

Russia Summons Japanese Ambassador as Dispute Over Kuril Islands Flares Up

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Japan's Ambassador Akira Muto visits the Russian Foreign Ministry in Moscow. **REUTERS / Ramil Sitdikov**

Japan's ambassador to Moscow was [summoned](#) to the Russian Foreign Ministry on Tuesday after Tokyo issued a sharp protest over President Vladimir Putin's first-ever visit to the disputed Kuril Islands.

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.

Putin's trip to the island of Iturup, known as Etorofu in Japan, last Thursday was the [first visit](#) by a Russian president to the archipelago since Dmitry Medvedev traveled there in 2010.

Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi denounced the visit as "absolutely unacceptable" and summoned Russia's ambassador in Tokyo.

In response, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov accused Japan of crossing "the line of decency" with its protest and summoned Japanese Ambassador to Moscow Akira Moto to the Foreign Ministry building.

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

Muto did not immediately comply with the summons, prompting Lavrov to express frustration on Monday.

"We were told either that he was not in Moscow or that he was unwell. We did not quite understand the situation," Lavrov told reporters.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova later said that Muto's health had "suddenly started feeling better" and confirmed he would attend on Tuesday.

Japanese public broadcaster NHK reported that Muto initially delayed his response out of concern that Russian officials would dominate the exchange. Tokyo ultimately instructed Muto to attend following internal deliberations.

Muto spent roughly 20 minutes inside the Foreign Ministry building in Moscow on Tuesday and declined to answer questions from reporters when leaving, according to Interfax.

Russia's Foreign Ministry [said](#) Muto had been summoned over Takaichi's "anti-Russian" comments.

"In the context of Tokyo's continued adherence to the 'collective West' sanctions policy against Russia, as well as Japan's support for the Kyiv regime, the head of the Japanese diplomatic mission was informed that Moscow reserves the right to take appropriate countermeasures," the ministry said in a statement.

Relations between Tokyo and Moscow have steadily deteriorated since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Japan joined G7 partners in imposing sanctions against Moscow, and it also provides financial and some military aid to Ukraine.

AFP contributed reporting.

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