
PRIORITIZE ACCESS IN JAPAN-RUSSIA DISPUTE

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Russian President Vladimir Putins visit to Japan on June 28 will not bring the hoped-for breakthrough in the countries territorial dispute. Yet, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe can still salvage something from the wreckage of his Russia policy by agreeing to Moscows proposal to create a visa-free area between Hokkaido and Sakhalin, including the disputed islands. This will not see the return of the islands to Japan, but it would see the return of Japanese to the islands.

For three years, Abe has worked tirelessly to secure a resolution to Japans territorial dispute with Russia over the islands off the coast of Hokkaido (known in Russia as the Southern Kurils). Announced in May 2016, Japans new approach saw Abe cultivate close personal ties with Putin and offer economic incentives via an eight-point economic cooperation plan.

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