



Kuril Island Dispute

For Prelims: Diplomatic Bluebook, Kuril Island Dispute, Treaties and Agreements Related to Kuril Islands

For Mains: World War II, International Treaties & Agreements, Kuril Island Dispute

Why in News?

Recently, Japan **described four islands** whose ownership it disputes with Russia as **illegally occupied** in the latest version of a **diplomatic Bluebook**.

- The use of stronger language underscored the chilled relations between the two sides amid the [Russian invasion of Ukraine](#).
- Russia refers to these islands as the [Kuril Islands](#), whereas **Japan calls them Northern territories**.
- Japan is also having a similar dispute regarding Northern territories with South Korea. South Korea refers to as Dokdo islands.

What is Diplomatic Bluebook?

- The Diplomatic Bluebook of Japan is an **annual report on Japan's foreign policy** and international diplomacy published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Japan.
- It has been published every year since its **first issue in September 1957**.

What is the Geographic Location and Significance of the Kuril Islands?

- **Location:**
 - The Kuril Islands are stretched from the **Japanese island of Hokkaido** to the southern tip of **Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula** separating the **Okhotsk Sea from the North Pacific Ocean**.
 - The **chain** is part of the belt of **geologic instability circling the Pacific (Ring of Fire)** and contains at least 100 volcanoes, of which **35 are still active, and many hot springs**.
- **Significance:**
 - **Natural resources:** The islands are **surrounded by rich fishing grounds** and are thought to have offshore reserves of oil and gas.
 - **Strategic Importance:** Russia has **deployed missile systems in the region**. Russia also plans a submarine project and intends to prevent any American military use of the islands.
 - **Cultural Importance:** The **Japanese** people, especially conservatives in Hokkaido, are **emotionally attached to the islands**.

RUSSIA-JAPAN TALKS ON DISPUTED KURIL ISLANDS



HISTORY OF KURIL DISPUTE

■ **1855: Treaty of Shimoda** gives southern Kurils to Japan and rest of island chain to Russia.

■ **1875: Treaty of St Petersburg** cedes all Kurils to Japan in exchange for Russian jurisdiction over Sakhalin

■ **1905:** After Russia's defeat in **Russo-Japanese War**, Japan gains control of southern Sakhalin

■ **1945:** Soviet Union occupies entire Kuril chain and southern Sakhalin after declaring war on Japan during final days of **World War II**

■ **1951:** Japan renounces claim to Kurils in **Treaty of San Francisco**, signed between Japan and Allied powers.



■ **1956: Soviet-Japanese Joint Declaration** restores diplomatic ties between two countries.

What is the History of the Kuril Islands Dispute?

▪ Background:

- The Kuril Islands dispute between **Japan and Russia** is over the **sovereignty of South Kuril Islands**.
- The South Kuril Islands comprise **Etorofu island, Kunashiri island, Shikotan island and the Habomai island**.
 - These islands are **claimed by Japan but occupied by Russia** as the successor state of the Soviet Union.

▪ Treaty of Shimoda (1855):

- In **1855**, Japan and Russia concluded the **Treaty of Shimoda**, which gave control of the four southernmost islands to Japan and the remainder of the chain to Russia.

▪ Treaty of Saint Petersburg (1875):

- In the **Treaty of Saint Petersburg**, signed between the two countries in **1875**, **Russia ceded possession of the Kurils to Japan in exchange for uncontested control of**

Sakhalin Island.

- However, these islands were again seized by the Soviet Union at the end of [World War II](#).
- **Yalta Agreement (1945):**
 - In **1945**, as part of the [Yalta agreements](#) (**formalized in the 1951 Treaty of Peace with Japan**), the islands were ceded to the Soviet Union, and the Japanese population was repatriated and replaced by the Soviets.
- **San Francisco Peace Treaty (1951):**
 - The **San Francisco Peace Treaty** signed between the Allies and Japan in 1951, states that Japan must give up “all right, title and claim to the Kuril Islands”, **but it also does not recognize the Soviet Union’s sovereignty over them.**
 - In World War II, the main combatants were:
 - **Axis powers** (Germany, Italy, and Japan)
 - **Allies** (France, Great Britain, the United States, the Soviet Union, and, to a lesser extent, China).
- **Japan-Soviet Joint Declaration (1956):**
 - The dispute over the islands has **prevented the conclusion of a peace treaty to end World War II.**
 - In 1956, diplomatic ties were restored between Japan and Russia by **Japan-Soviet Joint Declaration.**
 - During that time, Russia offered to give away the two islands closest to Japan. But the offer was rejected by Japan as the two islands constituted **only 7% of the land** in question.

What is the Current Scenario?

- Despite a series of agreements, the dispute continues, and **Japan still claims historical rights to the southernmost islands** and has tried repeatedly to persuade the Soviet Union and, from 1991, Russia to return those islands to Japanese sovereignty.
- In **2018**, the Russian President and the Japanese Prime Minister (PM) met on the sidelines of the [East Asia Summit](#) and decided to end the territorial dispute by the Japanese PM agreeing to negotiate based on the 1956 declaration.
 - This implicitly showed that Japan has given up the two islands to maintain peace with Russia.
- However, Russia indicated that the joint declaration signed by Japan and the Soviet Union in 1956 **neither mentions a basis for returning Habomai and Shikotan nor clarifies which country has sovereignty over the islands.**
- Further, in **2019**, the Japanese PM made it clear that the country is **not in the favour of withdrawing control over the Islands.**
- Japan also believes that the islands are an inherent part of the nation’s territory.
- Therefore, **Japan mentioned that it aims to sign the peace treaty after the territorial issue is resolved.**

[Source: TH](#)