

Japan Protests Russian Military Drills Near Disputed Kuril Islands

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Russian Defense Ministry

Japan has lodged a diplomatic protest over Russian military exercises taking place around the disputed southern Kuril Islands, Japanese media [reported](#) Wednesday.

Russia's Defense Ministry [announced](#) the military drills on Tuesday, saying they will involve 60 warships, 30 aircraft and more than 13,000 servicemen in the Sea of Japan, the Sea of Okhotsk and the northwestern Pacific Ocean.

According to the Sankei Shimbun newspaper, Russia [notified](#) Japanese officials that it will hold multi-day live-fire exercises around two of the four Kuril Islands, which Tokyo claims as its Northern Territories.

Russia also designated maritime exclusion zones around the remaining two islands for drills running through Aug. 29, along with missile test warnings through Aug. 6, the newspaper added.

Japan protested the exercises through diplomatic channels, saying that it “cannot accept” Russia’s actions to bolster its military presence around the disputed islands, which are administered by Russia as part of its Far Eastern Sakhalin region

Neither Russia’s Embassy in Tokyo nor the Japanese foreign ministry publicly commented on the reports. It was not immediately clear whether Russia’s ambassador in Japan was summoned.

Related article: [After 80 Years, Russia and Japan Still Can’t Agree on Who These Islands Belong To](#)

Japan maintains that the four southernmost islands of the Kuril chain, located just north of the Hokkaido prefecture, were illegally seized by the Soviet Union after it announced its surrender in World War II.

The disputed status of the islands has prevented Russia and Japan from formally signing a World War II peace treaty.

At the same time, Japan has gradually moved away from its postwar pacifist status — increasing military spending, ramping up defense pacts and deploying missile launchers to its outer islands.

Japan’s Defense Minister Shinjiro Koizumi said Tuesday the Japanese military needs to be boosted with a “sense of urgency and crisis,” as a new government “white paper” assessment warned of growing threats from China, Russia and North Korea.

The white paper [moved](#) from calling Russian–Chinese military cooperation a “serious” concern to describing it as a “deepening strategic partnership” with more frequent joint air patrols near Japan’s main islands.

Japan joined other Western countries in sanctioning Russia after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

AFP and Reuters contributed reporting.

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