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Russia Rejects Japan's Protests Over Military Buildup on Disputed Islands

By Reuters

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Vladimir Smirnov / TASS

Russia rejects protests from Japan over Russia's military deployments on a chain of disputed Pacific islands and reserves the right to bolster its security there as it sees fit, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said on Wednesday.

Moscow and Tokyo both claim sovereignty over the Pacific islands, known in Russia as the Kuril islands and in Japan as the Northern Territories.

Russian military deployments on the islands were not aimed against neighboring countries, the ministry said in a statement, in which it also accused Tokyo of unhelpful "megaphone" diplomacy.

"We firmly reject such demarches since Russia has the sovereign right to (conduct) any activity on its territory, including measures to strengthen national defense," it said.

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Japan said in July it had asked Russia to reduce its military activity on the islands.

Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev approved the deployment of Russian warplanes on one of the islands in February, accelerating the area's militarisation at a time when Moscow's ties with Tokyo are strained over the roll-out of the Aegis U.S. missile system.

Moscow has also deployed its newest missile defense systems to the islands and plans to build a naval base there even as it continues talks about the territorial dispute.

The Soviet Union seized the islands from Japan at the end of World War Two. The islands are the reason Moscow and Tokyo have not formally ended World War Two hostilities.

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