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**NEW LIGHT ON THE RUSSO-JAPANESE
TERRITORIAL DISPUTE**

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ABSTRACT

The territorial dispute between Japan and Russia, known as the 'Northern Territories' problem, is the biggest obstacle preventing the two nations from improving their relations. In 1994 an important and long-sealed document regarding this issue was found at the Australian Archives. Published not long after the end of World War II, this Japanese Government booklet might shed new light towards understanding the nature of this problem over the passage of a half century. The paper discusses the territorial problem, including the findings from the booklet, especially in the context of the shifting balance between the bilateral and multilateral dimensions of the problem.

NEW LIGHT ON THE RUSSO-JAPANESE TERRITORIAL DISPUTE

Kimie Hara*

If ideology was thought to be the reason for the long freeze in Soviet-Japanese relations during the Cold War, those relations should have improved when it ended; but they did not. The reason is because of the territorial dispute known as the 'Northern Territories Problem'. Sovereignty over these islands that lie to the northeast of the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido has been disputed throughout the postwar years between Japan and the Soviet Union, and is still disputed, regardless of the change of jurisdiction from the Soviet Union to Russia.

In 1994 an important and long-sealed document regarding this issue was found in the files of diplomatic documents preserved at the Australian Archives in Canberra. It seems to be the English version of a major Japanese government document whose existence has long been known, but whose contents have only been guessed at. Published not long after the end of World War II, this booklet reveals a contradiction at the heart of the present Japanese territorial claim for what is known as the 'four islands return' (*yontō henkan*).¹

It is not at all surprising that the Japanese Foreign Ministry should have chosen to conceal the existence of this document from researchers and the public. However, it may be unfair to blame only the Japanese side, considering the circumstances under which Japan had to produce this pamphlet and the evolution of the present territorial dispute. The 'Northern Territories Problem' is a by-product of the Cold War that was born in postwar international politics. The Cold War has now ended but this territorial dispute still exists. The 1946 booklet provides some hints towards understanding the nature of this problem over the passage of a half century. This paper discusses the territorial problem, including the findings from the booklet, especially in the context of the shifting balance between the bilateral and multilateral dimensions of the problem.

'Internationalisation' of the territorial dispute

In recent diplomatic movements concerned with the territorial dispute, a rather new-looking approach, which is being called 'internationalisation' of the 'Northern Territories Problem' has become evident. Having grown into an economic super-power, Japan has been seeking understanding and support from other nations in an effort to resolve this territorial dispute. Its effort to include statements

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¹ They are the islands of Kunasiri, Etorofu, Shikotan and the Habomais. Precisely speaking, there are more than four, since the Habomais consist of a group of islets. In this paper the term 'four islands' (or 'two islands' for Shikotan and the Habomais only), which has become commonly accepted, will be used.

regarding this issue in the G-7 Summit declarations is one of the most recent examples. Although this approach looked successful and seemed to be working until the London Summit (1991) and the Munich Summit (1992), Japan was not able to gain stable or reliable international support. Its unwilling attitude toward economic assistance to the Soviet Union (and later Russia), which was on the verge of political and economic breakdown, invited international recriminations and put it in a difficult position.² While internationalisation of the territorial dispute itself may be indispensable for any solution of the issue, the approach Japan took in the early 1990s was perhaps mistaken.

The history of the past half-century suggests that the problem has become so programmed that it is likely to remain unresolved so long as it remains within a bilateral framework. The architects who created the problem were 'third parties'. The key historical arrangement from which the problem originates was made at the Yalta Conference of 1945 and the San Francisco Peace Conference of 1951, in neither of which was there any consensus between Japan and the Soviet Union. At Yalta there was agreement between the United States, Great Britain and the Soviet Union,³ and Japan did not even know of the existence of the agreement till 1946. The San Francisco Peace Treaty was signed between Japan and 48 other countries including the US, UK and Australia, but not by the Soviet Union.⁴ Hence, Japan was not a party to the agreement at Yalta and the Soviet Union was not a party to the agreement at San Francisco. However, the countries which participated in these agreements became in a sense 'concerned states' with a stake in the disposal of the disputed islands. In 1955–56, peace negotiations were held between Japan and the Soviet Union. The real 'concerned states' (though non-signatories at Yalta and San Francisco respectively) turned to discuss sovereignty over the former Japanese territories occupied by the Soviet Union. The Japanese negotiator was about to make a concession, when the United States intervened. Resolution of the problem by the real 'concerned states' was blocked by a third party. In the Joint Declaration signed on 19 October 1956, diplomatic relations were restored and transfer of Shikotan and the Habomais was promised, but the peace treaty was

² For example, one of the major criticisms came from a former president of the United States, Richard Nixon. In his article contributed to the *New York Times*, 5 March 1993, Nixon condemned Japan for 'conditioning aid on Russia's return of four tiny northern

³ In February 1945, the leaders of the Allied Powers—Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin—met at Yalta in the Crimea and agreed, *inter alia*, to 'transfer' the Kuriles and 'return' Southern Sakhalin to the Soviet Union, as a condition of Soviet participation in the war against Japan. Upon this agreement, the Soviet occupied those territories at the closing of the Pacific War, and the occupation continues to this day. For details of Yalta Conference and Agreements, refer to *Foreign Relations of the United States (1945) The Conferences at Malta and Yalta*, 1955.

⁴ In September 1951, Japan concluded a peace treaty with 49 countries in San Francisco. Section (c) of Article 2 in Chapter II 'Territory' stipulated 'Japan renounces all right, title and claim to the Kurile Islands, and to that portion of Sakhalin and the islands adjacent to it over which Japan acquired sovereignty as a consequence of the Treaty of Portsmouth of September 5, 1905.' *Treaty of Peace with Japan*, Australian Treaty Series, Department of External Affairs, Canberra, 1952, No.1, p.3.

shelved, and to this day remains to be settled. Ever since Japan has consistently claimed territorial sovereignty over the islands of Etorofu and Kunashiri as well as Shikotan and the Habomais.

Japanese claims for the 'Northern Territories'

1946 pamphlet

In the Australian Archives (ACT) in Canberra may be found two copies of a pamphlet with the above title in the files of the Department of External Affairs of Australia. Even after the passage of over 30 years, until 1994 the file was contained in an officially sealed and unopened envelope, and one pamphlet is stamped 'secret' in Japanese. As is obvious from the cover, these were issued by the Foreign Office of the Japanese government in November 1946.

The pamphlet of 1946 consists of maps (see Maps 1 and 2), two chapters of text, and illustrations. It was designed to provide various grounds to show that the islands were Japanese territory. The Yalta Agreement was not mentioned. This pamphlet, which was issued not long after the end of the war, contains some elements which contradict the current 'four islands' claim of Japan, and it is

⁵ Wada Haruki, *Hoppō ryōdo mondai o kangaeru*, Iwanami-shoten, 1990, p.101.

⁶ Nishimura Kumao, *Nihon gaikōshi 27: Sanfuranshisuko heiwa jōyaku*, Kajima kenkyūjo shuppan-kai, 1971, p.24.

⁷ Cablegram from Australian Mission, Tokyo, sent on 30 May 1947, Australian Archives (ACT): A1838/2; 515/4. Asakai Kōichirō was the chief of General Affairs Department, the Central Administration Division of Contacts regarding Termination of War (*Shūsen renraku jimu-kyoku sōmu – bu buchō*).

understandable that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs should have chosen not to open it to researchers or the public even after the passage of 30 years.

In order to justify its demand for their return, the Japanese Government currently takes the view that these four islands are 'distinct' from the Kuriles.⁸ Many pamphlets and statements have been issued in support of this claim. Here, the pamphlet issued in 1987 is used (see Maps 3 and 4) for comparison both because it is typical and because the structure of its opening pages so closely resembles that of the 1946 pamphlet.

In the 1946 pamphlet, the first map (Map 1) indicates that the 'Kurile Islands' include all of the islands between Hokkaido and Kamchatka, including Kunashiri and Etorofu, although (probably) not including Shikotan and the Habomais, which are framed and enlarged below in such a way as to indicate that they are the focus of this pamphlet. In the second map (Map 2) of the 1946 pamphlet, the Kurile Islands are divided into the Southern Kuriles of Kunashiri and Etorofu, and the Northern Kuriles, i.e., the islands north of Etorofu. In this map, Shikotan and the Habomais are blacked out in the same way as the Japanese territory of Hokkaido, but differently from other Kurile Islands, and different historical backgrounds are provided on them. Based on these maps, it seems clear that the real Japanese goal of territorial recovery was then confined to the two islands of Shikotan and the Habomais.

However, in the 1987 pamphlet, the four islands of the 'Northern Territories'⁹ from the Kuriles. The first map (Map 3) indicates the Kurile Islands as the islands from Uruppu northwards, and does not include the islands from Etorofu southward. The second map (Map 4) of the same pamphlet shows the islands in focus of the present dispute—Etorofu, Kunashiri, Shikotan and the Habomais. Paying careful attention to the maps of both pamphlets, it is noted that the maps of the 1987 pamphlet closely resemble the map of the 1946 pamphlet, so much so that it seems quite likely that the first map (Map 1) of 1946 was simply modified to make these two maps of 1987, while the second map (Map 2), which is not convenient for the present claim, was omitted.

Chapter I of the 1946 pamphlet is entitled 'The Kurile Islands (Chishima)', and the 'Kuriles' here include both the Southern Kuriles (Etorofu and Kunashiri) and the Northern Kuriles (Uruppu and the islands to the north of it). Though 'the Kurile islands...are homogeneous geotectonically', the pamphlet argues that they are 'geologically and topographically...divided into two zones by the Yetorofu Strait between Uruppu and Yetorofu [Etorofu] in respect of the distributions of flora and fauna as well as climatic conditions, the southern zone (Kunashiri and Yetorofu)

⁸ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is very insistent on this point. For example, in Australia, in December 1994 a first secretary of Japanese Embassy said 'the Japanese government had always maintained that the four islands, Etorofu, Kunashiri, Shikotan and Habomai are not included in the term "Kuriles"'. *Observer*, December 1994, p.5, whereas only Shikotan and Habomai had been named in the journal of the previous month.

⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan, *Japan's Northern Territories*, 1987, p.3.

being more similar to Hokkaido'. The chapter also provides historical background of the Kuriles as early as the seventeenth century, including the treaties of 1855.¹⁰ and 1875¹¹ which set demarcation lines between the two nations.

Chapter II is entitled 'The Habomai Islands Group and Shikotan Island'. By using historical materials, encyclopaedias of different countries including Russia, American sailing directories, etc., it emphasises that these islands are distinct from the Kuriles, and that they were 'topographically and geographically a part of Hokkaido', and historically 'Japanese possessions since early days'. Therefore, they were 'not mentioned in both treaties' of 1855 and 1875. Despite this claim, however, the pamphlet also has to recognise some inconvenient facts as in the following passage:

In some cases the group of Habomais and Shikotan are included in the Kurile Islands (Note 1). But geologists agree that the two groups are to be distinguished geotectonically (Note 2).¹²

...More recently the North Kuriles have been administratively subdivided into two, Onkotan and the islands to the south being called the Middle Kuriles. The South Kurile group comprises Kunashiri, Yutorofu and Shikotan, but the Habomais are not included among the islands of the Kuriles.¹³

The last part of the pamphlet introduces maps of the islands at issue (Kurile, the Habomais and Shikotan) drawn during the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries.

This 1946 pamphlet not only contradicts the current Japanese argument on the Kuriles concerning Kunashiri and Etorofu, but also leaves some room for doubt in relation to the Habomais and Shikotan. However, it does not necessarily follow simply from this that the Japanese territorial claim is wrong. The current Japanese claim is not necessarily based on the single proposition that these four island groups are distinct from the Kuriles. Though it seems clear that the Japanese goal was the Habomais and Shikotan in the 1946 pamphlet, it should also be noted that Japan had already prepared bases of the present arguments. The pamphlet does refer to all the islands as 'Kuriles' but it already separates the Northern and the Southern groups, the latter belonging to Japan since 'early days', or 'geologically' and 'topographically' distinct from the former. In other words, Japan had then

¹⁰ In 1855 Imperial Russia and Tokugawa Japan signed the Treaty of Commerce, Navigation and Delimitation (Treaty of Shimoda), which set the boundary between Etorofu and Uruppu, and stipulated that the Kurile islands from Uruppu northward belonged to Russia. The treaty also stipulated that the large island of Sakhalin north of Hokkaido would have no national boundary, but would remain open to settlement by both nation.

¹¹ In 1875, with the Treaty for Exchange of Sakhalin for the Kurile Islands (Treaty of St Petersburg), the Meiji Government abandoned all of Sakhalin in exchange for the entire Kurile chain.

¹² Foreign Office Japanese Government, *Minor Islands Adjacent to Japan Proper: Part I. The Kurile Islands, the Habomais and Shikotan*, November 1946, p.8, Australian Archives (ACT): A1838/2; 515/4.

¹³ *ibid.* p.9.

divided the territories that it stood to lose (and it did not want to lose any of them) into three groups according to the strength of its claims. It was trying to treat Habomai and Shikotan as an integral part of Hokkaido, Kunashiri and Etorofu as territory from time immemorial although part of the Kurile chain, and the others as territory confirmed since 1875. Therefore, in order to understand the evolution of the Japanese claims, it is important to comprehend the difference between the circumstances under which the 1946 pamphlet was made, and the circumstances prevailing when the present claim was launched.

Background to the 1946 pamphlet

In August 1945 Japan accepted the Potsdam Declaration and surrendered unconditionally, but not until 29 January 1946 were the terms of the Yalta Agreement revealed.¹⁴ Once it was shown that the Kuriles had been promised to the Russians, it became a critical matter for Japan as to whether or not the Habomais and Shikotan were part of the Kuriles. The 1946 pamphlet was a product of the *Gaimusho*'s desperate efforts to maximise Japan's national interest, i.e., to regain former Japanese territories as much as possible, in the context of the time, i.e., with Japan as a defeated country and the Soviet Union as a member of the victorious Allies.

The Canberra Conference was held among the Commonwealth countries in August 1947 to discuss a peace treaty with Japan. Before signing a peace treaty which would determine the final disposition of territories as a result of the war, Japan had to appeal to the nations concerned. It may be assumed, therefore, that the pamphlet was given to the host country, Australia, before the Conference. Also, to Japanese eyes the rising tension of the Cold War probably looked promising in the sense that it seemed to open the possibility of exploiting differences among the victorious Allies. An Australian diplomat W. Macmahon Ball, who represented Commonwealth countries on the Allied Council for Japan, noted,

In 1945 Japan was a hated and still-dangerous enemy. In 1947 it was the general belief that there was only one enemy, the Soviet Union.¹⁵

The *Gaimusho* probably had it distributed to the other nations concerned, including Great Britain and the United States as a matter of course. However, the pamphlet has not been found yet in the archives of these countries. This is a curious, even mysterious, matter which remains to be cleared up by future investigation.

The focus of the territorial dispute for about a decade after World War II was the 'Habomais' or the 'Habomais and Shikotan'. The first authoritative indication of

¹⁴ James Byrnes released this secret agreement at a press conference on 29 January 1946. Adding that he personally did not know of it a few days after the Japanese surrender, the agreement for United States' support for Russia's claims to the Kurile islands was reached 'with full knowledge of the American military leaders', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 January 1946, Australian Archives (ACT): A1838/2; 515/4.

¹⁵ W. Macmahon Ball, *Japan Enemy or Ally?*, Cassell and Company Ltd, 1948, p.108.

US support for the Japanese claim came at a press conference on 28 February 1951. Dulles criticised the Soviet action in occupying them under the pretext that they were part of the Kuriles awarded to Russia at the Yalta Conference.¹⁶ In view of this US attitude, on 8 March 1951 Prime Minister Yoshida disclosed to the Upper House Budget Committee a request to the allies for the return of the Habomais. He declared that the Japanese Government understood that the Habomai Islands were to be returned to Japan, since they did not belong to the so-called Kuriles group. Previous claims had been made by political leaders and minor authorities, but this was the first time that the Japanese Government came out openly to request the return of the Habomais.¹⁷ Furthermore, once American support for the Japanese claim to the Habomais was announced, even a new interpretation of Shikotan as part of the Habomais appeared in Japan. The Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs told the House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee on 7 March that the Japanese Government held the view that Shikotan was included within the Habomai group.¹⁸ At the San Francisco Conference, Dulles reaffirmed the above view that Habomais were not included in the Kuriles.¹⁹ Other allies were cool towards Japan's claims in this 'Habomai-Shikotan' dispute. For example, when Dulles admitted that the Japanese had a legitimate claim at least to the Habomais, Australia expressed misgivings 'on account of the opportunity that was being left for contravention of original allied aims'.²⁰ Also, while admitting 'it may well be that the Japanese claim that the Habomai Islands are not part of the Kuriles is justified', it was argued that 'this point should have been made by the Allies when the Soviet Union first occupied the islands'.²¹

Various views were thus expressed regarding whether Habomai and Shikotan were to become Soviet territory or not at the time of the San Francisco Conference; however, Kunashiri and Etorofu were hardly mentioned either internationally or domestically. Only later did the argument appear that not only Habomai and Shikotan but also Kunashiri and Etorofu were not included in the expression 'the Kurile islands', which Japan renounced in the San Francisco Treaty.

¹⁶ Departmental dispatch dated 2 March 1951, No.10/1951, From W.R. Hodgson, Head of Australian Mission in Japan, Australian Archives (ACT): A1838/2; 515/4.

¹⁷ *Nippon Times*, 9 March 1951, Australian Archives (ACT): A1838/2; 515/4.

¹⁸ Memorandum dated 8 March 1951, No.183/1951, For Secretary, Department of External Affairs, Canberra, From T.W. Eckersley, Head of Mission, Australian Archives (ACT): A1838/2; 515/4.

¹⁹ Excerpt from the statement of the Delegate of the USA, John Dulles, at the Conference in San Francisco, 5 September 1951, *Nisso kihon bunsho shiryōshu*, Sekai no Ugokisha, 1990, p.87.

²⁰ Memorandum dated 27 December 1951, from R. McIntyre for The Australian Mission, Tokyo, Australian Archives (ACT): A1838/2;515/4.

²¹ Departmental Dispatch dated 2 March 1951, NO.10/1951, from W.R. Hodgson, Head of Australian Mission in Japan, Australian Archives (ACT): A1838/2;515/4.

The 'Northern Territories' problem is not in origin a bilateral dispute.

The 'Northern Territories' problem is like an invisible thick wall built in the aftermath of World War II, which still remains standing, even though the Cold War is over and the Soviet Union no longer exists. This issue was created by third parties. There had not been such a dispute before the war. Though the demarcation line changed in 1855, 1875 and 1905,²² this was done by mutual consent between the two nations. At Yalta, however, the Kurile Islands were used as a bargaining chip by the US and UK to bring the Russians into the war in the Far East. Japan, then the legal owner of the islands, did not even know of the existence of the agreement. At San Francisco, under new international conditions which came to be known as the 'Cold War', the Kuriles were again sacrificed in the power game over the construction of the postwar international order. The Peace Treaty neither defines the extent of the Kuriles,²³ nor specifies to which country Japan renounced them.²⁴ The Soviet Union did not sign the treaty, which in any case fully reflected the strategic interests of its Cold War opponent, the United States. The territorial problem was shelved at this point. Not until 1955, a decade after the war ended, were peace negotiations finally opened between Japan and the Soviet Union. Again, however, a third party intervened. The present Japanese claim for the return of the four islands became fixed during these negotiations.

Peace Negotiations 1955–56

The US involvement in the Soviet–Japanese negotiations of the 1950s is best known as 'Dulles' Warning'. In August 1956 during the Moscow negotiations, the Japanese plenipotentiary, Foreign Minister Shigemitsu Mamoru, was about to reach a compromise with the Soviet Union over their offer to transfer Habomai and Shikotan to Japan, and to conclude a peace treaty. However, US Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles put pressure on him, by warning that Japan's residual

²² In 1905 Japan acquired Southern Sakhalin by the Portsmouth Treaty following the Russo–Japanese War of 1904.

²³ In the *aide-mémoire* sent to the British Embassy, in March 1951 during the preparation for the San Francisco Treaty, the following clauses are found: 'With respect to the carrying out of the Yalta Agreement the United States agrees that Japan should be prepared to cede South Sakhalin and the Kuriles to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, provided it becomes a party of the peace treaty, but believes that the precise definition of the extent of the Kuril Islands should be a matter for bilateral agreement between the Japanese and Soviet Government or for judicial determination by the International Court of Justice'. , 13 March 1951, *Foreign Relations of the United States (1951)* vol. VI, *Asia and the Pacific*, 1977, p.1026.

²⁴ The Joint United States–United Kingdom Draft Peace Treaty dated 3 May 1951 specifies the Soviet Union as the party to which Japan was to renounce these islands. However, the name of the Soviet Union disappeared in the revised draft dated 14 July. (ibid., pp.1026, 1120).

sovereignty over Ryukyus could be endangered if Japan were to make concessions to the USSR.²⁵

The primary American objective of the postwar era regarding Japan was to prevent it from any rapprochement with the communist bloc. The conclusion of a peace treaty with Russia would put on the agenda the question of the normalisation of relations between Japan and communist China. Although the peace negotiations started in the 'peaceful coexistence' atmosphere of the mid-1950s, this temporary 'détente' was working strategically to the advantage of the Soviet Union. In the Asia-Africa region, postwar nationalist movements were burgeoning and seemed to point towards the emergence of a 'third bloc'. Soviet expansion of its sphere of influence by its peace initiatives in response to such moves was seen in the West as threatening.

Documents recently opened in the United States reveal several new facts regarding its involvement in the 1955–56 Soviet–Japanese negotiations. Prior to the Soviet–Japanese peace negotiations, the US State Department had predicted that the Russians might possibly use the Kuriles as a bargaining card in order to put pressure on the US for the return of the Ryukyus and also to increase tensions between the US and Japan.²⁶ On 7 April, sixteen months before the 'Dulles' Warning', Dulles had already implied in a National Security Council Meeting that the Ryukyus would not be returned to Japan. Dulles emphasised in the meeting that 'the Ryukyus were more valuable to the United States than the Kuriles were to the Soviet Union'. Though he supported 'Japan's claim against the Soviet Union for sovereignty over the Habomai Islands and Shikotan', Dulles came up with an argument that the US should not treat 'as legally invalid the Soviet Union's claim to sovereignty over the Kurile Islands and Southern Sakhalin'. The memorandum of the meeting records his discussion as follows:

The Soviet claim to the Kuriles and the Southern Sakhalin was substantially the same as our [US] claim to be in the Ryukyus and the Bonin Islands. Accordingly, in our efforts to force the Soviet out of the Kuriles and Sakhalin, we might find ourselves forced out of the Ryukyus and the Bonins. Secretary Dulles cited the terms of the peace treaty with Japan in which the Japanese agreed to confine themselves to the four major islands of the homeland. It was this which enabled us to maintain our own positions in Japanese territories outside the four main islands. He repeated that if we succeeded in getting the Russians out of the Kuriles it is certain that we would be forced out of the Ryukyus.²⁷

²⁵ Matsumoto, *ibid.* pp.114–7; Kubota Masaaki. *Kuremurin e no shisetsu: hoppō ryōdo kōsho 1955–1983*, Bungei shunju, Tokyo 1983, pp.133–7, 'Memorandum of a Conversation between Secretary of State Dulles and Foreign Minister Shigemitsu, (Ambassador Adrich's Residence, London, August 19, 1956)', *Foreign Relations of the United States (1955–57) vol.XXIII, Part I, Japan*, 1991, pp.202–3.

²⁶ Memorandum of discussion by Gleason, 11 March: Eisenhower Library, Whitman File, NSC Records, in Editorial Note, *Foreign Relations of the United States (1955–57) vol.XXIII, Part I, Japan*, 1991, pp.28–9.

²⁷ Memorandum of discussion at the 244th Meeting of the National Security Council, Washington, 7 April 1955, Eisenhower Library, Whitman File, NSC Records. Top

The memorandum continues,

The President stated with a smile that it was also certain that we would not succeed in getting the Russians out of the Kuriles.²⁸

The evidence as a whole leaves no room for doubt that the US intended to prevent any Soviet–Japanese rapprochement—no matter which island territories were involved. In other words, even if all of what is now called the ‘four islands’ had been offered by the Russians to the Japanese, the US probably would have linked the Ryukyus with the rest of the territories (i.e., the Northern Kuriles and the Sakhalin). Though it could not be imagined that the USSR would accept such a condition as to return all the islands promised at Yalta, the real objective of the ‘Dulles’ Warning’ was not to force the Russians to return how many and which islands to Japan, but to create unacceptable conditions in order to keep the Ryukyus under US control.

The ‘Dulles’ warning’ took place at the very time that a Foreign Ministerial Conference was being held in London to discuss measures to deal with Egypt’s declaration of its state ownership of the Suez Canal²⁹—a development highly unwelcome to the US and UK. Dulles’ goal was probably not only to gain the Ryukyus, but securely to lock into the ‘Free World’ the whole nation of Japan, located at the entrance to Asia and adjacent to Korea, China and the USSR. Should Japan conclude a peace treaty and have close ties with the Soviet Union, that was perceived as constituting a potential threat for US interests.

Article 26 of the San Francisco Treaty contained the following ‘most favoured

Should Japan make a peace settlement or war claims settlement with any State granting that State greater advantages than those provided by the present Treaty, those same advantages shall be extended to the parties to the present Treaty.³⁰

Dulles used this clause, arguing that, since transfer of territories to the USSR was not mentioned in the San Francisco Treaty, if Japan accepted the Soviet proposal, it would mean Japan was granting greater advantages to the Soviet Union than to the US under the San Francisco treaty. In such case, Article 26 would enable the US to claim the territory of the Ryukyus.³¹ At a later date, Dulles said,

Secret. Drafted by Gleason on 8 April *Foreign Relations of the United States (195557) vol.XXIII, Part I, Japan*, 1991, p.43.

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ Egypt was increasing its voice among Asian–African countries after the revolution of 1952. In July 1956, after the Soviet Union agreed (and the US and UK refused) on financial assistance for construction of Aswan High Dam, Egypt declared state ownership of the Suez canal. In October of the same year, this developed to a military clash between Egypt on the one hand and, UK, France and Israel on the other.

³⁰ *Treaty of Peace with Japan*, Australia Treaty Series, 1952, No.1, p.14.

³¹ As for the details, see ‘Memorandum of Conversation Between Secretary of State Dulles and Foreign Minister Shigemitsu, Ambassador Aldrich’s Residence, London,

That clause was put in the treaty—I wrote the treaty very largely, as you may remember—for that very purpose of trying to prevent the Soviet Union from getting more favourable treatment than the US got.³²

Other evidence supports the view that the US did not actually believe in the principle of Japan regaining control of the islands. Thus, Noel Hemmendinger who was Deputy Director of the Office of Northeast Asian Affairs in the US State Department told A.J.de la Mare of the British Embassy in Washington DC in 29 May 1956 that there was ‘no question but that Japan must give up her aspirations to the Kurile Islands’.³³ Knowing there was no chance of Japan gaining Kunashiri and Etorofu, and believing that Japan would have to give up its Kurile aspirations altogether, the US by its aide-mémoire to Japan of September 1956 officially supported the four islands claim.

Incidentally, from the early stage of the Soviet–Japanese peace negotiations, the Japanese Foreign Ministry tried to induce support for its territorial position from the ‘concerned states’. During the first London negotiations in 1955, Japan added a new condition for a peace settlement with the USSR. This was that the disposition of the Northern Kuriles and the South Sakhalin should be decided by an international conference.³⁴ They several times urged upon the US and UK the desirability of holding a conference of the US, UK, Japan, the USSR, and perhaps others, to consider the question of final territorial dispositions.³⁵ Despite its efforts, however, Japan could not draw any more support than that of the US on the two islands of Habomai and Shikotan.

The United Kingdom was another important ‘concerned state’ which had participated in both the Yalta and San Francisco arrangements. The Soviet–Japanese peace negotiations, indeed, started in London. The reaction of the UK was, however, slightly different from that of the US. The UK was watching the development of Soviet–Japanese negotiations carefully, and with great interest, but trying to keep itself away from any kind of involvement. It was afraid of the reopening of the San Francisco settlement. Chapter II Article 2 of the Peace Treaty did not specify to which country Japan renounced its former territories, not only in

August 19, 1956, 6.p.m.’, *Foreign Relations of the United States (195557) vol.XXIII, Part I, Japan*, 1991, pp.202–04.

³² Department of State for the Press: 28 August 1956, No.450, Secretary Dulles’ News Conference of 28 August 1956, FO371/121040, XC10742, Public Record Office, London. Also *Foreign Relations of the United States (195557) vol.XXIII, Part I, Japan*, 1991, p.211.

³³ Letter from A.J. de la Mare, British Embassy, Washington DC, to C.T. Crowe, Esq., C.M.G., Far Eastern Department, Foreign Office, London, 29 May 1956, FO371/121039, XC10742, Public Record Office, Kew, London.

³⁴ Matsumoto, *ibid.* p.49.

³⁵ Several documents to indicate this Japanese approach are found in the files of US State Department and British Foreign Office. For example, see pp.122–3, 204, *Foreign Relations of the United States (195557) vol. XXIII, Part I, Japan*, 1991, From Bill Denning (British Embassy Tokyo) to W.D. Allen (Foreign Office, London), 18 August 1955, FO371/115234, XC10742, also From A.J.de la Mare (British Embassy, Washington DC) to C.T. Crowe (Foreign Office, London), 29 May 1956, FO371/121039, XC107242, Public Record Office, Kew, London.

respect of the Kuriles and South Sakhalin, but also Formosa (Taiwan) and the Spratly Islands. International relations in the Far East was probably more complicated than Japan realised as it tried to exploit the situation. The interests of different nations were interwoven even in the basic structure of the East–West confrontation. Due to its economic interests, the UK had already recognised Communist China before the San Francisco Peace Conference, but the US supported Chang Kai-shek's Nationalist China in Taiwan. While recognising Communist China in one part of the region, the UK was nevertheless fighting with communist movements in another part, i.e., in Malaya. British misgivings are clear in the following sentence found in correspondence from the British Ambassador to Japan Sir Elster Denning to the Foreign Office in London:

...if the Japanese can persuade other powers to reexamine the territorial clauses of Article 2 of the Peace Treaty, then it seems to me that the Far East can easily be thrown into turmoil.³⁶

Having tried every possible approach, and realising that it was impossible for Japan to draw more than 'two islands' territorial concessions from the Russians after over one year of the peace negotiations, the Japanese Foreign Minister Shigemitsu decided to make a settlement and sign a peace treaty with the USSR. However, at the last moment decisive support for the 'four islands return' came from the US, and considerable pressure was brought to bear. Noticing Japan and the USSR preparing to break through the wall, Dulles reacted by putting it back firmly in place, using the Southern territory of Ryukyus. Incidentally, Shigemitsu on this occasion inquired whether the US would be prepared to take the initiative to convene a conference to discuss the disposition of the Kuriles and the Ryukyus. Dulles took a negative attitude and a few days later noted 'this procedure would require thorough study lest it open up disagreeable questions re Ryukyus and Taiwan'.³⁷ A shift may be observed in this US attitude from the previous year. In September 1955, early in the Soviet–Japanese negotiations, the US view, which was to be discreetly advised to high Japanese officials, was 'we [US] hope Japan will do nothing implying recognition of Soviet sovereignty over the Kuriles and South Sakhalin and we believe disposition of these territories should be left for future international decision'.³⁸ As Dulles indicated, the US shifted its position because it wanted to secure its position in the Ryukyus and also avoid any conflict with Britain.

Before there could be any 'post-war' start to relations between Japan and the USSR, the Cold War started. Since Japan was firmly embedded in the 'free world' bloc, it was not able to avoid being caught up in this new 'war'. The Northern Territories problem was destined to remain unresolved as a by-product of the Cold War.

³⁶ Denning to Allen, 18 August 1955, FO371/115234, XL10742, British Foreign Office Files, Public Record Office, Kew, London.

³⁷ *FRUS (195557) vol. XIII, Part I, Japan*, 1991, pp.202–05.

³⁸ *ibid.* p.122–3.

Domestically, the period of Soviet–Japanese negotiations in the mid-1950s overlaps with the period when the long era of LDP hegemony, the so-called ‘1955 system’, was established. The 1955 system, however, reflected Cold War politics in the domestic arena. Their policies toward peace negotiations with the Soviet Union became political bargaining tools between the two conservative parties, Liberals and Democrats, which then merged to form a large ruling party to oppose the then-strengthening socialist parties. Prime Minister Hatoyama Ichiro of the Liberal Party compromised with the Democrats led by former Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru, whose policy priority was cooperation with the US. The four islands claim became established as a core policy of the new Liberal Democratic Party, which was tantamount to being government policy thereafter.

When Hatoyama visited Moscow in 1956, diplomatic relations were restored and the Soviet Union promised ‘transfer’ of the Habomais and Shikotan. To this day, however, a peace treaty has never been signed, the two islands have not been returned, and Japan insists on its claim for the return of all four islands. The Northern Territories problem has its origin in a complicated mixture of both domestic and international politics. It was created multilaterally, but eventually became a bilateral problem—other nations, including the US, withdrawing from the issue after these peace talks.

The Ryukyus, which in 1956 were linked with the Kuriles by Dulles, were returned to Japan in 1972. However, during the long period of Cold War the wall became too hard and too well-entrenched to break-through. The primary global factor, the Cold War, has recently ended, but the wall is still standing between the two nations.

Conclusion: from bilateralism back to multilateralism

The 1946 pamphlet and the pamphlets representing the current claim (of which the 1987 one has been chosen here as representative) reflect the changes in the Soviet–Japanese relations over the years. The 1946 pamphlet reflects relations between the Soviet Union as a member of the victorious Allied Powers and the defeated Japan, soon after the war. The pamphlet also reveals the first Japanese thinking which seems to suggest that while Japan could not challenge the Kurile cession that the allies had already agreed to impose on Japan, it could make a good case that the Habomai and Shikotan were not included in the Kuriles and had been illegally occupied. The more recent pamphlets (of which 1987 is an example) reflect Soviet–Japanese relations of the Cold War period, in which the Soviet Union confronted the US, and Japan was included almost subordinately in the Western military bloc. Japan began to strengthen its case for the separate treatment of Etorofu and Kunashiri that it had already prepared the way for in the earlier pamphlet. Because of Japan’s having agreed to the cession of the ‘Kuriles’ in the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty, however, it had to argue that these islands were not part of the Kuriles. Both pamphlets reflected in different ways the weak

position of Japan, and its efforts to maximise its national interest in the given circumstances.

Japan's international status has greatly changed over the years: from shortly after the war, when the 1946 pamphlet was written, and from the mid-1950s, when the Soviet–Japanese peace negotiations took place and the Japanese claim was formulated in the terms which have persisted to the present. The ending of the Cold War may open the possibility of new changes. As the history of the past half century proves, it is impossible to solve the Northern Territories problem within an exclusively bilateral framework. The ‘internationalisation’, or ‘re-internationalisation’, of the Northern Territories problem may therefore be an indispensable step for its solution. However, recent Japanese approaches, although aimed at a kind of ‘internationalisation’, may have been missing the point. Instead of seeking for temporary support, which it can mobilise its economic power to secure, it is more important to appeal to the ‘nations concerned’ with solid arguments as to why the problem has to be ‘internationalised’ again. The international community is already deeply involved in the problem, because of historical considerations, and the responsibility to seek a solution is widely shared.

Corresponding to the structural change in international politics, domestic politics are now in transition from the Cold War. Before its collapse, the Soviet Government had started reviewing its policy toward Japan. It had reversed the long-held attitude that the ‘territorial problem has been solved in a series of international agreements’. The Russian Government inherited this slowly evolving Soviet diplomacy. As for Japanese policy, following the collapse of the LDP-dominant political party system, or 1955 system, a fundamental transformation seems to be taking place, though very slowly. Clues to a policy change may be observed in the beginnings of a review of past history, crucial parts of which had been left ambiguous or ambivalent in the process of creating the San Francisco System. The issue of ‘comfort women’ in Asia is one example of such a review. The same shift in thinking may be expected in due course to lead to a review of Russo–Japanese relations.

Under the so-called ‘30 year rule’ diplomatic documents are generally opened after 30 years. However, making an exception to this rule, the Japanese Foreign Ministry has not opened materials related to the Northern Territories dispute, and it seems that the Foreign Ministry Archives of Russia have adopted a similar procedure.³⁹ Although remote from the Northern Islands, and from both countries which still contest them, the document sealed for half a century and then unearthed in the Canberra archives sheds some new light on the genesis of the problem. It may be that other related materials will also be found in the archives of other countries. In fact, important materials are emerging from the National Archives in Washington DC and the Public Record Office in London following the opening of their diplomatic documents in the last few years. There are many new factors to be considered, both domestically and internationally, in the process of

³⁹ In July 1994, the author received a polite rejection two weeks after she requested access to materials of more than 30 years ago.

searching for the solution to the territorial problem. An international forum, such as Shigemitsu proposed in the mid-1950s, may not necessarily be the solution for the issue, as it might raise other sensitive issues related to the San Francisco Treaty—Taiwan and the Spratly Islands. However, if both nations are serious about solving the problem based on ‘law and justice’ as President Yeltsin suggested and the Japanese side agreed, it seems to be a necessary step to adopt an ‘open archive’ policy, and to invite the cooperation of all the states which were involved in creating the problem, and now have a mutual interest in helping to solve it.

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