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## **MOSCOW CAUTIONS TOKYO THAT DEMANDS OVER SOUTH KURILS MAY DAMAGE POSITIVE RELATIONS**

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Russian News Agency (11 October 2018)

Mounting claims by Japanese diplomats over the South Kuril Islands cannot cultivate a positive atmosphere in bilateral relations, Russias Foreign Ministry said on Wednesday.

"From subordinate diplomats of Japans embassy in Moscow - often by phone - we hear some demands which later are conveyed in the statements by high-ranking Japanese government representatives as official notes of protest," the ministry said.

"We firmly reject such demarches since Russia has the sovereign right to [conduct] any activity on its own soil, including measures to bolster national defense capabilities. These steps are not in the least aimed against neighboring states and are exclusively our countrys domestic affair," the commentary said.

"Regrettably, such backsliding by Tokyo into megaphone diplomacy not only doesnt facilitate a positive atmosphere in our relations, but in fact damages (ties), hampering the development of an entire range of Russian-Japanese relations," the ministry stressed.

The Russian Foreign Ministry says "any emerging concerns should be cleared up not with the help of ceremonial protests but through existing mechanisms of bilateral dialogue on confidence measures in security. They include meetings by the Security Councils heads (the latest of them took place in Tokyo on October 4), talks between the foreign and defense ministers in a two plus two format and ministerial consultations on strategic stability," the commentary said.

Another example of "the Japanese sides response, so odd in its form," to Russias activity on its own territory was a protest, allegedly lodged by the Japanese government with Russia via diplomatic channels, at a practice firing exercise on the South Kuril Islands.

According to the Kyodo news agency, the Japanese embassy in Moscow lodged the protest. Japans media reported that Moscow informed Tokyo on October 8 that the firing exercise would be held on the South Kurils on October 10 through 13.

Moscow and Tokyo have been negotiating to sign a peace treaty since the mid-20th century. The main obstacle to achieving this is the issue over ownership of the South Kuril Islands. After the end of World War II, the Kuril Islands were incorporated into the Soviet Union. However, the ownership of Iturup, Kunashir, Shikotan Islands and the Habomai Islands is being challenged by Japan. Russias Foreign Ministry has stated many times that Russias sovereignty over the islands is beyond any doubt. In 1956, the Soviet Union and Japan signed a joint declaration on ceasing the state of war, but no peace treaty has been signed yet.

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