
JAPAN AND RUSSIA HOLD TALKS ON SECURITY, TERRITORIAL DISPUTE

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The foreign and defense ministers from Japan and Russia met in Tokyo on Monday, with both sides expressing hope that discussions on joint development of islands claimed by both countries might help them move closer to resolving the territorial dispute preventing them from forging a peace treaty.

The talks are the first "two-plus-two" meeting since Russia's annexation of Crimea from Ukraine.

The one-day meeting is largely focusing on regional security, especially how best to deal with North Korea's launches of missiles and its nuclear program.

Russia's Foreign Ministry said before the talks that its envoys would raise the issue of a plan by the U.S. and its ally South Korea to deploy a state-of-the-art missile defense system known as THAAD, which has antagonized China and Russia.

Joint efforts in fighting terrorism and drug trafficking were also on the agenda.

Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida was meeting with his Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov, while Japanese Defense Minister Tomomi Inada sat down for talks with Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu. The four ministers will also hold joint talks on international and bilateral issues.

Japan and Russia last held "two-plus-two" talks in November 2013. Meetings were shelved after that due to the crisis in Ukraine, as Japan joined sanctions against Moscow.

The Tokyo talks are not expected to lead to a breakthrough on conflicting claims to islands north of Hokkaido □ Etorofu, Kunashiri, Shikotan and the Habomai islets □ that came under Russian control after Japan's defeat in World War II.

But the countries see more room for agreement on joint development of fisheries, tourism and other areas that might help bridge the gap.

Kishida said he intended to work in a "speedy manner" to move closer toward reaching a peace treaty, especially making progress on joint economic development.

Lavrov agreed, saying at the outset of the talks that "I believe this joint development will become an important step to create an appropriate environment for resolving a peace treaty."

Earlier, a Japanese foreign ministry official said Tokyo would raise concerns over Russia's installment of surface-to-ship missiles on Etorofu and other military activity elsewhere on the disputed islands, and seek an explanation from Moscow. It does not plan to push harder than that,

said the official, who briefed reporters on the condition he not be named.

Japanese officials also said the talks would include work on planning a visit by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to Moscow later this year. Logistics of visits by Japanese former residents of the disputed islands will also be addressed, they said.

Kaynak/Source: