The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Japan's Abe Looks to Settle Territorial Dispute With Russia Over Kuril Islands

December 02, 2014



Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe speaks during a debate session with seven other party leaders, ahead of the December 14 lower house election, in Tokyo on Dec. 1, 2014.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has vowed to settle a territorial dispute with Russia over the Kuril Islands and to conclude a formal peace treaty with Moscow that has not been signed since the end of World War II.

"My mission as a politician, as prime minister, is to resolve the problem of the Northern Territories at any cost [and to conclude a peace treaty]," Abe was quoted as saying by Russia's state-run RIA Novosti, which in turn cited Japan's Kyodo news agency.

Territorial claims over four islands in the Kurils — known as the Northern Territories in Japan and the Southern Kurils in Russia — have been at the heart of a territorial dispute between Moscow and Tokyo that has prevented them from concluding a formal World War II peace treaty.

Japan in August strongly condemned Russia for conducting military drills on the contested

island chain, saying it would lodge a protest with the country's Foreign Ministry.

A month later, Kremlin chief of staff Sergei Ivanov announced that the Russian government would spend 64 billion rubles ($1.25 billion) on the development of the Kuril Islands between 2016 and 2025, RIA Novosti reported.

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