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NEW BOOK DETAILS RUSSO-JAPANESE RELATIONS

Largely unknown and offering little in the way of economic advantages, the Kurils might seem out of place at the center of a protracted, high-stakes dispute involving two of the world's most powerful nations. Nevertheless, the remote island chain is the reason Russia and Japan have yet to complete normalization in the half century since World War II.

And, according to UC Santa Barbara historian Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, the challenges to resolving ownership of the Kurils---located between Japan's northern-most island, Hokkaido, and Russia's Kamchatka peninsula---remain daunting.

"It's about prestige and therefore all the more difficult to arrive at a solution. I see positive signs but an agreement by the year 2000 seems very unlikely," said Hasegawa, author of the new two-volume "The Northern Territories Dispute and Russo-Japanese Relations" (International and Area Studies at UC Berkeley, 1998).

In the waning months of World War II, President Roosevelt pressed the Soviet Union to open an Eastern front against Japan's flagging military machine. Stalin assented---with the condition that the Kurils be handed over to the Soviets at war's end. The Yalta Agreement, as it came to be known, was an especially bitter pill for the Japanese, who had gained control of the Kurils under two 19th-century treaties with the Russians.

But the matter was far from settled. In 1951 Japan was forced to renounce all rights to the Kurils as part of the San Francisco Peace Treaty. To maximize their leverage in future talks, however, U.S. negotiators were careful not to specify which nation would receive authority over the islands. What's more, the Soviet Union, which had since annexed the Kurils, refused to sign the agreement.

The two countries almost reached a compromise on the issue during initial normalization negotiations in 1955; a year later they issued a joint declaration that called for the Soviet Union to return the two southern-most islands of what the Japanese now termed the Northern Territories. Though it was ultimately ratified by both governments, Khrushchev seized on the renewal of U.S.-Japanese security arrangements as an excuse to unilaterally abandon the deal in 1960.

Japan's anti-communist policies and its role as a key U.S. ally further strained Russo-Japanese relations for the balance of the Cold War. (The Soviets in fact continue to use the inland sea created by the Kuril chain as a submarine base.) With the breakup of the Soviet Union, however, the Kurils emerged as the primary obstacle to Tokyo and Moscow achieving rapprochement. Negotiations continue to be contentious.

"When Gorbachev came to power, hope for a resolution to the matter was tremendous even though the Soviet Union was still intact. Since then we've seen dramatic changes in international relations: an end to the Cold War, disarmament treaties, a warming of Sino-Russo relations---and still no change in Russo-Japanese relations because of this territory dispute," said Hasegawa.

"The Japanese consider a return of all the islands essential to overcoming the legacies of the second world war. Meanwhile, the legitimacy of the Russian regime, like the Soviet regime before it, hinges to a great extent on the victories of the war. The new Russia couldn't possibly begin its existence by giving away territory that is deeply connected with the prestige and legitimacy of both the Soviet Union and Russia. That's the heart of the problem."

A detailed analysis of decades of negotiations over the Kurils, Hasegawa's two-volume tome took more than 10 years to research and write. The first volume, titled "Between War and Peace," covers the period from the first Russian-Japanese encounter in 1697 to 1985. Volume two, "Neither War Nor Peace," covers events from the Gorbachev era onward. The book is based on a wide range of sources in

English, Japanese, and Russian and incorporates the most recent scholarship, as well as extensive interviews with scores of politicians in both Japan and Russia.

Hasegawa says he was inspired to write such a lengthy account of the Kuril dispute after discovering how little quality scholarship on the subject actually exists---a fact he attributes to the linguistic and technical difficulties inherent in doing the necessary research. Fluent in Japanese and Russian, Hasegawa is well-versed in the political culture of both countries. And, as an American, he was able to approach the subject without nationalistic biases, unlike many Japanese and Russian scholars.

UC Berkeley political scientist George Breslauer has said Hasegawa's book "is the most encyclopedic account available of the history of Russo-Japanese relations and will for long be the authoritative reference work on the evolution of Soviet/Russo-Japanese negotiations."

Tsuyoshi Hasegawa is a professor of history at UC Santa Barbara. He is the author of "The February Revolution: Petrograd, 1917" (University of Washington Press, 1981) and "Daily Life in Petrograd During the Russian Revolution" (Chuokoronshi, 1989).

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