief analytic consideration in the greater context of the two countries’ military relations since the end of the Cold War and in the Putin era in particular. Moreover, when compared to the less substantive cooperation that occurred from early 2006 to late 2009, the highly symbolic trust-building measures of 2005 reveal the following: the degree to which the momentum in military cooperation that Russia and Japan had worked so diligently to establish from 1998-2005 had diminished in only three years; the continued, deleterious impact of U.S.-Japanese strategic enmeshment; psychologically and historically entrenched Russian-Japanese suspicion and distrust of one another; Russia’s strategic partnership with China; and the inability to resolve the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues on Russian-Japanese military relations into 2010; and, a partial reversal of Russia and Japan’s perception of one another as diminished military threats from 2006-2009.

In the opinion of Japanese Ambassador to Russia Issei Nomura, Russian-Japanese relations by the end of 2005 had advanced to their “best level” – both in “qualitative and quantitative terms”112 – since their formal establishment 150 years earlier in the February 1855
Treaty of Shimoda. Nomura’s sentiment in this regard was in no small part attributable to the significant, although arguably more symbolic than substantive, experiences that occurred in Russian-Japanese military relations in 2005. The official visit of a delegation of Japanese generals to Khabarovsk in November 2004 laid the groundwork for the important events of 2005. During their visit to Khabarovsk, the Japanese delegation observed Russian tank exercises on the Krai’s “snow-covered taiga.” This trip was a historically important event in Russian-Japanese military relations because it marked the first time since the Japanese occupation of Khabarovsk during the Allied Siberian Intervention in the Russian Civil War from 1918-1922 that Japanese generals had visited the area “in great numbers.” That the head of the Japanese commission and his Russian host were commanders of Japan’s Northern Army group (General Kenji Tokuda), based in Hokkaido, and the Russian Far Eastern Military District (General Yuri Yakubov), headquartered in Khabarovsk city, was meaningful because these generals were responsible for the defense of their country’s respective border region from the other as well as the stabilization of historically contentious Russian-Japanese maritime frontier.  

The effort of the Russian and Japanese governments to facilitate and encourage good personal rapport between Yakubov and Tokuda attested their mutual desire for reconciliation and enhanced cooperation in the spheres of defense and national security. Despite the symbolic importance of Tokuda’s “groundbreaking” visit to Khabarovsk in November 2004, representatives of the Russian and Japanese governments did not sign any accords pertaining to bilateral military relations. Soon after Tokuda’s trip to Khabarovsk, the Japanese government reciprocated Russia’s confidence-building gesture and, through Tokuda, announced in mid-December 2004 that it would reduce the “tanks and artillery pieces” of the Northern Army group on Hokkaido “by a third.” A few days prior to Tokuda’s announcement, Russian Ambassador to
Japan Aleksandr Losyukov met with him and jokingly apologized for Russia “no longer representing a threat” to Japan. Losyukov also light-heartedly apologized for the loss of government resources that Tokuda would incur as a consequence of the considerably diminished threat that Russia posed to Japan at this time.114

The attitude among Japanese political and military officials, as well as intellectuals and media commentators, was congruent with Losyukov’s remarks. That is to say, they were in agreement that a threat no longer existed to Japan in “the scenario of a full-scale invasion of Hokkaido by Russian ground forces.”115 To be certain, these developments at the end of 2004 displayed an impressive, tangible sea-change in Russian and Japanese threat perceptions of one another. The inclination of Japanese and U.S. military analysts to attribute this dramatic improvement in Russian-Japanese military ties to their mutual fear of China, however, remained tempting and logical. Consequently, they interpreted the deepening of ties in the sphere of defense cooperation in 2005 as an early stage in the development of a Russian-Japanese strategic entente intended to preclude the emergence of Chinese hegemony in Northeast Asia.116 Although a sufficient amount of evidence and corresponding official perspectives existed to lend credibility to assertions in U.S. and Japanese political, military and intellectual circles that China was the principal determinant of Russian-Japanese military cooperation in 2004 and 2005, there also existed evidence at this time to suggest that the two sides chose to reconcile because they believed it in their best interest to do so – apart from any incentive or factor external to their bilateral relationship. The mutual and respectful commemoration of Soviet victory in World War II and Japan’s triumph in the Russo-Japanese War of these conflicts’ 60th and 100th anniversaries substantiates this argument.

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For Russia and Japan, the commemoration of the 60th anniversary of Russia’s 1945 victory over Nazi Germany and the centennial of Japan’s 1905 triumph over Czarist Russia in the spring of 2005 was “no easy matter.” These traumatic experiences imparted to both sides an abundance of mutual, historically entrenched mistrust and resentment. The loss of honor, land and influence that Japan and Russia incurred from their defeats in these confrontations fomented psychological and strategic hypersensitivity among the current political and military elite in both countries, especially in regard to matters of national and territorial security. The air and spirit of reconciliation in Russian-Japanese military relations in the spring of 2005, however, mitigated temporarily the two sides’ typically negative perception of these experiences and thusly provided for their successful and peaceful remembrance and observation in each country. Nevertheless, it seems that the Japanese leadership went to greater lengths and risked more in terms of domestic elite and popular political backlash commemorating these events than did their Russian counterparts. Specifically, Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi risked far more politically by traveling to Moscow in May 2005 to observe Russia’s celebratory parade through Red Square than did Russian President Putin by sending low-ranking Russian government officials to attend events in Japan commemorating Russia’s defeat in its war with Japan in the early 20th century.

Despite the prevalence of pacifist attitudes among the Japanese political elite and public in 2005, the Soviets’ role in the Allied campaign against Japan in the latter half of 1945 remains an extremely controversial topic in Japanese history and society. In particular, the Japanese continued to harbor deep resentment for the duplicitous and opportunistic manner in which the Soviet government joined and conducted itself, respectively, in the Allied War effort against Japan in 1945. In the spring of 2005, the Japanese still perceived Stalin’s renunciation of the
1941 Soviet-Japan Neutrality Pact in April 1945 as a trust-shattering betrayal and understand his unilateral abrogation of the pact via the Soviet declaration of war on Japan on August 8, 1945, as a flagrant breach of international law. This course of events resulted in Russian custody of the southern Kuriles in the post-Soviet era and therefore persists as a source of Japanese tension and frustration in Russian-Japanese relations. An explanation follows.

Stalin’s repudiation of the 1941 Soviet-Japan Neutrality Pact in April 1945 precipitated Soviet accession to the Pacific theatre of World War II in August 1945. Roosevelt essentially guaranteed Soviet entry into the U.S. and British war against Japan by promising to Stalin the return of southern Sakhalin – then Japanese “Karafuto” – and the Kurile Archipelago after Japan’s unconditional surrender. A consequence of Roosevelt’s promise to Stalin at Yalta in February 1945 was, and remains, the southern Kuriles dispute. Prior to the Soviets’ entry into the Pacific theatre, the Soviet and U.S. governments allegedly had come to an understanding that Soviet military forces could occupy and eventually recover the islands of the Kurile Archipelago between, and including, Shumshu and Urup. The former is the first island in the Kurile chain in the north and sits just below the southernmost tip of the Kamchatka Peninsula; the latter is one of the southernmost islands in the archipelago and rests immediately to the north of the southern Kurile Islands. The U.S. supposedly limited Soviet expansion southward in the Kuriles to Urup because it recognized that the Japanese government had historically administered Iturup, Kunashir, Shikotan and the Habomai Islets as part of Hokkaido.

As per this understanding, the Soviets expected to meet the U.S. military on Iturup after the latter’s occupation of Hokkaido and the southern Kuriles. However, the rapid pace at which the Soviets advanced southward through the archipelago from Kamchatka and eastward from southern Sakhalin resulted in their reaching the southern Kuriles well before the U.S. troops had
arrived. The Japanese qualify Soviet behavior in capturing Iturup, Kunashir, Shikotan and the Habomai Islets as that of “a thief at a fire.” Russia’s intransigence over ownership of the southern Kuriles remains an acute point of contention in Russian-Japanese relations. Because the Soviet “victory” over Japan in August/September 1945 brought about the Soviets’ dispossession of the southern Kuriles from Japan, the Japanese have never been particularly keen on celebrating this event. Accordingly, many Japanese did not look favorably upon Koizumi’s attendance of the Russian Victory Day Parade in Red Square in the spring of 2005. Although the event itself commemorated the Soviet Union’s defeat of Nazi Germany, it alluded to Soviet “victory” over Japan and invoked the ire of certain segments of Japanese government and society.

That Koizumi was the first Japanese leader since the end of World War II to attend this important ceremony commemorating the Soviet victory in Europe in May 1945 demonstrated the historic character of this trip and the great extent to which Japanese perceptions of Russia as a traditional threat and adversary had subsided by 2005. It also exhibited the willingness of the Japanese government to cultivate a firmer basis for expanded military relations between the two countries. In stark contrast to the publicity, pomp and circumstance of the Russia’s Victory Day Parade, Japan’s celebration of the centennial of its consummate victory in the Russo-Japanese War, the Battle of Tsushima (also known as Japan’s “Trafalgar”), occurred in a “universally low-key” manner and atmosphere. And, despite Koizumi’s incredibly significant gesture a few weeks earlier, Putin did not attend any of the planned commemorative activities for the 100th anniversary of the battle. Putin sent in his stead to these ceremonies the Russian ambassador to Japan Aleksandr Losyukov and other lower-ranking embassy officials.
Notwithstanding its relative lack of diplomatic fanfare in comparison to the 60th anniversary of Soviet victory in World War II in Europe, the centennial celebration of the Battle of Tsushima nevertheless comprised a number of important and meaningful ceremonies. These ceremonies played an effective, symbolic role in encouraging Russian-Japanese reconciliation in the sphere of military interaction. On one hand, they helped to restore the loss of honor that Russia incurred as a result of its defeat in the battle. On the other, they assisted in healing the perpetual rift that developed as a consequence of the Russian-Japanese War and has undermined trust and confidence in Russian-Japanese relations, especially in regard to defense and security, since late 1905. These ceremonies included events such as Losyukov’s May 2005 voyage with Russian embassy and Japanese governmental officials aboard a Japanese Navy minesweeper to the estimated scene of the Battle of Tsushima in the Sea of Japan in the vicinity of the Japanese island for which the Battle is named; after firing a salute, Losyukov and the other delegates lowered a wreath onto the surface of the water “as a sign of the countries’ reconciliation.” Additional ceremonies involved the Russian Pacific Fleet remembering and honoring their fallen ancestors at a Russian naval cemetery in Vladivostok in late May 2005; an international symposium on the war in Osaka, Japan in late April 2005; and the unveiling of a monument commemorating the Japanese and Russian sailors that perished in the battle at the base of a hill on Tsushima Island that the local Japanese authorities had renamed the “Hill of Russian-Japanese Friendship.”

That Russia and Japan had engaged in such conciliatory forms of interaction in the ceremonies surrounding the anniversaries of these two formative, yet controversial events in the history of their military relations was highly significant. To be certain, the willingness of both sides to confront and overcome the lasting and detrimental legacy of the two most strategically
traumatic experiences in the history of their relationship intimated the possibility of a new era in
defense and security cooperation between the two countries. Soviet victory over Japan in
August/September 1945 and Japan’s humiliation of Russia in May 1905 remained primary
historical and psychological determinants of the two countries’ dysfunctional relations and lack
of military cooperation throughout the Cold War. They continued to have a negative impact,
although nowhere near as debilitating as it had been from 1945-1992, on the military vector of
the post-Soviet Russian and Japanese relationship. As per this analysis, the euphoria and
grandiose expectations among Russian and Japanese officials regarding the emergence of a
strategic partnership that arose from these landmark diplomatic achievements were
understandable. At the same time, however, events and developments were unfolding in other
areas of Russian-Japanese ties, principally in respect to the southern Kuriles and peace treaty
issues, as well as in Russian-Chinese and Russian-U.S. relations, that concurrently undermined
the symbolic importance of the reconciliation that had occurred between Russia and Japan in the
military sphere in the spring of 2005. Ultimately, these developments slowed considerably the
momentum that Russian-Japanese military cooperation had gained from January 1998 to
September 2005.

Despite the symbolic significance of the events in the spring of 2005, Russian and
Japanese positions on the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues had hardened and become
increasingly divergent since Putin and Koizumi’s last official summit in mid-January 2003 –
during which time they had signed the historic Japan-Russia Action Plan. The two leaders’
increasingly irreconcilable views on the territorial dispute perpetuated the inability of Russian
and Japanese diplomats to negotiate a peace treaty. The continued absence of a bilateral peace
 treaty naturally precluded any remarkable or substantive expansion in Russian-Japanese military
cooperation toward the end of 2005. Further exacerbating the diminution of progress in ties between the Russian and Japanese defense establishments was the seemingly exponential rate at which Russia had been developing similar ties with the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) of China. Of special note in this regard was the first-ever joint military exercise between Russia and China in mid-August 2005 entitled “Peace Mission 2005.” The exercise marked the first time since the inception of the People’s Republic of China that it allowed military personnel from a foreign army to operate on its territory. It not surprising that Japan regarded the alleged “counter-terrorism” exercise – which occurred in the vicinity of the Shandong Peninsula, only 500 miles or so from Japan – with suspicion and concern.¹²²

Also amplifying Japanese concern over Russian-Chinese rapprochement in August and September 2005 was Putin’s decision to construct the first terminus of the Eastern Siberian-Pacific Ocean (ESPO) oil pipeline to Daqing, China instead of the Russian Far Eastern port of Nakhodka. Putin’s decision had been the subject of intensive lobbying by the Chinese and Japanese governments since 2001. In late 2004, as Russian-Japanese military relations approached their cooperative high-point, Putin’s commentary on the matter indicated that the preferred Japanese route to Nakhodka – a seaport on Russia’s southeastern Pacific coast only 500 miles from Honshu – would be the first terminus of the ESPO pipeline. Although not a choice with immediate military implications, Putin’s decision as to whether Russia should construct the first terminus of the ESPO pipeline in China or along the Russian southeastern Pacific coast near Japan was of great strategic priority to leaders in Beijing and Tokyo. As countries in desperate need of natural resources, especially fossil energies, and specifically oil, to fuel their respective, expansive national economies and military-industrial complexes, Putin’s choice as to which route the ESPO would take first had profound implications for China’s and Japan’s national
security. It is understandable that Putin’s reassurances to Japanese government officials in late 2005 that Russia would supply Eastern Siberian oil to Japan via rail to Nakhodka, indeed a slower and more energy intensive transportation process than pipeline delivery, were neither entirely convincing nor comforting.

Another external factor that fomented a contraction in Russian-Japanese military cooperation after 2005 was the precipitous decline in Russian relations with the U.S. The Bush administration’s public endorsement and encouragement of democratic, “color revolutions” in the ex-Soviet republics on Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan in 2003, 2004 and 2005, respectively, incensed Putin as did the growing influence of the U.S. in Mongolia in 2005 and 2006. The full NATO membership of Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Romania, Bulgaria and Slovakia in 2004 as well as Ukraine’s accession to NATO’s “Intensified Dialogue” program – the precursor to the Membership Action Plan (i.e., invitation to join NATO) – further complicated U.S.-Russian relations and stoked Putin’s suspicion of Japan’s continued strategic enmeshment with the U.S.

Additionally contributing to the nadir in Russian relations with the U.S. and the subsequent contraction in Russian-Japanese military cooperation was the signing of a supplemental defense agreement by the U.S. and Japanese governments that strengthened, expanded and more deeply integrated the U.S.-Japanese Security Alliance – entitled “U.S.-Japan Alliance: Transformation and Realignment for the Future.” The provisions of this accord negatively impacted Russia’s confidence in Japan as a potential future military partner in Northeast Asia independent from considerable U.S. influence in two senses. First, the agreement afforded Japan a greater, more independent role in maintaining security in the region, albeit under the aegis of its alliance with the U.S. Second, the accord stipulated the need for continued
U.S.-Japanese cooperation in the field of ballistic missile defense (BMD) as a key to the security of both countries and Northeast Asia. The slack that the U.S. afforded Japan on its strategic “leash” in Northeast Asia likely troubled Russian political and military leaders given their country’s past experiences with a militarily independent Japan. Nevertheless, the two countries’ mutual commitment to research, design and eventually realize a global or even regional strategic BMD system was probably more disconcerting and alarming to Russia because of the negative implications that U.S.-Japanese success in this endeavor would have for Russia’s nuclear deterrent.123

As a result of these many factors, the impressive military cooperation that had been developing between Russia and Japan since early 1998 peaked in the spring and summer of 2005. Putin’s renewed, public criticism in early September 2005 of Japan’s southern Kuriles policy as intransigent124 and the Japanese government’s condemnation of the Russian-Chinese Peace Mission 2005 exercise as nontransparent marked the beginning of a contraction in Russian-Japanese relations that persists under Medvedev to this day. In spite of the many symbolic gestures and trust-building measures in the sphere of defense and security, the more substantive component of Russia and Japan’s military cooperation from 1998 – 2005 did not develop accordingly. That is to say, Russian-Japanese military cooperation over this intensive seven-year period did not advance beyond joint naval exercises geared toward search-and-rescue and counter-terrorism operations. At no point from 1998-2005 did the two militaries participate in exclusively bilateral and purely “combat” exercises at sea, on land or in the air. Although this trend has remained unchanged since late 2005, it should not intimate that senior members of the Russian and Japanese governments and defense establishments had not attempted to reinstitute some of this former momentum into their military relationship. Indeed, officials from both sides
issued statements and participated in historic exchanges toward this end from 2006-2010, but their states’ increasingly integrated, respective partnerships with China and the U.S., as well as their growing strategic self-interest in Northeast Asia, has continuously hindered the emergence of a substantive expansion in Russian-Japanese military cooperation that once seemed possible in the spring and summer of 2005.

Exchange of and dialogue between senior Russian and Japanese military officials continued on a consistent basis from 2006-2010. On two occasions in 2006, senior Russian military officials called for joint land-based “combat training ventures” in meetings with Japanese counterparts. To senior Japanese defense officials, such proposals likely seemed at once curious and ambitious because of their relative incongruence with the increasingly expansive scope and assertiveness of renewed, large-scale Russian military exercises in the Russian Far East and maritime areas near Japan. Beyond these annual and bi-annual large-scale operations, Russia – according to Putin’s prerogative – reinstated regular air force drills and strategic bomber flights in the vicinities of Japan and the U.S. in 2006 and 2007. Multiple instances occurred in which Japan and U.S. fighters scrambled from bases in Japan to shadow, “escort,” or intercept these Russian flights. Russia also became more vocal and direct in its criticism of the increasing presence of Japan’s military and exertion of economic influence in the international arena in 2007. Russia’s criticism was attributable to its perception of Japan’s involvement in international affairs as a function of its role as an agent of U.S. interest abroad.

In late June 2007, Russia’s Deputy Foreign Minister Aleksandr Losyukov informed his Japanese counterpart of Russia’s uneasiness and displeasure with the proposal of the Japanese government to create an “arc of freedom and prosperity” that essentially would establish a perimeter of democratic, pro-Western regimes along Russia’s southwestern, southern and
southeastern borders. Losyukov noted that Russia was inclined to regard this announcement and policy as “anti-Russian activity.” He was keen to warn the Japanese government “against cooperating with other countries in activities with an anti-Russian subtext” and further stated that the Russian government would “see such cooperation ‘very negatively.’” Months later, in mid-October 2007, Russia voiced its deepening concern over Japan’s continued cooperation with the U.S. in the sphere of ballistic missile defense and expressed its fear that an endeavor of this sort could “lead to an arms race” in Northeast Asia that would further destabilize the region.

In both cases, Japan reassured Russia that the nature of its behavior was beneficent and, in the latter instance, defensive. The relatively scarce operational common-ground that the Russian and Japanese militaries managed to find from 2008-2010 in naval search-and-rescue exercises and peacekeeper training, as well as in the historic visit of Russian generals to Hokkaido in late 2009 to observe Russia’s once incredibly hostile Japanese Cold War adversary, the Northern Army, in action so to speak, neither mitigated Russia’s growing military assertiveness in the region nor assuaged Japanese concern over this behavior.

**DIALOGUE AND PERSONNEL EXCHANGE**

Despite the contraction of Russian-Japanese military cooperation from late 2005 to late 2009, neither government sought to suspend dialogue and exchange between their defense ministries and military leaders. In fact, it was the continuation of official dialogue and exchange that sustained the two countries’ interaction and limited collaboration in the spheres of defense and national security during this four-year period. This dialogue and exchange also is responsible for the stabilization of Russia and Japan’s military relationship that has developed in a streamlined and lackluster, albeit pragmatic, manner and direction since late September 2009. Beyond these more recent trends in the evolution of Russian-Japanese military cooperation and
threat perceptions of one another, dialogue and exchange between the Russian and Japanese Ministries of Defense and military chiefs also played integral, if not central, roles in the inception and cultivation of Russian-Japanese military relations from 1992-1998 and the historic expansion of bilateral cooperation in the spheres of defense and national security from 1998-2005. To be certain, the development of direct contact, communication and interaction between Russian and Japanese defense officials facilitates personal rapport among these leaders that proves critical to trust-building and military cooperation, especially in a bilateral interstate relationship devoid of a formal peace treaty and hostage to an irreconcilable territorial dispute.

Russian-Japanese dialogue in the military sphere in the post-Soviet era has comprised conferences, consultations and formal and informal talks between civilian and non-civilian defense officials. Personnel exchange has included visits of Defense Ministers and military chiefs from each country to the other, reciprocal calls on Russian and Japanese ports by their respective naval vessels, troop inspections and the observation of one another’s military exercises.

THE YELTSIN ERA

During the 1990s, several notable instances of dialogue and personnel exchange occurred in Russian-Japanese military relations – many of which constituted historic and groundbreaking first experiences in this area of the two countries’ relationship. These landmark events and “first” experiences consisted of the April 1996 visit of the director-general of the Japan Defense Agency, Hideo Usui, to Russia – the first-ever official visit of a Japanese military chief to Russia in the history of Russian-Japanese relations; the port call of a Japanese naval vessel on Vladivostok in 1996 for the first time in 70 years; the May 1997 first-ever visit of a Russian defense minister to Japan since the beginning of the Soviet era; the port call of a Russian naval
vessel on Japan in late June 1997 for the first time in 70 years; the training of two Japanese fighter pilots by elite Russian pilots from February – March 1998; the first-ever visit of Japan’s “top uniformed officer,” Chairman of the Japan Defense Agency’s Joint Staff Council, Admiral Kazuya Natsukawa to Russia in late May and early June 1998 – during which he arrived in Vladivostok as the first senior-ranking Japanese defense official to do so in the history of Russian-Japanese military relations; the “unprecedented official visit” of Russian Army General Anatoly Kvashin to Tokyo in early December 1998 – the first ever by a Russian military chief-of-staff in the two countries’ history; Russian Pacific Fleet Commander Mikhail Zakharenko’s landmark official visit to Japan in mid-April 1999 – the first ever visit of a Russian Pacific Fleet commander since the establishment of Russian-Japanese relations in 1855, and the mid-August 1999 signing of an important bilateral agreement for development of dialogue and contacts between the Russian and Japanese military establishments by Russian Defense Minister Igor Sergeyev and Chief of the Japan Defense Agency Hosei Norota. These historically significant experiences proved crucial to the early phases in the development of Russian-Japanese military cooperation. They were important trust-building exercises and contributed greatly to the momentum and expansion of bilateral defense cooperation that began to occur between the two countries in early 1998 when Japan commenced 20 percent reduction in its troop contingent on Hokkaido. Indeed, the cumulative impact of these momentous events perpetuated the growth of Russian-Japanese military cooperation beyond the Yeltsin era and into the Putin era.

**THE PUTIN ERA**

Dialogue and personnel exchange in Russian-Japanese military relations continued to flourish and expand in Putin’s first term as Russian president. From 2000-2004, a number of
remarkable events occurred in this particular context of Russian-Japanese relations. Although the events included some “first” experiences, many were repeated activities and thusly demonstrated that an increasingly familiar, normalized and mature relationship was emerging between Russian and Japan in the spheres of defense and security cooperation. The first notable instance of dialogue and personnel exchange during this period was the visit of the chief of staff of Japan’s Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF), Admiral Kosei Fujita, to Moscow and Vladivostok in mid-February 2000 where he met with Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Navy, Admiral Vladimir Kuroedov, and Commander of the Pacific Fleet, Admiral Mikhail Zakharenko, respectively. The significance of this exchange is that it constituted the first-ever visit of a chief of staff of Japan’s MSDF to Russia since the inauguration of the MSDF in 1954.

Another impressive development in this area of bilateral military cooperation was the September 2000 port call that MSDF ships made at the secretive and secluded Russian naval and submarine base at Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky on the southeastern coast of the Kamchatka Peninsula. The Russian naval facility at Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky is home to Russia’s strategic nuclear forces in the Pacific, specifically the Rybachiy strategic nuclear submarine contingent of the Pacific Fleet. The Russian Pacific Fleet’s strategic nuclear submarine contingent at Rybachiy is the last in the Russian navy besides that of the Russian Northern Fleet. At the time, the visit of Japanese naval vessels to this critical military outpost in the Pacific marked the first time a non-Russian naval vessel had entered this militarily valuable port since the beginning of the Cold War.

In late November 2000, Russian Defense Minister Igor Sergeyev met with Japanese Defense Minister Kazuo Torashima in an effort to mend a serious rift in Russian-Japanese
relations that occurred in late September of that same year when Japanese authorities had arrested an MSDF officer on suspicion of selling sensitive military information and technology to a Russian naval attaché. Sergeyev attempted to assuage the damage that this scandal had inflicted on Japan’s perception of Russia as a diminishing threat by announcing the intent of the Russian government to reduce troop strength in Siberia and the Far Eastern Military District by 20 percent. Sergeyev and Torashima also signed a defense cooperation accord that stipulated continued joint search-and-rescue naval exercises, “reciprocal visits by warships” and personnel exchange including “military school cadets and instructors.”

Additionally significant examples of dialogue and personnel in Russian-Japanese military relations that occurred from 2000-2004 included the meetings and talks held between the Japan Defense Agency’s Administrative Vice-Minister, Ken Sato, and Russian Defense Minister Igor Sergeyev and Russia Chief of General Staff Anatoly Kvashnin in mid-January 2001; the visit of the Chief of General Staff of the Japanese Air Force, Shoji Takeguchi, to Moscow in late January 2001 for consultations with his Russian counterpart; the visit of Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Navy, Admiral Vladimir Kuroyedov, to Japan in mid-April 2001 – the first ever of a commander-in-chief of the Russian Navy to Japan in the two countries’ history of formal relations – during which he met with his counterpart, MSDF Chief of Staff Admiral Toru Ishikawa, and Chairman of the joint Chiefs of Staff Committee of Japan’s Self-Defense Forces, Shoji Takegouchi; talks between Russian and Japanese defense officials in Tokyo in mid-October 2001 planning for bilateral military dialogue and cooperation in 2002; the mid-April 2003 dialogue between Russian Defense Minister Sergey Ivanov and Japanese Fleet Commander Vice-Admiral Nobuchika Makimoto in Japan, and the mid-July 2003 official visit of Commander of the Russian Far Eastern Military District General Yuriy Yakubov to the
headquarters of the ground forces of the Northern Army group in Sapporo, Hokkaido where he met with Northern Army Commander General Osama Motida – the first ever visit of a Russian military commander to this bastion of Japanese Cold War conventional deterrence against a looming Soviet threat to the north since before the Soviet era.\textsuperscript{154}

That the Russian and Japanese governments went to great lengths to realize the success of Yakubov’s visit to Hokkaido in the summer of 2003 was especially demonstrative of the trust and confidence that each sought to establish with the other. Moreover, it indicated the extent to which the two sides sought to dilute the historically entrenched distrust that continued to undermine the expansion of substantive military cooperation between them and overcome the legacy of their dysfunctional past in this sphere of interaction. This symbolically important event provided a firm basis for continued reconciliation in Russian-Japanese military relations during Putin’s second term as President of the Russian Federation. However, the momentum that such landmark and encouraging experiences in Russian-Japanese military cooperation had facilitated since early 1998 began to abate by the end of 2005. And although the dialogue and exchange among Russian and Japanese military personnel became less intensive and substantive, in fact contracting from late 2005 to late 2009, the two sides nevertheless persevered in maintaining communication and cooperation in the areas of military interaction that were practical and in their interest.

The events and experiences of note in dialogue and personnel exchange in Russian-Japanese military relations that occurred from 2004 to late 2009 included consultations between Japan’s Hokkaido-based Northern Army group commander Lieutenant-General Kenji Tokuda and his de facto Russian counterpart Commander of the Russian Far Eastern Military District Yuriy Yakubov in Khabarovsk in early November 2004 regarding mutual efforts to combat
international terrorism;\textsuperscript{155} Yakubov’s trip to Hokkaido in mid-June 2005 to celebrate with the Japanese Northern Army group the 50\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of its Seventh Tank Division;\textsuperscript{156} the visit of Japanese Defense Agency chief Fukushiro Nukaga to Moscow in mid-January 2006 during which he held talks with Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov, toured the Russian General Staff Military Academy and inspected a military unit in the Moscow military district;\textsuperscript{157} the visit of an official military delegation of Japan’s Northern Army group to Khabarovsk in early November 2006 to consult with leaders of, and tour the headquarters and training areas of, the Russian Far Eastern Military District;\textsuperscript{158} and talks between Russian Chief of General Staff General Yuriy Naluyevskiy and Chief of the Joint Staff of the Japan Self-Defense Forces Admiral Takashi Saito in mid-April 2008 during which Saito expressed his conviction that Medvedev would continue Putin’s policy toward Japan, especially in the sphere of military cooperation.\textsuperscript{159} Dialogue and exchanges in the Medvedev era comprised events such as the visit of a delegation from the Russian Far Eastern Military to Hokkaido in early November 2008, a return visit by a delegation from Japan’s Northern Army leadership to the Russian Far Eastern Military District in early March 2009, and the historic, first-ever observation of military land-exercises of the Northern Army in Hokkaido by Russian military leaders in late September 2009.\textsuperscript{160}

\textbf{CONCLUSION}

Military relations between Russia and Japan from 2000-2010 neither expanded nor deepened to an extent commensurate with the strategic partnership that Russia allegedly seeks to establish with Japan over this period. Nevertheless, this chapter demonstrated that Russian-Japanese military relations since the turn of the millennium were surprisingly extensive given the continued existence of a highly sensitive and pervasive territorial dispute, the absence of a peace
treaty and historically and psychologically entrenched mutual distrust. That Russia and Japan have managed to realize the level of cooperation in the spheres of defense and security that they have given these political handicaps is at once impressive, commendable and encouraging. Moreover, the fact that Russia and Japan have pursued policies of engagement, dialogue and exchange at and between the senior-levels of their respective defense establishments despite the contraction in bilateral defense cooperation since late 2005 has demonstrated the rationality and maturity with which each side is attempting to approach and sustain this vector of their relationship. It appears that Russian and Japanese political and military leaders are putting forth a concerted, albeit certainly not their best, effort to avoid a freeze in military contact, operational (i.e., naval) interaction and dialogue that would lead to repeating their prisoner’s-dilemma-like historical trend in military confrontation. Indeed, it is much to the credit of Russian and Japanese political and military officials that cooperation between their two militaries has reached its current level considering that mutual attempts at reconciliation in this sphere began only a little over a decade ago.
Cumulatively, the late Czarist and early Soviet periods lasted from 1855-1941. The late Czarist period spanned from 1855-1917. I chose 1855 as the beginning year of the late Czarist period because it was at this time that the Russian empire signed its first modern treaty with an East Asia government, Tokugawa Japan. The early Soviet period spanned from 1917-1941. I chose 1941 as the terminal date for the early Soviet period because it was by this point that the Soviet Union had consolidated its political-military hold over the Soviet Far East, as demonstrated in the Soviet-Japanese border conflicts at Lake Khasan in 1938 and Khalkin Gol in 1939. Moreover, Japan had essentially recognized Soviet regime consolidation in the Soviet Far East when it signed the Soviet-Japan Neutrality Pact in April 1941.

Czarist Russia was a “victim” of Japanese military aggression at points between 1855 and 1917 in a relatively indirect sense. This means that Japanese military aggression against Czarist Russia principally took place in the form of Japanese attacks on territories in the sphere of influence of the Russian Empire in Northeast Asia, such as Manchuria and Korea. During the Russo-Japanese War from 1904-1905 Manchuria and the Yellow Sea constituted the primary theatres of land-based and naval military conflict. The Japanese did, however, seize Sakhalin Island after Russia, Japan, the U.S., and European powers called for an armistice in an effort to convene a peace conference between the two sides. Conversely, the Soviet Union was a “victim” of Japanese military aggression from 1917-1939 in a far more direct sense than its Czarist predecessor. Specifically, the Japanese, as part of the Siberian Intervention, occupied vast tracts of Siberia and the Russian Far East, including Northern Sakhalin, from 1918-1925. Furthermore, Japan threatened the Soviet security in 1938 and 1939 when it attempted annex territory in the Soviet Far East and the Soviet satellite-state Mongolia in the battles at Lake Khasan in 1938 and Khalkin Gol in 1939, respectively.

I cite the period of Russian-Japanese imperial competition in Korea and Manchuria as beginning in 1860 because it was at this point that Russia had concluded the 1860 Treaty of Peking with a weakened Qing China. The 1860 Treaty of Peking essentially ceded to Russia the territories comprising modern-day Khabarovsky and Primorsky Krais. It was at this point that Russian imperial ambition in Manchuria began in earnest. Japan feared that Russia’s push southward into Korea would eventually lead to Russia’s amphibious invasion of Japan. Consequently, the Meiji government started to assert influence in Korea in the 1860’s and 1870’s in an effort to stem this prospective Russian threat to Japan’s independence and territorial security. Examples of imperial competition between Russia and Japan in Korea and Manchuria from 1860-1905 that threatened Russian interests in mainland Northeast Asia consisted of: Japan’s conclusion of an “unequal treaty” with Korea in 1876 eight years prior to Russia’s first treaty with Korea in 1884, Japan’s victory in the First Sino-Japanese War in 1895 in which it briefly gained control of the Liaodong Peninsula and Port Arthur (until the Russians gained control of these territories after the 1895 Triple Intervention), the 1902 U.K.-Japan Alliance which the British and Japanese governments designed principally to contain Russian expansionism in Northeast Asia, and the beginning of the Russo-Japanese War in 1904.

Japanese occupation of eastern Russia as part of the Siberian Intervention lasted on the mainland from 1918-1922. In October 1922, the Japanese evacuated Vladivostok. However, the Japanese, having seized northern Sakhalin in supposed retaliation for Soviet-aligned anarchist attacks on its troops in the Russian Far East in March 1920, did not actually withdraw from Russia completely until their forces left northern Sakhalin in the spring of 1925.

Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan signed the Anti-Comintern Pact in late November 1936. The two sides designed the Anti-Comintern Pact for the expressed purpose of combining their efforts to undermine, preempt, and counteract the activities of the Soviet-dominated “Communist International” in their respective societies. The Pact was implicitly enacted to halt the expansion of Soviet power and influence in Europe and East Asia. The Anti-Comintern Pact represented a particularly significant threat to the Soviet Union because the two initial signatories, Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, were two of the Soviet Union’s most powerful neighbors. At the time, any potential conflict between the Soviet Union and either of these countries would likely result in the other’s participation thus embroiling the Soviet Union in a two-front war with formidable adversaries.

In particular, the Japanese cultivated and encouraged former White Russian and Cossack leader Ataman (Grigory) Semenov. Indeed, the Japanese government financed, armed, and supported Semenov in hopes that he would successfully invade the Soviet Far East and establish a buffer state between Manchukuo and the Soviet
Union. (See Jamie Bisher, White Terror: Cossack Warlords of the Trans-Siberian (New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 304-306.)

7 The Soviet-Japanese battles at Lake Khasan and Khalkin Gol in the late 1930’s were negative political-military experiences for the Soviets in that they constituted overt acts of Japanese aggression against the Soviet Union and Soviet allies in the Soviet Far East and Northeast Asia, respectively. Soviet forces were victorious in both encounters, particularly in the 1939 Battle at Khalkin Gol during which the Soviet and Soviet-aligned Mongolian armies defeated the Japanese and Japanese-aligned Manchukuo armies on the Mongolian-Manchukuo border.

8 George A. Lensen, The Strange Neutrality: Soviet-Japanese Relations during the Second World War 1941-1945 (Tallahassee, FL: Diplomatic Press, 1972), pp. 21-34. Although the Japanese government ultimately decided to pursue peaceful relations with the Soviet Union instead of invading Siberia, it nevertheless secretly drafted plans for such an attack in the event of German victory over Soviet forces in the West.


11 The period of Bolshevik regime consolidation in Asian Russia took place from 1923-1939. I qualify the period as beginning in 1923 because it was by this time that the Bolsheviks had effectively defeated the last pockets of White resistance in the Far East. Furthermore, the Japanese had, for the most part, withdrawn its forces from mainland Russia in the Far East. The consolidation period ends in 1939 because it was by this time that the Soviets had fortified their position enough in the Far East to defeat the Japanese in the quasi-war at Khalkin Gol in Eastern Mongolia. The Soviet ability to do so implies not only strategic and military recuperation in Asian Russia in the aftermath of the Russian Civil War, but also that they had solidified their domestic political authority in such a way as to successfully defend Russia against the Japanese on a unified basis. That is to say, the Soviets had effectively eradicated any sympathetic pockets of anti-Bolshevik resistance that would engage the Soviets in the Far East in alliance or association with the Japanese.

12 For further information on the U.S. Lend-Lease program to the USSR and the strategic importance of the Soviet Far East to this vital provision route through the North Pacific and Siberia, please see: Roger Munting, “Lend-Lease and the Soviet War Effort,” Journal of Contemporary History, Vol. 19, No. 3 (1984), pp. 495-510.

13 For a thorough treatment of the “race” between the U.S. and the USSR to establish themselves in East Asia in the closing days of World War II in the Pacific theatre, please see: Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, Racing the Enemy: Stalin, Truman and the Surrender of Japan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

14 Perhaps the most informative, recent publication treating the topic of U.S.-Soviet competition for geopolitical influence in Northeast Asia in the final days of World War II in the Pacific Theatre is Tsuyoshi Hasegawa’s Racing the Enemy.


16 Ibid., pp. 49-50.


19 Ibid.


21 During the decade-long Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, the Soviet and Afghan governments and media claimed that Japan, along with the U.S. and China, among many others anti-Soviet governments, gave substantial logistical, military, and economic assistance to anti-Soviet Afghan rebels. See “USA to ‘Increase Spending’ on ‘Training and Arming of Terrorist Bands’,” BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, August 25, 1987; “Growing Military Aid to Afghan ‘Counter-Revolutionaries’,” BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, October 8, 1984; “‘Ever More Massive’ Interference by Counter-Revolutionaries in Afghanistan,” BBC Summary of World
Broadcasts, December 24, 1984; “Babrak Karmal’s Interview with Japanese Newspaper,” BBC Summary of World

22 Alexei Arbatov, “Russian Military Doctrine and Strategic Nuclear Forces to the Year 2000 and Beyond”
(paper presented at the “Russian Defense Policy Towards the Year 2000” Conference at the Naval Postgraduate

23 “The Russian Federation’s Attitude to Armed Conflicts and the Utilization of the Russian Federation
Armed Forces and Other Troops,” The Basic Provisions of the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation:


25 “Russian President Approves New Military Doctrine,” RIA Novosti, February 5, 2010

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27 Ibid.

urlintl=1&fr=bfrumktrurl=http%3A%2F%2Fnews.kremlin.ru%2F&l=ru_en&btnUrl=

29 Nakano Junzo, “Japan’s Security and the Russian Far East,” in Akihiro Iwashita (ed.), Siberia and the
Russian Far East in the 21st Century: Partners in the "Community of Asia" (Sapporo: Hokkaido University Slavic

30 Ibid., p. 41.

31 Ibid., p. 42.

32 Ibid., pp. 42–43. The section of the Japan Defense White Paper that summarizes and analyzes the
military postures of Northeast Asian countries, as well as the U.S. is entitled the “Security Environment Surrounding
Japan”.

33 Ibid., p. 43.

34 Ibid.


36 “Security Environment Surrounding Japan: Security Environment in the Asia-Pacific Region – Russia in
Russian Far East. Mobility 2004 entailed the redeployment of Russia’s permanent combat-ready troops from
Western/European Russia to Russia’s Far Eastern Federal/Military District.

37 “Security Environment Surrounding Japan: Overview,” in Defense of Japan 2006, accessed October 9,


40 Between 1967 and 1980 the Soviet government had increased its military presence in the Soviet Far East
substantially. This increase included conventional and strategic military hardware and weapons systems, as well as
a massive surge in troop levels. The Soviet government augmented its military presence in its Far Eastern territories
in order to more effectively deter what it regarded as an imminent Chinese threat. Indeed, the massive surge in
troop levels constituted perhaps the most visible element of Soviet military build-up in the Soviet Far East. From
1967 – 1980 increased the number of Soviet army divisions from 15 to 45, respectively. With each division
comprising some 10,000 infantrymen, the Soviets had increased their troop presence in the Soviet Far East from
150,000 to 450,000 in a period of only 13 years. This constituted roughly 25% of the entire Soviet army. (See
Alvin Z. Rubinstein, Soviet Foreign Policy Since World War II: Imperial and Global (Boston: Little, Brown and
Company, 1985), pp. 157-158.) Under Gorbachev, however, the Soviet government demilitarized the Sino-Soviet border and reduced Soviet troop presence in the Soviet Far East by some 260,000 Soviet military personnel. (Ibid., p. 162)


42 Ibid. (For a visual confirmation of the “strategic arc” of Russian Far East military forces surrounding Hokkaido please see “Figure 1-2-14” entitled “Russian Military Deployment in Areas Close to Japan.”)

43 Ibid.


55 Sung-ki Jung, “Defense White Paper to Specify Sovereignty over Doddo,” The Korea Times, July 28, 2008. Although, this article does not explicitly confirm the timeline for drafting, submitting, and publishing the 2008 Japan Defense White Paper, one can infer that this timeline is accurate and valid. Specifically, the article in which the author makes a reference to the 2008 White Paper was written in late July and he states that the Ministry

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of Defense of Japan (MODJ) will publish the report later that year. Since the MODJ published the 2008 White Paper in September 2008, one can generally defend the validity of this timeline.

The Japan Defense White Paper is the Ministry of Defense of Japan’s (MODJ) principle annual policy paper. Nevertheless, the MODJ publishes additional documents that supplement its annual White Paper. The primary supplemental document to the annual Defense White Paper is the East Asian Strategic Review. The National Institute for Defense Studies (NIDS) is the “main policy research arm” of the MODJ. NIDS publishes East Asian Strategic Review on an annual basis. This document examines the trends and capabilities of Japan’s neighbors in East Asia, including Russia, in more specific detail than the MODJ’s annual Defense White Paper. It often draws attention to developments in these countries’ military intentions and actions in East Asia that annual Defense White Paper omits or overlooks. The East Asian Strategic Review has proven a valuable resource in assessing Japan’s threat perception of Russia over the last few years in a more comprehensive and informed manner. For more information on this document, please visit the NIDS website and homepage: http://www.nids.go.jp/english/index.html.


“Russia – Regain Influence and Military Strength,” in East Asian Strategic Review 2008, pp. 141, 149. According to the MODJ, two factors accounted for this assertive Russian behavior: economic recovery via increased sales of Russian energy at higher cost on global markets and a strong current in Russian public opinion supporting Russian state efforts to restore the country’s international status as a great power. (Ibid., pp. 143, 149.)


“Russia’s Pacific Fleet Completes Anti-Submarine Drills,” RIA Novosti, October 23, 2008, accessed January 3, 2010. Retrieved from http://en.rian.ru/russia/20081023/117915596.html. In the Bereg 2008 military exercises, Russia implicitly communicated to the Japanese its intention and capability to maintain political-military control over Sakhalin and the Kuriles, particularly the southern Kuriles. The Russian naval maneuvers to provide safe navigation for Russian commercial and military vessels from the Sea of Okhotsk to the Pacific also emphasized the strategic importance of the southern Kuriles, specifically the Vries and Ekaterina Straits, to the Russian government. These exercises echoed Stalin’s desire to annex the Kurile archipelago at the end of World War II in order to secure a purely Russian outlet to the Pacific. Finally, Russian anti-submarine exercises in the vicinity of the Sakhalin Island and the Kurile Archipelago likely indicate the Kremlin’s desire to defend its strategic nuclear submarine forces at Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky as well as its intention to retain the Sea of Okhotsk as a “Russian lake” for the strategic nuclear submarines of Russia’s Pacific Fleet.


Ibid., p. 67.


“Security Environment Surrounding Japan: Overview – General Situation,” in Defense of Japan 2009, p. 2. On one hand, the 2009 Defense White Paper encourages an optimistic perception of this development as an opportunity for greater Russian-Japanese cooperation in the international community. On the other, it cautions, albeit implicitly, that Russia’s national power may become manifest in more assertive Russian military behavior in Northeast Asia that will influence the region’s security environment in a negative manner.

“Security Environment Surrounding Japan: National Defense Policies of Countries – Russia,” in Defense of Japan 2009, p. 66. Beyond the corroboration of Russia’s growing reliance on its strategic nuclear forces in the 2009 Japan Defense White Paper, Russian military leaders have also, and quite recently, alluded to the prospect of a large-scale conventional attack on Russia and the indispensability of Russian nuclear weapons in discouraging, repelling, or preventing such acts of aggression against the Russian Federation. (See “Russia May Face large-Scale Military Attack, Says Strategic Missile Troops Chief,” ITAR-TASS News Agency, December 16, 2009.)


85 Ibid.


92 Ibid.

93 Ibid.


100 Ibid.

101 Ibid.

102 Ibid.

103 “Russia Set to Export Arms to Japan – Ivashov,” BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union – Political, November 29, 2000. The offer of the chief of the Russian Foreign Ministry’s International Cooperation Department, Colonel-General Leonid Ivashov, to sell Russian arms to Japan occurred during a visit to Japan in late November 2000. From this time until Putin and Koizumi’s signing of the Japan-Russia Action Plan in Moscow in January 2003, Ivashov’s proposal remained on the table, so to speak. Japan, however, neither expressed explicit interest in Ivashov’s proposition over this two-year period nor drafted any “specific plan” to purchase arms from Russia – although the chief of the Japan Defense Agency, Shigeru Ishiba, did note during an interview in mid-January 2003 that the Japanese government had not ruled it out. (See “Japan Defence Agency Head Interviewed by Russian Newspaper,” BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific – Political, January 12, 2003.)


106 Ibid.

The Korean and Chinese conflicts began and persist as civil wars in which external powers, specifically the U.S., remain deeply involved. The absence of peace between the Soviet Union, now Russia, and Japan, however, has been a de jure, albeit dormant, international as opposed to domestic conflict in which the U.S. has not sought to become explicitly or deeply involved.


Ibid.


“Russia, Japan Mark 100 Years of Tsushima Battle,” RIA Novosti, May 27, 2005.

Ibid.

“Ibid.

“Ibid.

“Ibid.

“Ibid.

“Ibid.


Ibid.

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“Ibid.

“Ibid.


142 Zakharenko also become the first Russian military officer ever to board a Japanese submarine. (See “Russian Fleet Commander Visits Yokosuka Base,” Japan Economic Newswire, April 13, 1999.)


159 “Russian CGS Meets Japan Defence Chief (Comments on Medvedev),” BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union – Political, April 12, 2008.
CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION
This study has established the increasing complexity of Russian relations with Japan since the turn of the millennium. This study has further established the significant expansion of Russian cooperation with Japan in virtually all areas, particularly in the economic sphere, from 2000-2010. Notwithstanding its confirmation of these important and notable trends in the two countries’ political, economic and military interactions during this period, this study refuted the Russian government assertion that its relationship with Japan is currently advancing toward a “full-blown partnership.” To be certain, this examination of Russian-Japanese ties demonstrated that such a statement regarding the remarkably rapid evolution of bilateral cooperation in political, economic and military spheres in the Putin-Medvedev era was nevertheless premature and imprecise. Toward this end, this study identified and comprehensively assessed a number of factors and trends that precluded the emergence of a “full-blown partnership” between Russia and Japan from 2000-2010.

Not surprisingly, these factors and trends comprised two of the principal obstacles to the cultivation of a truly intensive and trusting Russian friendship with Japan: the southern Kuriles dispute and the lack of a peace treaty. At the same time, however, these factors and trends included additionally important and influential obstacles to this Russian ambition of a political, economic, military and strategic nature, not least the absence of lasting, friendly rapport between presiding Russian and Japanese leaders, comparative mutual deficiency in terms of the scope and depth of bilateral trade relations and the persistence of the U.S.-Japan Security Alliance. This study also identified and discussed, albeit somewhat briefly, the theoretical assumptions and explanations underlying the nature of Russia’s relationship with Japan as it existed over the last decade.
QUALIFYING THE COMPLEXITY OF RUSSIAN RELATIONS WITH JAPAN FROM 2000-2010

The complexity of Russian relations with Japan from 2000-2010 arose primarily as a result of simultaneous experiences and instances of cooperation and competition between the two countries during these 10 years. It also emerged as a result of the curious nature of Russian-Japanese cooperation that occurred over this period. In regard to the simultaneity of Russian cooperation and competition with Japan, the former comprised a number of significant experiences and trust-inspiring events – many of which were historically unprecedented in Russian relations with Japan – and transpired in almost every sphere of bilateral interaction in what only can be described as an increasingly confident atmosphere between both states. The problem, however, was that much of the political, economic and military cooperation that had taken place in the Putin-Medvedev era was richer in symbolism than in substance.

More specifically, in terms of many of the historically unprecedented “firsts” that occurred in Russian-Japanese relations from 2000-2010, especially in the military sphere, no significant bilateral activities followed that suggested the development of greater depth in this aspect of the two countries’ relationship. Similar trends were evident in the political and economic spheres as well. Notwithstanding the deficiency in substantive interaction in political, economic and military relations, the cooperation that did emerge in these areas has been and will continue to be of critical value to the process of Russian-Japanese reconciliation and complete normalization of relations. As such, the importance of this cooperation should not be understated. Instead, Russia and Japan should be commended for these achievements and the international community should encourage further and more substantive Russian cooperation with Japan beyond 2010.
The major complexity that arose from the Russian-Japanese relationship from 2000-2010, however, was that the two countries’ inability to resolve the southern Kuriles and peace treaty issues significantly, if not entirely, undermined any potentially positive impact that their cooperation may or could have had on their relationship. This effect was especially evident in respect to the progress that Russia and Japan made in cultivating economic ties from 2000-2010. The Russians, quite accurately and understandably, tout the impressive growth in economic relations with Japan during this period as the most noteworthy and encouraging areas and instances of reconciliation between the two sides – and as evidence of Russia’s concerted and genuine effort to establish a “full-blown partnership” with Japan. Nevertheless, the chapter on Russian economic relations with Japan essentially confirmed that the scope and depth of bilateral cooperation in this area left much to be desired and was neither “dynamic,” nor indicative of, nor conducive to the emergence of a full-blown Russian-Japanese partnership. Indeed, it is the expansive and notable, albeit substantively deficient, cooperation that transpired between Russia and Japan in the Putin-Medvedev era combined with the absolute absence of progress on two of the most pivotal matters in their relationship – the territorial and peace treaty impasses – that have established an extremely regrettable and high level of complexity in Russian relations with Japan since the turn of the millennium.

COOPERATION IN RUSSIAN RELATIONS WITH JAPAN FROM 2000-2010

Essentially, cooperation in Russian relations with Japan from 2000-2010 expanded and occurred in areas that would not immediately facilitate a complete normalization in ties, but at the same time represented notable and compelling improvements to suggest that, if maintained, these practices may create the trust necessary for reconciliation in the future. That Russian-
Japanese cooperation in the Putin-Medvedev era did not include tangible progress on settling the southern Kuriles dispute and the peace treaty impasse is, as previously noted, regrettable. It is regrettable because the positive diplomatic environment that collaboration and trust-building in other areas created in this relationship from 2000-2010 was highly conducive to negotiating a resolution to both matters. However, the absence of progress on these two influential issues should not eclipse the noteworthy improvements in political, economic and military cooperation that did occur during this period.

Indeed, the conclusion of the 2003 Japan-Russia Action Plan and its fulfillment in all areas except for that concerning the matters of a “peace treaty” and “border demarcation” demonstrated a strong will on Russia’s side to create deeper, friendlier ties with Japan. In this same respect, the many intergovernmental, cultural and educational exchanges that took place between the two countries in the past decade also have signaled a growing Russian interest in Japan not viewed since the early 20th century. That bilateral trade swelled to approximately $29 billion by the end of 2008 – an almost 600 percent increase from the beginning of the decade – further intimated the promise and vast potential of Russian-Japanese cooperation. Moreover, the increasingly frequent and intense military dialogue that emerged between the Russian and Japanese governments and defense establishments from 2000-2010 purported a deepening sense of urgency and commitment on both sides to cultivate close ties in the most strategically sensitive spheres of bilateral interaction.

The problem with Russian cooperation with Japan from 2000-2010, however, is that it is generally misleading in that it looks almost immediately impressive in terms of quantitative and, to a certain degree, qualitative significance, but information and data provided from further investigation often reveals a more accurate account and estimation of the extent of cooperation.
that has actually occurred. For example, Russian claims that its economic ties with Japan were “dynamic” because of the rapidity with which the two countries’ trade turnover increased between 2004-2008 seemed accurate quantitatively when first considering the basic trade turnover totals for the four-year period under consideration. Yet, after examining the Russian-Japanese trade relationship a bit more closely, it became evident that neither side had much over which to boast. In terms of overall trade, each country accounted for an almost negligible single-digit percentage of the other’s total. And, the substance and structure of trade basically had gone unchanged since the Czarist era. That is to say, Japan continued to import raw materials from Russia while exporting finished goods, predominantly in the forms of energy and hi-tech machinery, respectively. That the type of product the two sides were continuing to provide to and receive from each other essentially had not expanded to include goods from other sectors of their respective economies completely delegitimizes and disqualifies Russian assertions that it has cultivated with Japan a “dynamic” economic relationship.

It is in this respect that achievements in Russian cooperation with Japan remain perplexing because they are indeed impressive and compelling when considered in the dysfunctional and extremely skewed historical context of Russian-Japanese relations. Upon more intensive analysis and exploration, however, it seems that the Kremlin has set a particularly and uniquely low standard in its relations with Japan if it is to deem their current state of relations as “dynamic” and indicative of an inevitable “full-blown partnership.” Examples of Russian “dynamic” partnerships with other great powers, specifically China, the EU and even the U.S., help to reveal the exaggerated nature of Russian claims in respect to the evolution of its relationship with Japan from 2000-2010. Although the Russian and Japanese governments are certainly justified in hailing the strides that they had made in the Putin-Medvedev era, any
exaggeration as to the extent or overall impact of these developments is neither warranted nor justified.

Many of these Russian government claims are, of course, hyperbole geared, albeit in a somewhat misdirected manner, toward two ends. First, the Russian government genuinely seeks to communicate to its Japanese counterpart – as well as the international community – the extent to which it values friendly relations with Japan. Second, and more appropriately, the Russian government utilizes such hyperbole in an attempt to overcompensate diplomatically for the lack of progress on the two bilateral issues of greatest concern to the Japanese government: the southern Kuriles dispute and the peace treaty impasse. To be certain, the Russian government needs to exercise more caution in its use of diplomatically pregnant terms such as “dynamic” and “full-blown partnership” to describe its relationship with Japan, especially because it has neither taken nor has demonstrated the willingness to take any substantive initiative in resolving the matter in a way that involves direct dialogue with Japan at the highest levels of government. Indeed, it is particularly brazen on Russia’s part to employ such terms while it remains in a seemingly irreconcilable territorial dispute over the southern Kuriles and concurrent insurmountable peace treaty impasse with Japan. It also could be potentially very destabilizing to Russian relations with Japan because the more often the Russian government utilizes these terms to describe its partnership with Japan without making progress on these important issues or displaying an intention to do so, the wider the gap between the reality and hyperbole in Russian-Japanese relations becomes – and the more likely the opportunity for Japan to draw attention to this fact in the form of public criticism of the Russian government.
COMPETITION IN RUSSIAN RELATIONS WITH JAPAN FROM 2000-2010

The severe deficit of substance that characterized Russian cooperation with Japan from 2000-2010 was attributable to the principal trend in the two countries’ relationship during this period: competition. The main sources of this competition and tension naturally were the territorial and peace treaty issues, but these matters were by no means the only causes for the chronic deficiency in substance that plagued Russian-Japanese relations in the Putin-Medvedev era. A number of other factors and themes perpetuated competition and tension between Russia and Japan since the turn of the millennium. These factors included the further strategic enmeshment of Japan and the U.S., increased tension in U.S.-Russian relations, the expansion of the Russian-Chinese Strategic Partnership, continued mutual negative threat perceptions of one another, Japanese hesitancy to enhance investment and assist in the development of the Russian Far East, Russia’s anxiety over an excessive amount of Japanese investment in strategic (i.e., energy) sectors of the Russian economy, and both sides’ inability to overcome the intensely deleterious legacy of highly suspicious, distrustful and psycho-strategically traumatic Russian-Japanese political-military history in Northeast Asia.

The underlying themes, or rather concerns, in these many sources of competition between Russia and Japan are territorial and economic security, particularly in the Russian Far East. There exists abundant historical precedent in Russia’s relations with Japan that justifies its profound strategic anxiety over Japanese economic, and thusly consequentially territorial, ambition in the region. Accordingly, Russia’s seemingly inconsolable strategic anxiety and paradoxically insatiable psychological compulsion for not only global great-power status, but for a similar status of influence in its border regions, including Northeast Asia, likely will effect
Russia’s tendency toward schizophrenic behavior – competition, conciliation, cooperation, paranoia and reservedness – in its Japan policy. What is more, until Russia can overcome these many obstacles and dysfunctional aspects of its perception and approach to relations with Japan, the prospect of realizing even a normal, forget “full-blown,” bilateral partnership with Japan will remain elusive. Indeed, to overcome these many significant and psycho-historically entrenched obstacles to the normalization of relations with Japan and obtain the type of relationship with Japan to which it claims to aspire, the Russian government will have to initiate and expand substantive cooperation comprehensively in all areas of bilateral interaction with Japan as it pledged to do in the 2003 Japan-Russia Action Plan.

COOPERATION AND COMPETITION IN FUTURE RUSSIAN RELATIONS WITH JAPAN

The study has established that little evidence exists to suggest a deviation from the current, tortuous trajectory of Russian relations with Japan in the near or distant future. It is likely that cooperation between the two countries will remain relatively devoid of substantive or even dynamic expansion as long as the territorial and peace treaty issues go unresolved. That the deficit in substantive cooperation will likely continue should not, however, detract from the cooperation that does occur in the years ahead. Even if it is more symbolic than substantive, cooperation is better than no cooperation. That is to say, the continuation of contact, interaction and dialogue between countries is absolutely critical to perpetuating cooperation, diluting competition and avoiding conflict. It is for this reason that Russian cooperation with Japan, although not necessarily optimal or ideal, is nevertheless positive and progressive, as well as vital to the stability of their relationship, considering the abundance of historical evidence attesting to how quickly antagonistic and confrontational the two countries’ relations can
become. To be certain, even though these instances of cooperation may leave something to be desired, they could nevertheless play a notable role in facilitating normalized diplomatic Russian-Japanese ties in the future in that they could maintain momentum in dialogue and intergovernmental interaction and contact. Notwithstanding its continuation in the future in virtually all spheres, lying beneath almost all instances of cooperation between Russia and Japan will be a strong undercurrent of suspicion, tension and competition as a consequence of the territorial and peace treaty issues, as well as the U.S.-Japanese Security Alliance and Russia’s historically entrenched distrust of Japan. The data presented in this study does not intimate the extreme likelihood of military conflict – conventional or otherwise – over the southern Kuriles in the next 20 to 30 years.

**CONTRIBUTION TO LITERATURE**

This study has contributed significantly to scholarly literature concerning Russian relations with Japan in the post-Cold War era. In particular, it has presented a modified, albeit not necessarily new, approach to researching and analyzing Russia’s relationship with Japan since the end of the Cold War, and in the Putin-Medvedev period specifically. First, it has attempted to treat and thusly examine the southern Kuriles and peace treaty impasses as issues in bilateral relations separate from other political, economic and military aspects of Russian-Japanese ties in the last 10 years. By endeavoring to separate these two highly controversial matters from other important spheres in Russian interaction with Japan, this study has been able to explore and comment on the scope and intensity of the cooperation that did transpire between Russia and Japan during this period without having to constantly invoke the overwhelming impact of the territorial and peace treaty issues.
Moreover, this study considered intensively, as a result of its relatively comprehensive design, previously overlooked areas in Russian-Japanese relations such as the determinants of Russian policy toward Japan in the Putin-Medvedev period, leadership rapport, progress in reconciliation as per the 2003 Japan-Russia Action Plan, as well as an in-depth investigation of Russian and Japanese threat perceptions of one another and the evolution of bilateral military cooperation, dialogue and exchange from 1992-2010. Additionally, it confirmed Russia’s excessive and risky use of hyperbole in describing the substantive nature of its relations with Japan and the limited progress that the two sides had in fact made toward developing a “dynamic” or “full-blown partnership” in the last decade. Finally, this study combined a comprehensive empirical assessment of Russian-Japanese relations from 2000-2010 with theoretical explanations – drawn from three major areas of international relations theory – as to why a “full-blown partnership” has not yet emerged between Russia and Japan.

**THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS OF CASE-STUDY**

This study utilized three major areas of international relations theory to assist in its explanation of Russian relations with Japan from 2000-2010. The three areas included the neorealist-neoliberal debate, perception and misperception in international politics and game-theoretical approaches to international relations analysis. In regard to the neorealist-neoliberal debate, this study demonstrated that the assumptions and principles of neorealism, particularly concern for survival and territorial security, dominated Russia’s policy toward Japan during the Putin-Medvedev era. This study further demonstrated that the Russian-Japanese relationship is only minimally interdependent and does not show any signs of advancing to one of “complex interdependence” at any point in the near or distant future. In fact, the evidence suggests that further stagnation and lack of progress in resolving or even addressing the territorial issue will
likely result in regression to a relationship of merely “interconnectedness.” In terms of perception and misperception in international politics, the Russian-Japanese case-study clearly substantiates the incredibly negative impact of traumatic historical political-military experiences on the cultivation of friendly relations between two traditionally hostile and adversarial states.

This study further substantiates the continuously deleterious effect that states’ overestimating the extent to which others threaten their security has on the development of bilateral trust and friendly interaction. Finally, game-theoretical analysis of Russian ties with Japan from 2000-2010, particularly in regard to the iterated prisoner’s dilemma model, exhibited the importance of continued dialogue in situations in which cooperation between two states is consistently elusive and fleeting – specifically in regard to such hypersensitive issues as territorial disputes. Indeed, the iterated prisoner’s dilemma model intimated and reinforced the importance of intergovernmental communication, contact and dialogue in situations in which states attempt to cultivate relations around a persistent territorial dispute – no matter how trivial such communication and dialogue may seem. As such, these three areas of international relations theory have proven particularly useful in helping to explain the complexity of Russian relations with Japan in the Putin-Medvedev era – a complexity in relations that will unfortunately, but somewhat predictably, continue into the future until the resolution of the territorial and peace treaty issues.
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