

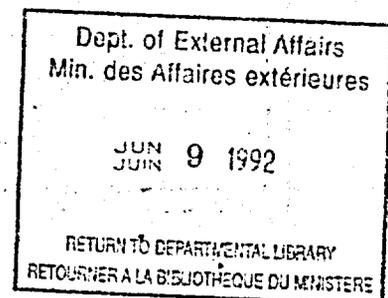
**THE RUSSO-JAPANESE BORDER DISPUTE:**  
**THE NORTHERN TERRITORIES**

**Summary:**

The dispute between Japan and Russia regarding sovereignty over what Russians describe as the Southern Kuriles and the Japanese refer to as the Northern Territories has been a persistent irritant in bilateral relations since 1945. The conflicting claims are a result of Allied dispositions of Japanese possessions by the Yalta and Potsdam Declarations, and by the provisions of the San Francisco peace treaty which deprived Japan of its sovereignty over the Kurile Islands, without legally assigning title to another state and without defining which islands belonged to the Kurile chain.<sup>1</sup> Over the years, Japan and the Soviet Union (and now Russia) have held intermittent talks involving a variety of legal and historical claims to the disputed islands. While these talks have been unsuccessful, Japan now enjoys virtually unanimous (if unofficial) Western acceptance of its policy of insisting on return of the four islands of the Northern Territories before concluding a peace treaty with Russia.

Despite the recent introduction of Germany as "mediator" (reported widely by the European media but not commented on by either the Russian or Japanese Foreign Ministries), it is difficult to see when or how this issue will be resolved, especially as it serves as a useful tool for the Japanese in their policy of maintaining an aloof relationship with Russia.

Japan continues to highlight Russian force deployments in the Far East as a major source of concern. A resolution of the Northern Territories issue would have immense implications for Japanese defence planners and, as it would remove for Japan one important underpinning of the continuing validity of Japan-USA security cooperation, for Asia Pacific regional stability.



43-763-084