
Moscow voices protest over Tokyo depicting Russia's South Kuril Islands as Japanese at G20

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The Russian Foreign Ministry has lodged an official protest with the Japanese embassy after Tokyo showed the South Kuril Islands – Russia's sovereign territory – as Japanese in various media materials at the latest G20 summit.

The Foreign Ministry handed a protest note to the Japanese diplomats on July 2, the ministry's spokeswoman, Maria Zakharova, said at a briefing on Thursday, describing Tokyo's actions as *"abuse of its G20 presidency role."* Moscow once again noted that Japan's territorial claims are *"unsubstantiated"* and go against existing international agreements.

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"Such actions run counter to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's repeatedly declared intention to avoid any steps that could... negatively affect the atmosphere of Russian-Japanese relations," Zakharova said.

A series of videos called 'Inspiring cities of Japan', which was published by the Japanese government's [website](#) and posted on YouTube by the official [account](#) of the Prime Minister's Office of Japan ahead of the G20 summit starting from late February, show a map of Japan which includes two of the southernmost Kuril Islands – Iturup and Kunashir – as part of Japanese territory. One of the videos was also [published](#) on the G20 2019 summit's official website.

Tokyo has so far not issued any statements in response to the Russian note.

The longstanding territorial dispute over the Kuril Islands has been one of the major stumbling blocks in relations between Russia and Japan that has so far prevented the two nations from signing a formal post-WWII peace treaty.

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The USSR and Japan ended World War II hostilities in 1945 with an armistice that was not followed by a peace treaty. Known in Japan as Iturup, Kunashir, Shikotan, and Habomai, the islands in the Sea of Okhotsk were handed over to the Soviet Union under the 1945 Potsdam Declaration.

Since then, Tokyo has tried to claim the four Russian Kuril Islands, known in Japan as the 'Northern Territories'. Japan has also talked about the prospects of regaining sovereignty over the southernmost part of the archipelago, which includes Shikotan and Habomai.

In 1956, a non-binding declaration signed by Japan and the USSR envisaged the prospects of a sovereignty handover, though its wording is vague. Still, the document says the move would be possible only after the two sides sign a peace treaty. However, Tokyo maintains that the territorial dispute should be resolved first. Moscow has repeatedly insisted that its sovereignty over the islands cannot be a bargaining chip.
