

# Japan, Russia and their Territorial Dispute: The Northern Delusion

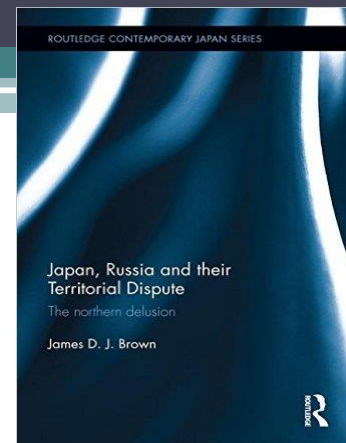
Canon Institute for Global Studies  
(CIGS), 15:00-17:00

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# Book project



- *Japan, Russia and their Territorial Dispute: The Northern Delusion* (Routledge, March 11 2016)
- Origins of the book project
  - My background in Russian foreign policy
- Aim of the book
  - To provide a detailed explanation of contemporary Russian thinking on the territorial dispute with Japan and thereby provide a realistic assessment of its prospects of resolution.

# Contents of today's talk

- Japan's position
  - Perceived areas of leverage vis-à-vis Russia
  - PM Abe's plan for 2016
- Russia's position
  - Legal issues and historical memory
  - Economics
  - Security
  - Social considerations
- Outlines of a viable deal



# Caveat

- Pessimistic about Japan's chances
- Based on attempt at objective assessment, not preference for one side

# Japanese leverage?



- History and international law
  - “inherent” Japanese land; 1855 Treaty of Shimoda
  - “stab in the back” of violating 1941 Neutrality Pact
  - San Francisco Peace Treaty (1951)
    - “Japan renounces all right, title and claim to the Kurile Islands”
    - But, “The Northern Territories are not included in the Kurile Islands” (MOFA)
- Economic
  - Japanese investment needed for Russian Far East
- Security
  - Russia’s underlying fear of China

# Abe's Russia policy



- Determination
  - Russia declared priority on day of 2012 election
  - “my mission as a politician, as prime minister, is to achieve [a resolution to the territorial dispute] no matter what”
  - “as many meetings as possible” with Putin
- Concrete achievements
  - Economic: \$1bn bilateral investment fund (Apr. 2013); trade exceeded \$35bn in 2013; visa-simplification (Oct. 2013)
  - Security: “2+2” (Nov. 2013)
  - Peace Treaty: Deputy FM talks (Aug. 2013, Jan. 2014)
- Progress disrupted by Ukraine crisis

Japan's Abe calls for Putin to be brought in from the cold; January 17, 2016; *Financial Times*

- Prime Minister Abe:
  - “We need the constructive engagement of Russia.”
  - “I believe appropriate dialogue with Russia, appropriate dialogue with president Putin is very important.”
- Mr Abe said he was willing to go to Moscow as this year's chair of the Group of Seven advanced economies, or to invite the Russian president to Tokyo.



# Abe's plan for 2016



- Intention to hold summit announced (4 Jan)
  - Lull in Ukraine crisis; shared interests of G7, Russia re ISIS, DPRK
- Important preparatory steps
  - Kōmura in Moscow (10-14 Jan.)
    - Delivers letter ; meets Lavrov, Naryshkin; proposes Japan can speak up for Russia's interests at G7
  - Deputy FMs Morgulov, Sugiyama to meet, Tokyo (Feb)
- Unofficial summit
  - Timing: Spring 2016, before G7 (26-27 May)
  - Location: Vladivostok/Khabarovsk/St. Petersburg
- Putin's official visit to Japan



# Abe's proposed deal



- Russia
  - Recognises legitimacy of Japan's claim to sovereignty over all 4 islands
- Japan
  - Agrees to maximum flexibility on timing of transfer
  - Offers economic support for development of RFE, assistance in integrating Russia with Asia-Pacific
  - Agrees to end sanctions
  - Presents itself as bridge between West and Russia
- Fall-back position?
  - 50-50 territorial split
  - Mentioned in past by Asō, Yachi

# What prospects of success?

- Prospect of Abe succeeding in securing a favourable territorial deal for four islands (or even three) islands?
- Zero!



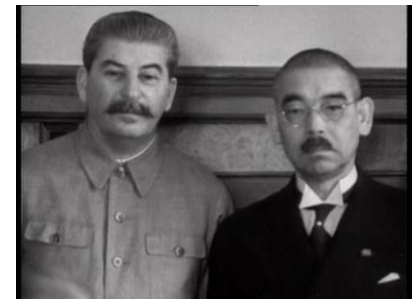
# Russian perspectives on history and international law

- Islands are not “inherent” Japanese land
  - Russians were first to Iturup/Etorofu (1778/9)
  - Subsequent Japanese “colonisation”
    - “The fact of the matter is that the Japanese advance onto the Kuril Islands constituted the seizure of territory and was accompanied by the same annihilation of local tribes that occurred in America with the Indians.” (Koshkin)



# Russian perspectives on history and international law

- Four decades of Japanese aggression
  - Russo-Japanese War (1904-5), Siberian Intervention (1918-22), Anti-Comintern Pact (1936), Battle of Lake Khasan (1938), Khalkhin Gol/Nomonhan (1939)
- Mutual disregard for Neutrality Pact
  - Japan considers breaking Pact in June 1941
  - Moscow renounced Pact in April 1945



# Russian perspectives on history and international law

- Yalta Protocol (Feb. 1945)
  - “The Kurile Islands shall be handed over to the Soviet Union.”
- San Francisco Peace Treaty (Sept. 1951)
- UN Charter, article 107
  - Lavrov’s interpretation: “everything that the victorious powers did is sacred and inviolable.”
- Invention of the “Northern Territories”
  - “the suggestion of the Japanese that the Habomais , Shikotan, Kunashir, and Iturup are not included in the Kuril Islands ... corresponds neither to geographic science nor to the history of preceding Russo-Japanese negotiations” (Ivanov)

# Russian perspectives on history and international law

- Major Soviet contribution to victory over Japan
  - “it is a ‘historical fact’ that the Soviet victory over Japan led to the end of World War II” (Mironov)
- Giving up the islands would be betrayal of 12,000 Soviet soldiers killed fighting Japan
  - 539 killed in Battle of Shumshu
  - “the four islands became Russian territory after a bloody struggle and have now assumed the status of sacred territory” (Rogozin)
  - “a legal war trophy” (Ivanov)



# Russian perspectives on Japanese economic incentives



- Genuine desire for Japanese investment
  - “Japanese capital is worth its weight in gold” (*RG*)
- Belief in Russian counter-leverage
  - “No, I don’t think Japan has an alternative [to Russian gas]. ... For them, it is the shortest route” (Gazprom)
- Gloomy assessment of Japan’s economy
  - “Against a background of prolonged recession, from which no exit is in sight, there is rooted amongst the public a sense of pessimism which borders on the feeling of a country that has capitulated after a long and exhausting war.” (Strel’tsov)
  - Japan overtaken by China in 2008 as country listed by RFE public as most desirable economic partner



# Russian perspectives on Japanese economic incentives

- Territorial dispute not an obstacle to economic relations
  - “Russian officials have concluded, correctly, that they can challenge Japan aggressively regarding the islands and still secure considerable Japanese investment and commerce” (Weitz).
- Primary obstacle is Russia’s business climate
  - Goal of 20<sup>th</sup> place in World Bank ease of doing business ranking by 2018 (120<sup>th</sup> in 2011)
  - Vladivostok Free Port, Priority Development Zones, Eastern Economic Forum

# Russian perspectives on Japanese economic incentives



- Economic value of the islands
  - Rhenium; seafood worth \$4bn a year
    - “Of course, I would never give up the Southern Kurils! ... these islands are especially rich in fish and mineral resources. That is, the Japanese have something to gain and we have something to lose” (Duma deputy)
- Investments of R30bn (2007-15), R20bn (2016-25)
  - Airport on Iturup/Etorofu, hospital on Shikotan
  - “In short, the islands are being transformed from a godforsaken edge to a downright paradisiacal corner of Russia” (*Argumenty Nedeli*)

# Russian perspectives on security issues

- Increasingly close relations with China
  - Public vs elite attitudes
    - “Foreign experts keep telling us about the threat from China. We are not worried at all. ... China does not have to populate the Far East and eastern Siberia to get what it needs: natural resources” (Putin)
- Japan’s desire for security relations with Russia
  - Strategic nightmare of hostile China-Russia bloc
  - “Under the increasingly severe security environment in East Asia, it is critical for Japan to advance cooperation with Russia in all areas” (NSS)

# Russian perspectives on security issues

- Impact of the Ukraine crisis
  - Reminder that on major issues Japan will always side with the United States
    - “Japan’s chances [on the territorial issue] have been restricted by themselves to the lowest possible level in connection with the fact that, having joined Western sanctions, they have now openly become an adversary or even an enemy of Russia. If prior to the sanctions there was some logic in holding negotiations, there is not now.” (Duma deputy)

# Russian perspectives on security issues

- Strategic significance of the islands
  - “Last line of defence” for Russian nuclear deterrent
    - “the Russian military could mine the straits between the Kurile Islands and effectively isolate the Sea of Okhotsk, allowing strategic nuclear submarines with ballistic missiles to deploy in relative safety” (Felgenhauer)
  - Fear that Japan would permit US military installations on the islands
  - Importance of islands as gateway to Arctic and Northern Sea Route

# Sea of Okhotsk



# Russian perspectives on public opinion, social issues

- Fervent public opposition to any concessions
  - 4% in favour of returning the islands (2009)
- Population issues
  - 16,500, growing by 2-3% per year
- Crimea precedent
  - “Crimea is not just a territory. There are people living there who came to the referendum and voted in favour of reunification with Russia. And we have to respect their choice. As for the islands that you mentioned, there are people living there who would hardly vote in favour of joining Japan.” (Putin)



# Russian tactics



- Why does Russia negotiate if it has no intention of making a deal?
  - Desire for closer economic relations
    - Russia encourages belief that better bilateral relations will lead to a resolution of all problems
- Aim to hold “peace treaty” talks, not “territorial negotiations”
- Playing for time
  - Ageing of Japanese former residents
  - In 2035 the islands will have been ruled for longer by Russia than they ever were by Japan

# Possible Russian concessions

- Two islands currently possible
  - Continued willingness to transfer Habomai and Shikotan as gesture of good will following signing of peace treaty
  - Putin's commitment to 1956 Joint Declaration
- In the future, not even two
  - Putin unusual in his willingness to transfer any territory
  - Gradual move towards denial of existence of any territorial dispute
    - “We are not engaging in any form of dialogue with Japan on the ‘Kuril problem’. This question was solved 70 years ago” (Morgulov)

# Questions and comments

