

## **Criticism of Russia's Creation of an Anniversary to Commemorate the End of the Second World War**

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The lower house of Russia's parliament, the State Duma, passed a bill by majority vote on 7 July to name 2 September — the date Japan signed the Articles of Surrender ending the Second World War — “Victory Over Japan Day.” On 14 July, the upper house, the Federation Council, approved the bill. We have heard that Pres. Medvedev changed the holiday's name to “Anniversary of the End of the Second World War” and signed the bill.

According to a report in the *Sankei Shinbun* on 26 July, the Russian political world's explanation of the rationale for the creation of this anniversary is, “it is considered odd that although sixty-five years of victory over Germany in the west is celebrated, nothing is done about the east.” Russia was invaded by Germany and Moscow was threatened by attack, and even though it occurred during the time of the Soviet Union, it is part of the history of the Russian people and it is thus understandable that they would celebrate their victory over the Germans. Their history concerning Japan is just the opposite.

The idea that the day of shameful Soviet aggression toward Japan should, at this late date, become a national holiday — whatever its title — will have to cause the world to take note that even though the political system may have changed, Russia's values are unchanged from those Stalin and the Soviet Union, and they are incompatible with those of the rest of the world. It is reported that Stalin called the attack on Japan “pay-back for the Russo–Japanese War.” There is no way the Japanese nation and people, who bore the injury from the Soviet Union's aggressive war, could let it pass without response that a Russia that has repudiated the Soviet Union should commemorate Soviet aggression and an unjust war that should have shamed them internationally. There had been no report of movement toward any open criticism by the Japanese government, but as someone who has seen history transpire — including war, as a veteran's society — we must strongly criticize the above-mentioned law's establishment.

On the evening of 14 August, 1945, Japan sent a telegram indicating a willingness to accept the Potsdam Declaration, acknowledging the unconditional surrender of her forces and announcing that hostilities would cease as of the 15th. Japan did not fire a single shot at any of the Allied forces thereafter other than at the combined forces of the Soviet Union who had unjustly attacked the Japanese army. In contrast with Japan, who had put down her weapons despite still possessing the capability to wage war both at home and in overseas territories, the Soviet Union went forward with her attack totally without any acceptable rationale under international law. They seized the Kurile Islands, which historically had no connection with Russia whatsoever. The Soviet Union also had designs on Hokkaidô, but American opposition brought a halt to this.

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<sup>1</sup> Kaikôsha is a the Japanese Veteran Officers' Club, with a membership made up of veteran officers of the Japanese Imperial Army (WW2 and before) and the modern Japan Ground Self-Defense Force. There are more than 10,000 members.

I hope the present Russian administration will not commit the folly of attempting to justify the war of aggression prosecuted by the Soviet Union as a “victory,” and to truly contribute to permanent peace in the world by reflecting on the education of her citizens and her foreign policy. If they intend to look back at the day the Second World War ended, they should properly recognize the nature of the Soviet Union’s actions. If this does not happen and they celebrate the fruits of imperialistic aggression instead, it is likely that this will be an obstruction to permanent world peace and Japan’s grudge will continue into perpetuity.

The Russo–Japanese Neutrality Pact concluded on 13 May, 1941, and valid until May of 1946, was a treaty of mutual non-aggression and an agreement to preserve their respective territories. Even should one say the Soviet Union unilaterally announced intentions not to extend the treaty beyond its termination, the unannounced surprise attack on Manchuria that began at midnight on 9 August, 1945, was a violation of that treaty. One hour before that, at 5:00 PM Moscow time, Soviet foreign minister Molotov presented a declaration of war to Satô Naotake, the Japanese ambassador to the Soviet Union. For some reason, the ambassador’s telegram reporting the situation did not arrive in Tokyo. There is evidence to suggest that this was because of interference by the People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs.<sup>2</sup>

To begin with, the attack came during the period the neutrality treaty was in effect. Furthermore, Japan had been relying on the Soviet Union as an intermediary with the Allied Powers to conclude peace. There was no reason for the Soviet Union to have felt any threat from Japan. The basis for the Soviet Union’s declaration of war was nothing more than their base desire to gain a share of the spoils of victory by joining the war before Japan could surrender. There is no justice in that.

Even after Japan had accepted the Potsdam Declaration and ceased hostilities, the Soviet Union went forward with her aggressive attack. At the time, Manchuria on the whole was unoccupied as yet, and the Soviets had just crossed the border onto Sakhalin when they were stopped; the Soviet army had not set foot on any of the Kurile Islands.

At the Yalta Conference, which had nothing to do with Japan, the Soviet Union demanded southern Sakhalin should be returned to them. This stands in contrast with the Allied Powers’ stated moral base of the war, which was territorial inviolability.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Boris Slavinskym, *USSR–Japan: On the Way to War*, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> A selected listing of chronological events:

**The Atlantic Charter** (Britain and America — 14 July, 1941). “First, their countries seek no aggrandizement, territorial or other; Second, they desire to see no territorial changes that do not accord with the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned....

**Declaration by the United Nations** (26 nations including the Soviet Union — 1 January, 1946). “The Governments signatory hereto ... [b]eing convinced that complete victory over their enemies is essential to defend life, liberty, independence and religious freedom, and to preserve human rights and justice in their own lands as well as in other lands, and that they are now engaged in a common struggle against savage and brutal forces seeking to subjugate the world.”

**Cairo Declaration** (1 December, 1943). “The Three Great Allies [America, Britain, and China] are fighting this war to restrain and punish the aggression of Japan. They covet no gain for themselves and have no thought of territorial expansion. It is their purpose that Japan shall be stripped of all the islands in the Pacific which she has seized or occupied since the beginning of the first World War in 1914, and that all the territories Japan has stolen from the Chinese, such as Manchuria, Formosa, and The Pescadores, shall be restored to the Republic of China. Japan will also be expelled from all other territories which she has taken by violence and greed.”

**Yalta Agreement** (Soviet Union, Britain, United States — 11 February, 1945). “The former rights of Russia [possessed before the Russo–Japanese War, i.e., southern Sakhalin, Dairen, and the Chinese-

The Soviet Union's demand for the return of the southern half of Sakhalin (which had been given to Japan as compensation at the end of the Russo–Japanese War) was beyond unlawful. Their additional demand for the transfer of the Kurile Islands (the possession of which had been agreed upon as Japan's by a treaty between Japan and Russia in 1875) had been without any legitimate right. The Soviets probably would not have stopped there but for the cease fire.

As shown by the various treaties and declarations referenced in footnote three above, Sakhalin was not one of Japan's territorial acquisitions *after* the First World War, as demanded in the Cairo Declaration; Japan's possession of it was a consequence of the Russo–Japanese War. Possession was legally transferred to Japan at the Portsmouth Peace Conference of 1905, which took place under the eyes of the world, and at the time the world cheered the fairness of the terms for peace, so it was not stolen through greed or violence. The “Convention Embodying Basic Rules of the Relations between Japan and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics” was signed twenty-five years after the Treaty of Portsmouth, on 20 January, 1925, affirming the continuing validity of the Portsmouth treaty. Moreover, it should be noted that the Japanese exploration of Sakhalin began in 1635, and it was a Japanese explorer, Mamiya Rinzō, who confirmed in 1808 that Sakhalin was in fact an island. This last was forty-one years before Russia passed through the strait between Sakhalin and the eastern coast of Siberia in 1849. The Portsmouth stipulation concerning the ownership of the southern part of Sakhalin only supported these historical details.

This is to say nothing of the fact that turning over of the inherent Japanese dominion that was the Kurile Islands,<sup>4</sup> as was called for in the secret Yalta Agreement, was totally inconsistent with the spirit of territorial inviolability shown in the public Atlantic Charter, Declaration of the United Nations, and the Cairo Declaration.

Nonetheless, the eighth article of the Potsdam Declaration, which the Japanese accepted, said, “the terms of the Cairo Declaration shall be carried out and Japanese sovereignty shall be limited to the islands of Honshu, Hokkaido, Kyushu, Shikoku, and such minor islands as we determine.” Thus, there was nothing Japan could do to prevent the forced cession of the Kurile Islands, and Japan renounced rights to and jurisdiction over the Kuriles with the signing of the San Francisco Peace Treaty. The Soviet Union was not actually a signatory of the Peace Treaty itself, however, so they were not qualified to make such a claim in the treaty.

The force used by the Soviet Union in doing this was ultimately practicable at the time of the Yalta Conference, but as military superiority was already objectively in

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Eastern and South-Manchurian railroads] shall be restored.... The Kuril Islands shall be handed over to the Soviet Union.”

**Potsdam Declaration** (26 June, 1945). “The terms of the Cairo Declaration shall be carried out....”

<sup>4</sup> The Treaty of St. Petersburg (7 May, 1875) is called in Japanese the “Sakhalin–Kuriles exchange treaty.” Since the closing days of the Tokugawa shogunate, there was difficulty in settling a formal national border as the Russians began moving south on Sakhalin where both Russians and Japanese had been living. A harmonious decision was reached whereby the Japanese abandoned the entirety of Sakhalin to Russia in return for the total possession of the Kurile Islands. Article Two of the treaty read, “In return for assignment of the rights to the Empire of Russia of the island of Sakhalin as mentioned in Article One, His Imperial Majesty, the Tsar of All the Russias, assigns to His Majesty the Emperor of Japan the Kurile group of islands to belong to the Japanese Empire in perpetuity. This group contains eighteen islands [they are listed], so that the boundary between the empires of Russia and Japan in these waters will pass through the strait located between Cape Lotapko on the Kamchatka Peninsula and the island of Shumshu.”

American hands, it must be remembered as one of the dirty secrets of American diplomacy that they abandoned the principles of international rights to give the Soviets bait to join in the fighting to end the war sooner. There are great changes that will take place in future international situations, and judgment concerning the Russian possession of the Kurile Islands is something the world will have to think about once again.

Putting all this aside, I am making three claims herein, and they are as follows:

First, even if we recognize for the time being that handing over the Kurile Islands the archipelago to the Soviets was the result of Japan's acceptance of the San Francisco Peace Treaty and the secret Yalta agreement between the Soviet Union and the United States, the so-called northern islands are in no way numbered among the Kurile Islands, and the Russian possession of them is, ultimately, entirely illegal.

Kondô Jûzô, an explorer sent out by the shogunate, erected a stele on Etorofu proclaiming it "Etorofu of Dai-Nippon" in 1798.

In the first treaty between Russia and Japan, concluded on 7 February, 1855, we find: "Article Two: Henceforth, the boundary of the Empire of Japan and the Empire of Russia shall be between the islands of Etorofu and Urup. Etorofu belongs to Japan, and all the island of Urup and the Kurile Islands to the north of it belong to Russia." As is clear from the Treaty of St. Petersburg, quoted in footnote 4, the Kuriles consist of eighteen islands from Shumshu to Urup, and did not include Etorofu or Kunashiri.

The four northern islands were historically never Russian territory. Even if Article Eight of the Potsdam Declaration, which was based on clauses in the Yalta Agreement (which was originally non-binding on Japan) is used as justification for the unjust possession of the Kurile Islands, they were taken at a time when Japan's diplomacy was non-functional, and so Japan absolutely cannot accept the unlawful Russian possession of these four northern islands since there is no doubt that they were Japanese territory.

On 7 September, 1957, the American State Department formally opined that, "with respect to the territorial question, as Japanese Government has been previously informed, the United States regards the so called Yalta agreement as simply a statement of common purposes by the then heads of the participating powers, and not as a final determination by those powers or of any legal effect in transferring territories. ... The United States has reached the conclusion after careful examination of the historical facts that the islands of Etorofu and Kunashiri (along with Habomai and Shikotan which are part of Hokkaido) have always been part of Japan proper and should in justice be acknowledged as Japanese sovereignty. The United States would regard Soviet agreement to this effect as a positive contribution to the reduction of tension in the Far East."

Even though the implementation of this illegal act on 2 September, 1945, was a disgrace committed by Stalin's Soviet Union, Russia cannot create a joyful thing like a day to commemorate victory.

Second is the question of the Soviet attack taking place after the war had ended, as touched on earlier in this document. After 15 August, 1945, the Japanese forces had capitulated, and in the face of their preparations for disarmament, Shumshu Island was attacked by a landing force on 18 August with artillery support from the Kamchatka peninsula. They encountered Japanese forces who put up a resolute defense, but when the Japanese army received orders to cease fire, the Soviet troops escaped annihilation at the beachhead. On the morning of 20 August, an amphibious landing

attack of Sakhalin at the mostly defenseless town of Maoka was accompanied by naval bombardment and airstrikes. On the 22nd, three defenseless Japanese boats filled with refugees fleeing Sakhalin were attacked by Soviet submarines in the Rumoi Offing near Hokkaidô, and survivors bobbing about in the water were strafed by Soviet fighter planes. Almost 2,000 innocent victims died. A group to be sent ahead to work out the details in scheduling the signing of formal documents of surrender to the Allied Powers were delayed until 2 September by the aftermath of a typhoon. Soviet forces landed on the islands of Kunashiri and Shikotan on 1 September, but they reached the Habomai Islands *after* the signing, on the 4th and 5th. This timetable of the attacks and occupation of the islands would have been all the more prolonged had local Japanese forces not accepted their orders to cease fire and carried out their defense as they wished. The “anniversary of the end of the war” as seen from the example of Shumshu Island would have to be called the “anniversary of national criminality.”

Lastly, a point that is filled with disgrace concerning this “end of the war” on 2 September is the unlawful post-war internments and forced labor of Japanese. It was typical of slavery in ancient times, but the forcing of 600,000 prisoners of war to work toward the systematic rebuilding of one’s own country as slave laborers after the end of the war and causing the death by starvation or disease of 60,000, was a serious infringement of the Potsdam Declaration, which said “the Japanese military forces, after being completely disarmed, shall be permitted to return to their homes with the opportunity to lead peaceful and productive lives,” and a transgression of the Hague Convention Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land.<sup>5</sup> At the very least this was a transgression of international justice. Many Kaikôsha members bear keen memories of young military comrades buried in the frozen soil. The regrets and grudges held by those who died while being slave laborers in Siberia will probably never disappear.

Furthermore, the Japanese who were living in Manchuria at the time would have had a difficult time trying to completely catalogue the brutality, the poor military discipline, and the systematic, large-scale looting, that were displayed by the Soviet forces that invaded Manchuria.

Especially as it was largely fought unilaterally after the war had already ended?

I reiterate. If Russia now celebrates “the anniversary of the end of the Second World War,” we will, in return, draw the world’s attention to the sensible understanding of just how unjust this Soviet attack had been. The Soviet actions after 9 August, 1945, were criminal acts in violation of international law which do not deserve to be called “war.” For sensible Russians and their government, 2 September is a disgraceful date upon which they should profoundly reflect.

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<sup>5</sup> Chapter Two, Article Twenty of the Hague Convention treaty signed on 18 October, 1907, says, “After the conclusion of peace, the repatriation of prisoners of war shall be carried out as quickly as possible.”

# The Soviet Attack on Sakhalin and the Kuriles

