

Committee: Special Political and Decolonization Committee

Issue: The issue of the South Kuril Islands

Student Officer: Marianna Generali

Position: Co-Chair

PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

Dear Delegates,

My name is Marianna Generali and I am a student in the 11th grade of HAEF Psychiko College. This year's ACGMUN will be my first time chairing and my 9th conference overall. It is my honour to be serving as a co-chair in the Special Political and Decolonization Committee in the 3rd session of the ACGMUN. I am more than excited to work with each of you individually and I look forward to our cooperation within the committee. MUN is an extracurricular activity that I enjoy wholeheartedly and could not imagine my life without it. Through my MUN experience, I have gained so much and it has helped me in so many areas of my life. In particular, I have gained organizing and public speaking skills and enhanced my knowledge on the history of the world and most importantly current affairs, hence I believe this is a one of a kind opportunity and I hope that everyone will have a fruitful debate and a lot of fun. I hope that I can help you with your preparation and your work within the conference and in your endeavours overall.

I believe this is a really interesting topic and will bring a lot of fruitful debate, but it is crucial that you come prepared. I will be the expert chair on the topic of the issue of the South Kuril Islands. This study guide will provide you with essential information on the issue, including some background information concerning previous negotiations, armed conflicts and previous attempts to solve this momentous, on which you can base your resolutions upon. I would advise you to read the study guide in detail, and you conduct your own research, also taking into consideration your country's policy.

In case you have any further questions do not hesitate to contact me via e-mail at marrgen3@gmail.com. I will be more than happy to answer your inquiries and I will be available at any time should you need me.

Best regards,

Marianna Generali

TOPIC INTRODUCTION

The Kuril Islands form an archipelago in Sakhalin Oblast, far-eastern Russia. The archipelago extends for 1,200 km from the southern tip of the Kamchatka Peninsula (Russia) to the north-eastern corner of Hokkaido Island (Japan) and separates the Sea of Okhotsk from the Pacific Ocean.¹



Figure 1: The Iturup Island also known as Etorofu. It is the largest and northernmost island of the Kuril Islands.

The original inhabitants of the Kuril Islands were the Ainu People. The Islands were later populated by the Russians and Japanese in the 17th and 18th centuries, after waves of exploration. The Southern Kurils, as called by Russia, or Northern Territories, as called by Japan, are the subject of almost 75 years of dispute between the two nations.

The disputed Northern territories are the Shikotan, Kunashiri/Kunashir, Etorofu/Iturup

and the Habomai islets. They are located in the Sea of Okhotsk in the Northwest Pacific. On three of the islands, communities had developed and by the time WWII began, 17,000 Japanese residents were living on the islands. However, Russia seized the islands at the end of the war, and by 1949 all residents had been deported to Japan.

A peace treaty to end WWII by Japan and Russia has yet to be signed, because of this dispute. This fact highlights the significance of the resolution of this conflict. It is high time that the 75-year dispute was brought to an end, as it has reached the zenith of its capacities. Furthermore, by resolving this matter a lot of nations can benefit economically, and thus the matter is imperative for the international community.

¹ "Kuril Islands," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Dec. 2018 <<https://www.britannica.com/place/Kuril-Islands>>.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Archipelago

A group of small islands or an area of sea in which there are many small islands.²

Sakhalin Island

Located between the Tatar Strait and the Sea of Okhotsk, north of the Japanese island of Hokkaido, it forms Sakhalin oblast with the Kuril Islands.

Kuril Islands/ Kurils/ Southern Kurils/ Northern Territories

They consist of 56 islands and many minor rocks. They are conducted by the Greater Kuril Chain and the Lesser Kuril Chain. The disputed islands are the Kunashir/Kunashiri, Etorofu/ Iturup, Shikotan, Habomai islets.

Ainu People

The Ainu are an indigenous ethnic group of people who live in Hokkaido in Japan today as well as in Russia; the Kuril Islands and Sakhalin. From the 15th century, waves of Japanese settlers began crowding out Ainu communities on Honshu Island and pushing them northwards.³



Figure 2: Ainu Man Circa 1880

² "Archipelago," Cambridge Dictionary, Dec. 2018
<<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/archipelago>>.

³ "Who are the Ainu People?," Heritage of Japan, Dec. 2018,
<<https://heritageofjapan.wordpress.com/just-what-was-so-amazing-about-jomon-japan/1-temp-from-africa-to-east-asia-the-tale-of-migration-and-origins-emerges-from-our-mitochondria-dna/origins-of-the-jomon-jomon-connections-with-the-continent-and-with-todays-japanese/who-are-the-ainu-people/>>.

Sea of Okhotsk

It is the north-western arm of the Pacific Ocean, situated between the Kamchatka Peninsula to the east and the Kuril Islands to the southeast.⁴

Russian Pacific Fleet

The Pacific Fleet (PF) is an operational-strategic association of the Navy of Russia. The Russian Pacific Fleet as a part of the Navy and the Armed Forces of Russia is, in general, a means of military security of Russia in the Asia Pacific region.⁵

Joint Economic Zone

By developing a joint economic zone, two countries would reach an agreement and ergo share the administration of economic activities in a specific area, as well as the benefits that the zone has to offer, and in general economic and trade-related activities.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Historic Background

The dispute over the southern Kuril Islands represents one of the longest disputes in East Asia. It is based upon possession of the four southernmost islands in the chain, Etorofu/Iturup, Kunashiri/Kunashir, Shikotan, and Habomai. They are disputed between the Russian Federation and Japan.

Until the end of WWII, the countries' borders remained stable. However, in late August 1945, the Soviet Union got control over the entire Kuril Islands chain and southern Sakhalin Island. During the

Yalta summit in 1945, possession of these territories by the Soviet Union was decided.



Figure 3: Map of the territories surrounding and bordering the South Kuril Islands.

⁴ "Sea of Okhotsk," *New World Encyclopedia*, 25 Aug. 2015, Dec. 2018
<http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Sea_of_Okhotsk>.

⁵ "Pacific Fleet" *Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation*, 15 Jan. 2019,
<<http://eng.mil.ru/en/structure/forces/navy/associations/structure/forces/type/navy/pacific/about.htm>>.

At the time Joseph Stalin was planning on attacking Japanese forces three months after the conclusion of the war with Germany. All of the Islands' population was exiled in 1947 and taken to resettle in northern Japan.

Military Activities

The dispute ought to be accentuated due to the increasing Russian military presence on the disputed island. Japan has expressed concerns regarding Russian military activities on the islands, as Russians have deployed military aircraft. It has been considered by the Russian Navy to establish permanent naval bases for its Pacific Fleet on one of the islands. The Russian Ministry of Defence also decided to deploy an army division and in 2016 stationed anti-ship and missile defence systems on the disputed territories.

Russo-Japanese War

From 1904 to 1905, the Russo-Japanese was a military conflict where Japan came out victorious and forced Russia to stop expanding in the Far East. The Russo-Japanese War developed due to the rivalry between the two countries for the dominance of Korea and Manchuria. The war began when the main Japanese fleet fired an attack on the Russian naval military unit at Port Arthur. In the Treaty of Portsmouth, Japan seized the Liaodong Peninsula and the South Manchurian Railway, as well as half of Sakhalin Island. The Russian Federation agreed to evacuate southern Manchuria, (which was given back to China), and Japan's control of Korea was recognized.

Natural resources

Since around 30,000 Russian residents inhabit the islands and there has been a strong Russian military presence on Iturup, the Russian Federation has attempted to increase the natural resources in the area. In August 2006, a \$630m plan in order to develop the Kuril island chain was backed, including the improvement of the energy and transport infrastructure. In 2004, it was indicated by Vladimir that the return of the two southernmost islands could be considered, however, he did not want to let go of the two larger islands. The Kuril Islands are encompassed by fishing grounds and have supplied of oil and gas offshore. Furthermore, rhenium deposits have been discovered on Iturup at the Kudriavy Volcano. Great income also comes from tourism. The islands and their waters have a lot of economic importance coming from their mineral resources, which are hydrocarbon deposits, gold, silver, iron, and titanium. The islands are able to produce enough geothermal energy in order to meet its entire annual heating needs. The waters of the southern Kurils have a great source for fish and seafood production, which is worth around 4 billion dollars a year.

The Japanese government has strived to keep the public aware of the dispute. It provides assistance mainly humanitarian to Russian locals living on the islands. This assistance includes caring for medical patients inhabiting the islands and providing humanitarian relief goods depending on the locals' needs.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

Japan

Promptly after the Soviet Union broke up, Japan provided humanitarian aid to Russian residents living on the Kuril Islands. Since 1991, the islands' residents have been permitted visa-free travel to Japan with regard to achieving analogous benefits given to Japanese and their families formerly living on the Islands.

In 2009, the Japanese parliament decided to adopt a law affirming that the South Kuril Islands are stolen territory that belongs to the Japanese and is being unlawfully occupied by Russia.

Japanese leaders have come to understand over the years their obligation to establish a cooperative relationship with Russia on a broad range of issues separate from the Northern Territories dispute. In 2011, Japanese leaders announced their consideration of participating in joint economic activities of the Kurils with Russia, under the circumstance that such activities did not negatively affect Japan's claims to the territories.

The Japanese Ministry of Defence stated that the deployment of a Russian military aircraft on the islands is of their great concern. This is due to the fact that in March 2018, the Russian Air Force deployed two Su-35S fighters (a jet-age dogfighter and a capable missile delivery platform)⁶ to an airfield on Iturup/Etorofu.



Figure 4: The Sukhoi Su-35 Flanker-E, a jet-age

Japan cannot allow any activities, including economic activities by a third party, nor allow any activities carried out under the presumption that Russia has "jurisdiction" in the Northern Territories.

⁶ Sebastien, Roblin. "Russia's Su-35 Fighter: The Only Thing You Need to Know," The National Interest, 21 Jul. 2017, 13 Jan. 2019, < <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/russias-su-35-fighter-the-only-thing-you-need-know-21624>>.

Russia

Vladimir Putin sought to solve the issue by organizing negotiations based on the 1956 declaration. This formed the first recognition by the Russian Federation that they might return some territories as a result of a negotiated solution.

By the time, Vladimir Putin was in his second presidential term, the Russian government took many measures in order to strengthen Russia's hold on the islands. Firstly, the government adopted a special federal programme to develop the islands economically. It designated a total of \$630 million in US Dollars for various infrastructure development projects to be implemented and completed on the islands. Also, the Russian Federation has strengthened the islands' defences to ensure its security in the region.

Defence planning is important for Russian leaders and they see the possession of the southern Kurils as playing a crucial part in it. The islands have access to the Sea of Okhotsk and ergo the Russian Pacific Fleet has gained free entry to the Pacific Ocean. Russian military planners argue that losing the channels between the southern Kuril Islands would result in the reduction of the effectiveness of the Russian Pacific Fleet and thus reduce Russian security in the region.

Russia's military activities are organised in response to its concern over Japan's possible acquisition of two U.S.-made land-based Aegis Ashore ballistic missile defence batteries and have recently expressed their concerns over their deployment. In September 2018, Vladimir Putin expressed his hope to sign a peace treaty with Japan to formally end the hostilities that began during World War II.



Figure 5: The Kuril Islands, located between the Sea of Okhotsk and the North Pacific Ocean.

China

It is crucial to highlight that reconciliation between Russia and Japan does not constitute an alliance, especially one against China. Japan is concerned about China's rise and would consider a peaceful relationship with Russia as a geopolitical reassurance. This is due to the fact that Japan has been an established power since WWII and from the early 1990s China has seen an immense rise in its economic and military power. Ergo Japan loses influence in the Asian region, as well as economic benefits and military sanctions.

Japan has tried to access Russian gas and oil exports from Siberia and Sakhalin. There is a concern that pipelines may be built that send the energy resources to China instead.

USA

The United States and the United Kingdom issued the Declaration of Principles, or else the Atlantic Charter, which later on navigated the Allied countries in WWII. It served as the common guideline that these two countries did want to gain territorial expansion by means of war (The Soviet Union proclaimed allegiance to the Charter in September 1941). The Cairo Declaration of November 1943 mentioned this principle of the Atlantic Charter and stated that Japan would be expelled from the territories.

Japan firstly claimed the Kurils in the 1950s. In 1956, Japanese negotiators managed to reach an agreement with the Soviet negotiators in order to settle the issue by transferring the Shikotan and Habomai Islands to Japan. This deal was disregarded due to pressure by the United States, which threatened to keep control of Okinawa (Island in the Pacific Ocean) if Japan was to accept the deal.

Former President of the US, Bill Clinton, met with former President of Russia, Boris Yeltsin, under the Moscow Summit, in 1998. The summit addressed non-proliferation and arms control issues and both presidents discussed common security concerns and agreed to give each other's countries continuous information on launches of ballistic missiles, where the issue of the Kurils Islands was discussed.

On the other hand, Russia seems concerned about the establishment of more U.S. missile defence systems to Northeast Asia. Vladimir Putin has frequently shown his apprehension over the deployment of the Terminal High-Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) system to South Korea.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date	Description of event
1795	Russia established a colony on the Kurils
1821	Russia claimed control of the northern and central islands
February 1855	Treaty of Shimoda; control of the four southernmost islands to Japan and the remainder of the chain to Russia
August 1875	Treaty of Saint Petersburg; Japan traded the southern half of Sakhalin Island to Russia for the Kurils
February 1904-September 1905	Russo-Japanese War; Treaty of Portsmouth; Japan gained Sakhalin south of the 50th parallel

1924	After the Russian Revolution, the Japanese occupied all of Sakhalin, but they withdrew
February 1945	Yalta Agreements; Soviet Union took control of the Kurils and Sakhalin's entire Japanese population eventually was repatriated
September 1951	Treaty of San Francisco ⁱ
December 1991	The Soviet Union breaks up, Russia gains control of the islands
April 1998	Kawana Summit; It reaffirmed the good relations between former prime ministers of China and Russia, Ryutaro Hashimoto and Boris Yeltsin respectively, and expressed a desire for a peace treaty to be signed by 2002
January 2003	Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and President Vladimir Putin adopted the Japan-Russia Action Plan
November 2006	Japan-Russia summit talks held on the occasion of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Economic Leaders' Meeting in Hanoi

RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES, AND EVENTS

The Treaty of Commerce, Navigation and Delimitation/ Treaty of Shimoda (1855)

It was concluded in 1855, and the countries' border was established between the islands of Etorofu and Uruppu. Whereas Sakhalin Island was a place where inhabitants could be from both Japan and Russia.

Treaty of St. Petersburg (1875)

Japan gave up all of Sakhalin Island to Russia in exchange for the Kuril Islands, which were listed in the treaty as 18 islands (from Shumshu to Uruppu).

Portsmouth Peace Treaty (1905)

This treaty ended the military conflict and ergo Japan took over the part of Sakhalin south of 50 degrees north latitude from Russia.

Yalta Conference/Agreement (1945)

It was signed by the three big powers of the Soviet Union, the UK, and the US. It was concluded that the Kurils Islands should be handed over to the Soviet Union.

Treaty of San Francisco (1951)

Under this 1951 treaty, Japan decided that they have the claim of the islands, but Russia did not sign the treaty.

Kawana Summit (April 1998) and Moscow Summit (November 1998)

In April of 1998, Japan proposed to resolve the issue with the “Kawana Proposal.” When Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi visited Russia in November of that year, Russia made the “Moscow Proposal”, as a response to Japan. The countries ultimately did not reach an agreement.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

It was conducted in November 2006 when the Japan-Russia summit talks were held on the occasion of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Economic Leaders’ Meeting in Hanoi, that the countries should build a “partnership based on common strategic interests” and thus conduct negotiations on the territorial dispute.

Other solutions in the past have focused on the amount of territory that should be transferred in case of a compromised agreement. Russia has offered multiple times to give over the two southernmost islands, the Shikotan and Hamobai and at the same time offered to include Japan in the joint development of the other two islands. The Russian Federation, offered frequently to solve the dispute on the basis of the 1956 joint declaration. However, the Japanese government does not see this offer equitable, since the two islands that would remain in Russian possession, the Kunashir/Kunashiri, Etorofu/ Iturup, conduct 93% of the total territory.

Yevgeny Primakov, Russia’s former Prime Minister mentioned the possibility of the development of a joint economic zone in the South Kuril Islands, as mentioned in the definition of key terms.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

In order to solve the matter, it is crucial that both sides reach a compromise. In order for the two countries to reach an agreement, economic, political, and strategic affairs need to be addressed, as well as the improvement of the relations between Russia and Japan.

Compromises between the Member States

Russia could give up Shikotan and Habomai islands, as they cover only 7% of the territory claimed by Japan. Furthermore, Russia has previously agreed to hand them over, under a joint declaration in 1956. This would be a step in the right direction in order for agreements to be reached and thus for the issue to be resolved.

Japan could consider supporting economic activities

Japan could support economic activity in the islands, as well as in Russia. Should Japan consider fostering the activities of the Kurils then the direct public sector investment and positive economic incentives for its private sector will support economic growth in the islands, Russia's Far East and Siberia. This would result in better relations between the two countries and ultimately, result in a compromise between the two nations on solving the territorial dispute.

Establishing a joint economic zone

As mentioned previously, establishing a joint economic zone can be considered a valid solution to start negotiations on the topic. A Russian-Japanese authority helping to administer distinct economic and legal regimes, as well as a joint economic zone covering all four islands will help develop the area. This zone would help Russia and Japan share economic activities in the Kuril Islands, and benefits from them, as by developing the area would increase the stability and profit of the Kurils. Also, it could be possible for them to share the general economic and trade related activities, for example, the aforementioned natural resources. By establishing a joint economic zone, the two countries could share the sovereignty of the Islands, thus reaching a condominium, or even reach an agreement over separating the zone and solving the dispute.

Reaching a condominium

Should the countries both want to administer and share activity in the area then the most preferred option would be for the countries to reach a condominium. This would mean that both countries share the sovereignty of the islands simultaneously. This would result to all activities, such as economic, social, political and more, being run by both Japan and Russia. The condominium would be established on the basis of the joint economic zone in order to move towards this joint administration over the Kuril Islands.

Reaching a political agreement

In order for the dispute to be solved, the two countries must reach a political agreement that highlights and underlines the economic zone. Firstly, it would require the demilitarization of the area, in order for Japan to be able to negotiate an agreement. Also, Russia would continue to exercise authority over the Kunashiri/Kunashir, Etorofu/Iturup islands, unless else is agreed upon. Furthermore, Japanese permanent inhabitants will have to be able to have free stay on the islands. Also, negotiations should be made upon the matter, by conducting conferences and summits, taking the example of the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, expressing interest in solving the matter. It is crucial that the nations are convinced to collaborate, as without negotiations, any effort will be pointless.

Separating the zone equally

Should the two countries consider negotiations upon the matter it would be possible for the zone to be separated equally. This would require the compromise and a consensus of the two countries over splitting the region. Idealistically, the zone would be separated in half, giving 50% of the territory to Japan and Russia, in turn, keeping the other 50%.

The integration of the islands into Japan

Should the Habomai and Shikotan islands be given to Japan, the Russian Federation could also, after a specific period of time agreed by the two nations, give the remaining islands to Japan, on the basis of an agreed political regime. In order for this to be achieved it would require strong political will and sufficient political support from the two countries, as well as their compromise and cooperation. If this deal is conducted, then the nations could “turn page” and strengthen their relations. If demands in Japan reduce then the created opportunity for an agreement would oppose the deal in Russia and thus could be managed. After this period, the Islands will have a new and established economic system that will benefit from the economic potential in Russia, capitals in Asia etc. Viewing the positive aspect, Russia would not be giving up the Islands, but gaining an area that it would be able to administer, such as Hong Kong, while in the long term would benefit the whole Pacific coast of Russia.

All in all, it is essential for the countries to reach agreements peacefully, keeping in mind the aforementioned solutions. Bear in mind that the solutions cannot be implemented without the cooperation and compromise of the nations. Overall, the committee needs to look either at the establishment of joint cooperation in the area, Japan gaining sovereignty over the islands or sharing the islands in an equal manner.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

“ARCHIPELAGO.” Cambridge Dictionary, Cambridge University Press,

dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/archipelago.

Fritz, Martin. “A Solution to the Kuril Islands Dispute?” DW, Deutsche Welle , 2 Dec.

2016, www.dw.com/en/a-solution-to-the-kuril-islands-dispute/a-36624291.

Gady, Franz-Stefan. “Japan Asks Russia to Reduce Militarization of Disputed

Kuril Islands." The Diplomat, The Diplomat, 1 Aug. 2018, thediplomat.com/2018/08/japan-asks-russia-to-reduce-militarization-of-disputed-kuril-islands/.

Gorenburg, Dmitry. "The Southern Kuril Islands Dispute." Russian Military Reform, 11 Sept. 2012, russiamil.wordpress.com/2012/09/11/the-southern-kuril-islands-dispute/.

"Japan's Northern Territories." MoFA, Japan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan, www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/russia/territory/pamphlet.pdf.

"Kuril Islands." Encyclopædia Britannica, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 18 July 2013, www.britannica.com/place/Kuril-Islands.

"Kuril Islands." Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, 14 Jan. 2019, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kuril_Islands.

"Kuril Islands Dispute between Russia and Japan." BBC News, BBC, 29 Apr. 2013, www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-11664434.

"Japan's Northern Territories." MoFA, Japan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan, www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/russia/territory/pamphlet.pdf.

"Pacific Fleet." Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, Russian Federation Defence Ministry, eng.mil.ru/en/structure/forces/navy/associations/structure/forces/type/navy/pacific/about.htm.

Roblin, Sebastien. "Russia's Su-35 Fighter: The Only Thing You Need to Know." The National Interest, The Center for the National Interest, 21 July 2017, nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/russias-su-35-fighter-the-only-thing-you-need-know-21624.

"Russo-Japanese War." Encyclopædia Britannica, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 11 Jan. 2019, www.britannica.com/event/Russo-Japanese-War.

"Tokyo Expresses Regret over Russian Missile-Firing Exercise Due on Kuril Islands." News.am, NEWS.am, 17 June 2018, news.am/eng/news/457139.html.

Trenin, Dmitri, and Yuval Weber. RUSSIA'S PACIFIC FUTURE. Carnegie Endowment

for International Peace, 2012.

“Who Are the Ainu People?” Heritage of Japan, 16 Dec. 2014,

heritageofjapan.wordpress.com/just-what-was-so-amazing-about-jomon-japan/1-temp-from-africa-to-east-asia-the-tale-of-migration-and-origins-emerges-from-our-mitochondria-dna/origins-of-the-jomon-jomon-connections-with-the-continent-and-with-todays-japanese/who-are-the-ainu-people/.

ZumBrunnen, Craig. "Kuril Islands." World Book Advanced, World Book, 2019,

www.worldbookonline.com/advanced/article?id=ar305920.

ⁱ <https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/unts/volume%20136/volume-136-i-1832-english.pdf>