

## Japan-Russia Relations: Tokyo's Balancing Act

Dr. Yoko Hirose, Keio University

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**Tatsumi:** Today I'm happy to have Dr. Yoko Hirose from Keio University, she's an emerging scholar on Japan-Russia relations and Japan-Eurasia relations. She will talk for about 15-20 minutes about her perspectives on what Japan has in store for its relations with Russia, what its challenges are, and what her potential policy recommendations might be. And in the interest of full disclosure, she and I went to the same high school back in the day. So without further ado, *douzo* [please go ahead].

**Hirose:** Thank you for your kind introduction, and good afternoon everyone. First, it is a great honor for me to be here. I'd like to express my gratitude to Ms. Tatsumi and the Stimson Center for this kind invitation. Today I would like to talk about Japan-Russia relations, especially after the Ukrainian crisis. As you know, Russian intervention in Ukraine has been a serious concern during the crisis. Japan is suffered by the dilemma of policy toward Russia. At first, I'd like to brief the background of the Japan-Russia relations. Japan has been trying to recover all Northern Territories, namely: Kunashiri Island, Etorofu Island, Shikotan Island, and Habomai Island from Russia. This is a map of Japan, and the northern area is – this is Etorofu, and Kunashiri and Habomai and Shikotan. So, all four islands are very near to Hokkaido. And, it is a precondition for Japan to complete this comprehensive treaty with Russia. Therefore the territorial problem is so critical for Japan to think about to think about the relations with Russia. On the other hand, Russia has been protecting the official stance that there have never been territorial problem with Japan. In addition, Russia has been regarding Japan as not a sovereign state, but as a puppet of the US although Japan has been facing dilemmas between the US and Russia.

Then, Shinzo Abe, present prime minister, has been trying to make the personal relationship with Vladimir Putin, Russian president, deeper for the mutual confidence building as a premise to resolve the territorial dispute. They met five times between December 2012, when Abe took office, and February of this year, when Abe participated in the Sochi Olympics opening ceremony. However, the Ukrainian crisis about Abe's efforts to note. That the Ukrainian crisis disrupts over three stages. First of all, it reminds them the secondary annexation of Crimea by Russia and somewhat of the Eastern Crisis.

The US and EU activated the sanction on Russia after its annexation of Crimea. And, they have gradually been making the sanction heavier. Actually, Japan does not want to activate the sanction on Russia. The reasons are the following: First of all, Abe personally made a great effort to keep the good relations with Russia-especially Vladimir Putin. Secondly, Ukraine is not such an important issue for Japan than Russia to be honest. However, Japan could not escape activating this sanction on Russia, as one of the members of the G7, and ally of US. In this situation the sanction by both parties are the important key to think about the relations between Russia and Japan, so I'd like to believe such sanctions until now. Please remind, first, Japan's sanction for Russia is much milder than the US and the EU's sanction for Russia as a premise.

The first one was activated on 18<sup>th</sup> March, just after the annexation of Crimea by Russia. The contents of the sanction are as follows: Firstly, to suspend consultation for relaxing visa regulations, and secondly, to freeze negotiations of a new investment agreement and outer space cooperation agreement, and agreement for the prevention of dangerous military activities. However, ironically enough, Russia highly appreciated Japan, saying that Japan became the sovereign state, not the puppet of the US, for the first time. Barack Obama, the US president, visited Japan from 23<sup>rd</sup>-25<sup>th</sup> of this April, and Abe welcomed him as a national guest. Actually, Obama has thought to be trying to escape the meeting with Abe as much as possible, so the meaning of this visit was so significant for the Japanese government. During the visit, Obama is believed to have asked Prime Minister Abe to take a stronger position toward Russia, concerning the Ukrainian crisis. Then, the Japanese government activated the second sanction for Russia on the 29<sup>th</sup> of April. It was just after Obama's visit to Japan and after the starting of the confusion in eastern Ukraine. In this sanction, Japan suspended the issuing of visas to 23 individuals who are considered to have contributed to the violations of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity temporarily.

In addition to that, Japan postponed Japanese Foreign Minister Kishida's visit to Russia and economic mission scheduled in April, and they have never been realized till now. Differently from the Russian reaction from the first sanction, Russia criticized Japan's actions this time-especially accusing that Japan was forced to do so by a foreign power, actually meaning US power. On the other hand, Vladimir Putin issued a message for Japan on 24 May as follows: First of all, Russia is ready to talk on all four islands, as the meaning of this message is very significant for Japan because it is almost the first time they [Russia] showed the possibility of thinking on all four islands. Secondly, the final resolution on this territorial issue does not exist now, but it will be made in the difficult negotiation. Thirdly, the final resolution should not harm both interests, but become the draw or win-win between Japan and Russia. Fourthly, Russia has been really shocked by Japan's sanction against Russia, and they doubt if Japan wants to negotiate actually.

In this way, Putin showed that he is opening the window for Japan and everything of the future relation between them depends on Japan's attitude. Then, the third sanction by Japan was activated on 5<sup>th</sup> August after the accident on Malaysia airlines on 17<sup>th</sup> July. The contents of this sanction are as follows: Firstly, to freeze assets of individuals and groups supporting the separation Crimea from Ukraine and to prohibit imports from Crimea. Secondly, Japan decided to freeze fund for new project in Russia, in line with the policy of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. As you know, concerning the accident of Malaysia airlines, the EU and the US activated additional and much further sanction against Russia in the end of July. And for this measure, Russia took serious retaliatory measures for the EU and the US which read seriously about economic influence, especially for Eastern Europe and Baltic countries. However, Russia did not take the retaliatory measures for Japan, maybe because Russia is understanding that Japan did not want to activate sanctions on Russia. And, Russia did not also want to escape from the retaliatory measures for Japan. So this Russian action seems to be a manifestation of their goodwill for Japan.

However, Russia took retaliatory measure for Japan on the 22<sup>nd</sup> August, and handed a list of Japanese citizens who are banned from visiting Russia at that time. Although the names of them have never been

made public. Nevertheless, 31<sup>st</sup> August, Lavrov, Russian foreign minister degraded that Russia accepted the invitation for Vladimir Putin by Japanese government. So, the realization of Putin visit to Japan depends on the Japanese stance. However, Japan has not decided on it yet, reading the US reaction.

As a conclusion, I'd like to mention some points. Actually, Japan is facing the difficulty or dilemma between the US and Russia. However, Japan should carry out independent and balanced diplomacy as a sovereign state. Now, Russia changed their diplomatic priority from Europe to Asia, and Russia-China relations have become deeper and deeper now. However, actually, Russia doesn't trust China, and the relationship between them can be said to be a superficial one. So Russia needs other partners in Asia, so Japan has a chance to make a better relationship with Russia. In addition, Russian position in the world is weak now. However, it is very difficult due to the Ukrainian crisis and relations with the US. Thank you so much for your kind listening.

**Kendall:** Thank you very much for your talk, I'm James Kendall, Red Fox Consulting. Could you talk a little bit about the depth of Japanese investment in natural gas in Siberia, and the effect those investments are having on the decision, both for sanctions and also the islands-the Northern Territories as you...?

**Hirose:** Thank you for your question. Actually, Japanese companies had invested a huge amount in Siberia, but there was an accident on the Siberian development, because Gazprom, the almost national company of Russia suspended cooperation with Japanese companies, so we are really worried about the corporation to invest to Siberia, so now the activity is not so active. But, I think in this situation, our cooperation concerning energy field, there are no effects from the Ukrainian crisis because as you know, we had a big earthquake in 2011, and then our nuclear plants were suspended. So now, we are really needing to keep the energy. So Russia is also one of the important resources of our country. Although the EU and US activated the sanction also over the energy field, but I think Japan will not cover for the field I think.

**Rozman:** Thank you for your presentation; I'm Gil Rozman, formerly of Princeton, now at the Asan Forum. I've been covering this issue very closely this summer, and we've been printing summaries of the Japanese debates, and you haven't really presented all sides of the debate in Japan. Also we are covering the Russian response in which some are saying '*hikiwake*' the proposal by Putin is now dead. Putin might come, but he's not going to offer that. So you gave, I think, two reasons why Japan should break with its allies and take an independent course towards Russia-independent of what Russia does in Ukraine. One reason is that China really would welcome Japan as a partner, and Russia is very cautious of China. Many in Japan disagree with you, and many here disagree with you on that-that Russia gets very little from Japan and it's very close to China, and is not going to be very cautious towards China just because it gets some kind of deal with Japan. The second reason you gave is that Japan may get back-will get back-islands and that you even suggested that Putin's statement in May might mean four islands. But virtually nobody believes there will be four islands, so people are saying at most there will be two islands which Russia has offered Japan several times in the past. So what is the big gain for Japan, and what is the cost for Japan in doing this, when it's telling other countries 'help us' when China is pressuring Japan on the Senkaku/Diaoyu issue, and now you are saying 'we don't want to help European countries or the United States when they feel Russia is pressuring in Europe'-isn't Japan weakening its

position with its allies if it just takes this into policy, and what does Japan really get from making this decision.

**Tatsumi:** I'll let you think about that because it's such a huge question that you've presented...in the meantime, go ahead.

**Mosettig:** Mike Mosettig, PBS Online Newshour. First of all, some of this may be lost in translation, but words are important. The Malaysian airplane didn't have an accident, it was shot out of the sky by a missile, presumably fired by a...if you're referring to the Malaysian plane over Ukraine, obviously the first Malaysian plane was an accident, but the second Malaysian plane was not an accident. If you could elaborate more on your answer to the first question, what is driving this more for the Abe government and Japanese policy makers? Is it the desire to get the islands back, which has been going on since 1945, or is it the energy issue and the need for other energy supplies?

**Tatsumi:** So I guess, first for you to consider is why the Abe government looks so willing to engage Russia? I guess that was the bottom of your question, right Mike? And the second one is a much larger one, from Dr. Rozman. So, I'll let you choose from...I would like you to talk to both questions, but in what order, it's up to you.

**Hirose:** Thank you for your questions. About the Malaysian Airline, you were right of course, and I'm sorry to have made the mistake. Why is Abe willing to engage Russia? I think it's a personal reason, because he has special feelings for the northern area, and because his grandfather engaged to the problem. So he wants to put his name in history to recover the northern islands. Then, in the diplomatic field, he wants to resolve two problems. The first one is the northern territory problem. The second one is the people's ...abduction to North Korea. So, he tried to resolve these problems. And, about your question, it's a really really huge question. Actually, for Japan, the Northern Territory is a very important territory, because of the former residents, and resources. Around the Northern Territories, there are good fishing grounds. So it is very important for Japan to recover the Northern Territory. It is related, the other question on Abe's willingness to engage Russia. Now, the former residents have become aged, and many have died. So if he resolves the problem soon, maybe nobody knows about the Northern Territory. Maybe now we can say it is a really critical period. So many Japanese tops try to resolve the territorial problem, so they showed me the mutual confidence building. For this aim, the Japanese government and Japanese companies invested a huge amount for Russia. There are some opinions, but such attitude is not so good because Russia would rather that Japan will pay until the resolution of territorial problem. So maybe, I don't think it will be interest of Japanese government, so the way of resolution is very important. But they are always seeking about the Northern Territory at first, so our choice of diplomatic attitude for Russia was so limited until now, unfortunately.

**Tatsumi:** First goes to Robin White

**White:** Thank you very much for dealing with all of these difficult questions, Robin White, retired foreign service. When I was in Tokyo in the 1980s I was following Japan-Soviet relations and it was kind of the same old story. The Japanese Keidanren and other organizations were seeing all sorts of riches in Siberia and the government was seeing that because the Soviets wanted the money and the technology

then there could be a deal on the Northern Territories. So here we are again, I guess one question is, can anybody really seriously believe Putin when he says 'oh yeah, maybe we'll talk about the floor'? That's so cynical. I mean even Abe with his grandfather complex really can't believe Putin on that. And then, another question is, every time there seem to be serious secret negotiations where they were talking about perhaps two to Japan and two to Russia, the people involved were savaged by the conservative press and the conservatives in the sound trucks and their careers destroyed. So is there any realism at all in Japan on this issue?

**Hirose:** Thank you so much. For the first question, in my opinion, it is really doubtful that Putin is ready to return the two, even two, islands. I don't think there is no possibility that he is ready to return four islands, it's just lip service. In Japan, many people think that now is the chance for Japan, because territory problem is really controversial in every country. So to resolve the territorial problem, a strong leader is favorable. So, as you know, President Putin is a strong leader, so he can maybe make Russian people silent if Putin decided to return the islands. It is really doubtful about Putin's real mind. But, Japan has to make a resolution now. Now, the second question...sorry, could you repeat it again?

**White:** When people tried to negotiate in the past, and talked about two to one and two to the other, it was met with a very bad reaction, -unintelligible-

**Hirose:** Yes, as you said almost all negotiations are secret, and some retired diplomats wrote about the negotiations, maybe I think, there are no old information in his book, but, even such a point of negotiations...people thought it was really sensational. We think that we had many occasions where we could recover two islands in our history. But all of them were not realized by the pressure from the US in the Cold War era, and recent years by the pressure of our foreign ministry. We don't have a single opinion for the resolution for the territory problem. Some people think the two islands are okay, it's better than the zero option, but many people think that Japan should recover the four islands together, so it's not easy for us to make a single policy for the Northern Territory problem.

**Tatsumi:** The lady here in the middle

**Yang:** Thank you, reporter from Voice of America, My question is: at the end of your speech you mentioned that Russia does not trust China and they need other partners in Asia, so I'm just wondering...what makes you...could you elaborate on that, on why Russia does not trust China and could give us some examples, thank you.

**Hirose:** As I said, now, Russia's diplomatic priority is in Asia, so China is very important partner for making diplomacy in Asia, especially Russia and China have been sharing their interests, trying to make a multi-polar world against the world led by only the US. In the global level, they can be good partners. But to think about the regional issues, Russia is really worried about the influence to the center of Asia from China. Because Central Asia was the former USSR and it is really important to hear of interests whole Russia. To think about another example, for example, BRICS- BRICS means five economic countries, Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, and in the BRICS meetings Russia and China try to be at the top of the five countries. For example, they made a bank. About bank, China tried to be top of the project. On the other hand, Russia tried to make thick relations with Brazil and India, and we can

find another example to think about SCO-Shanghai Cooperation Organization, in the project of the SCO they rival to influence Central Asia. To think about new member, from South Asia, Iran and so on, to think about the regional politics I think they are serious rivals. The story is also related to the Northern Territorial problem. Recently, Russia tried to develop the Northern Territory area, many feel they are really eager to make the Northern Territory a good strategic field for the military, then they are planning that the...now it is pended by the sanction, but Russia tried to abide Mistral military fleet, tried to put one in the Black Sea, and one by the Northern Territory. The reason of putting such a fleet to the Northern Territory, Russia is fearing fleet from China, so it is the reasons of your question.

**Tatsumi:** There's a follow-up from the gentleman in the back.

**Yu:** Thank you; actually I have a follow-up question...

**Tatsumi:** Could you identify yourself for us? Sorry-

**Yu:** Oh, sorry, my name is Donghui Yu of the China Review News Agency of Hong Kong. I have a follow-up question about the Japan-Russia and China relations. You mentioned that Russia does not trust China. But the reality is that right now China and Russia are getting closer and closer, and they have common needs for the geopolitical strategy to offset the US-Japan alliance, or Japan has the territory disputes both with China and Russia. So, do you mean that it is not necessary for Japan to worry about closer relations between China and Russia? Or does Japan need to find some strategic tactics to deal with this situation to improve the relations with China and Russia? Thank you.

**Hirose:** Thank you for your question. For Japan, the relationship between Russia and China is really big threat because China and Russia are sharing their interests, not only on the global level but also the territorial dispute for Japan. They are sharing the historical understanding, especially on the situation after World War II, they believed that Russia (or former USSR) kept a piece of Eastern Asia after World War II. So their position toward Japan is very similar. So Japan is really worried about the alliance between them.

**Yu:** What's the tactics that they'll be able to...

**Hirose:** It is very difficult because at first...Now unfortunately the relationship between Japan and China is really bad. Many people say that it is really difficult to make a good solution to improve the relationship with China, also have the problem with South Korea, most of them are really difficult, so in this situation, at least before the Ukrainian crisis, for Abe, Putin is the most reliable leader in Eastern Asia. So he can make a personal relationship with Vladimir Putin, but it is almost impossible to reach this China and South Korea. Now, the relationship with Putin also seems to be really difficult. So, I think the Japanese government now troubling to think about diplomacy in East Asia.

**Tatsumi:** Thank you, the lady over here –

**Gogulapati:** Hi I'm Ranjani from Northrop-Grumman, can you speak to the extent of any defense cooperation, or any defense industry cooperation between Japan and Russia?

**Hirose:** Thank you for your question. Actually, Japan tried to proceed the cooperation in the military area, but unfortunately because of the Ukrainian crisis now we must stop the military cooperation with Russia. Before, we had some joint military activity in the Japan Sea and so on. Now, they've stopped it.

**Tatsumi:** And, there has not been defense cooperation at the industrial level. I mean, there is unit-level joint exercise, confidence building, port calls mutually and so forth but not at the industrial level for obvious reasons. – Ah, Dennis-over here-

**Halpin:** Hello, thank you for the presentation. I'm Dennis Halpin from the US-Korea institute at SAIS. I had a question on alliance team player, and what that means. As you know with the rebalance to Asia, there has been a big emphasis on our alliances in Asia and everyone being a team player. And with regard to Japan, I think Washington has gone out of its way to be a team player. For example, President Obama said in April in Tokyo that the Senkakus were covered by the mutual defense treaty. Now, if the American people don't want boots on the ground in Iraq, right? Do you really think they want boots on the ground on some unoccupied islands in the East Sea? But still, he said that. On collective self-defense: our Korean allies have had issues with that because of history. But I hear behind closed doors Washington's really been beating up on the Koreans and saying "you need to be a team player". Third example: in The Hague, President Obama acted like a wedding matchmaker in a Seoul tea room when he brought a reluctant prospective bride Park Geun-hye to sit, he sat down in between her and Prime Minister Abe in The Hague. So, then we look at Japan. Prime Minister Abe says the US alliance is a priority, and yet on his Russia policy and North Korea policy he seems to think it's okay to go a bit his own way. Now when I worked in Congress I understand the sensitivity about the abductee issue. But still, I hear Washington is saying "we need team players to deal with the North Korean nuclear issue." And with Putin, if you look at American history, American historians know using minority populations as an excuse to invade another country, Crimea and Ukraine, reminds many Americans of one person named Adolf Hitler in 1938 who used the German minority population as an excuse to invade Czechoslovakia, that makes us unhappy. So my question is: America has obviously been a good alliance team player for Japan, has Japan been a good alliance team player for America?

**Tatsumi:** Oooh, you really put her on the spot!

**Hirose:** Thank you for your question. Just in my opinion, we think the partnership with the US is the most important for Japan. But, recently we have some kind of problems. For example, now the US military bases in Okinawa is our serious problem, and of course Japan has never had a military after World War II. But now we are asking to work with holding militaries in the world. Now the Japanese government is thinking about the change in our constitution, because the problem is related to our alliance to the US. On the other hand, as you said our US-Japanese authority is covering the Senkaku problem, but not covering the Northern Territories problem. I think there is some kind of political thinking to the American stance for the Japanese diplomacy, so it is a really difficult task for Japan. But now Japan is trying to be a good partner to the US, and is now trying to change our stance, including our constitution, so now it is critical but please understand, Japan is thinking about the best partner is the US, not Russia.

**Tatsumi:** Although, I'll just complement her remarks a little bit, that I think there probably is a political calculation in Mr. Abe and the people who are close to him, that are leaning forward on the defense area when it comes to US-Japan alliance, that's the part where they are being a good team player. But I think your question is fair which is, in the overall scheme of things, would that be good enough action for Japan to be considered as good team player for the US and, like Dr. Rozman pointed out, for Europe when they are facing this pressure from Russia. I think that is a very fair question and I frankly don't think there's-I haven't seen much debate inside Japan, I just follow media, but I just don't think there is enough thinking of that total balance way of thinking. Over here to...thank you, you've been patient.

**Sanchez:** Hi my name is Alejandro Sanchez; I'm an analyst for a small think tank. My question is: what is your opinion about the role of the Japanese media in discussing, reporting Japan-Russia relations, do you think they are being objective, are they being neutral, are they portraying Russia as more of an aggressive power, are they informing the Japanese population properly or are they being more biased to one side or another? Thank you.

**Hirose:** Thank you for your question. I think Japanese media is not so neutral on Russian information. For example, to think about the present Ukrainian crisis, as you know there is a propaganda war between US/EU and Russia. The argument between them are really different. Then to think about the Japanese media, they are writing almost the same argument as the US. But I'm covering not only Western media, but also Russian media and Ukrainian media. All media is not neutral in this situation. Generally, the Japanese media is not fair for Russia.

**Tatsumi:** Over here to the gentlemen...

**Taylor:** My name is John Taylor, I'm with the State Department, although currently I'm not at the State Department, I'm a student at the National Intelligence University. I've seen the Northern Territories with my own eyes when I was serving at the consulate in Sapporo, *そして、やっぱりみるとほしくなるんですね* (Once you see it, you begin to want it). I have a personal interest in this matter. My question sort of builds on the question from the gentleman over here, I certainly agree and am hopeful that Japan has seen benefits from its alliance with the US, but do you think there are things the US can or should do to help resolve this territorial dispute, the Northern Territory dispute, for its ally Japan?

**Hirose:** To think about the historical problem, I can understand that it is very difficult to use the Japan-US treaty in the Northern Territorial problem, but I think the much more important thing is political support from the US. Maybe it's really important to improve the situation of the territorial problem with Russia.

**Taylor:** Political support in what form?

**Hirose:** I don't know the reality, but many people believe that the US is against that Japan will finish the problem of returning two islands. So if it is true, I think it is not good for Japan because it's my opinion that even only two islands returning is much better than the other option so...I don't know, I'm sorry.

**Tatsumi:** Jim, you have a follow-up?

**Kendall:** Just a comment, or its phrased as a question but...If Japan accepted two islands, if they agreed and broke with the principal of territorial integrity and took two islands instead of all four, do you think that has consequences for other island disputes, other territorial disputes that Japan-and not only Japan but the United States may be involved in worldwide. Where China might be encouraged, on the Senkaku issue for example, where they could take “okay, we’ll carve up the Senkaku Islands”. Do you think that that might be why the United States is concerned about that?

**Hirose:** I think, about the Senkaku Islands, Japan has been keeping effective control for them, but concerning the Northern Territory, USSR or Russia has been keeping effective control to them. It is a big difference. And in addition, to think about the Northern Territory problem, we must think about the San Francisco peace treaty. At the San Francisco peace treaty, Japan abandoned so-called “Chishima islands” and then it is very difficult to define what the Chishima islands are. Russia insisted that Chishima islands would include all four islands, but Japan said that not all of them are Chishima, but around the period that the San Francisco peace treaty was signed, Japanese people actually called Etorofu and Kunashiri “Southern Chishima”. So this is some kind of proof that Japan recognized Etorofu and Kunashiri as part of Chishima which was abandoned by Japan itself. So maybe with that discussion, maybe just controversial issue would be Habomai and Shikotan but Japanese government insisted that all four islands should be returned.

**Tatsumi:** Dr. Rozman has a follow-up and then...

**Rozman:** One theme that you haven’t raised has been raised in Japan recently, especially by Ambassador Togo, whose views you are close to in many ways, and I think that’s the biggest theme. And that is that for Abe there is a desire to break away from this sort of “Post-War Japan” and for Putin there is a desire to establish and independent, strong national identity, and Togo is suggesting that this issue, a lot of it I think, is about civilizations. It’s about Japan declaring its separation from Western civilization while maintaining the alliance very strongly. Do you think of this? Have you been reading these articles discussing this broader theme of: “this is a way for Japan and Russia both to establish themselves as major civilizational forces, different from China, and for Japan to sort of draw Russia out as a civilizational center , and separate it from China given the great danger of Chinese-Russian overlap on these identity issues.”?

**Hirose:** Yes, I agree with your idea and it’s really a danger for Japan. I also read the article and book of Ambassador Togo, and I agree with his idea, and in my opinion, Prime Minister Abe is so naïve for the diplomatic thinking. It is very difficult but Japan tends to set their walls themselves, so to think about the next steps they must break through their mind to fix some kind of framework so...

**Tatsumi:** I think the gentleman in front...

**Ek:** Hi my name is Casey Ek, I’m a Journalism student at American University. My question is about Japan’s militarization and the United States’ role in that. So with the United States kind of lending a lot its resources to making Japan and its military a more normal military-with the United States’ role in making Japan’s military a more normal military, and with that having Japan kind of stand alone as a more sovereign nation within this area, contrary to how it was in past years, post-World War II. And

Japan's willingness to engage Russia in ways that are contrary to United States interests and EU interests, so with the United States pouring resources into Japan's military, is it a possibility that as this continues Japan will act in ways that are against the United States' interests...how do I say this...will the United States lending its resources to Japan's military in fact hurt it in terms of dealing with Russia?

**Tatsumi:** Let me just clarify, what do you mean when you refer to "US lending its resources"?

**Ek:** Sure, I mean in its sale of drones and all types of military assets in that way.

**Tatsumi:** Okay, I mean, in terms of basically sending US forces out there?

**Ek:** Not only that...and its willingness to sell its resources, all that, military companies, military arms manufacturers and all that, willing to sell Japan all its military assets.

**Tatsumi:** Because she's kind of...that's an unfair question to her frankly.

**Ek:** Sure

**Tatsumi:** So let me just take that. I think my simplest answer is that's what the alliance is for. I would like to think that Japanese leaders have enough common sense in that, with the alliance commitment there are two sides. That the US helping Japan in terms of being willing to transfer its assets or willing to sell the latest technology equipment, and perhaps investing in the forces in the Western Pacific, helping Japan to defend itself. In return, Japan does have certain obligations. And, it would be an extremely controversial situation where Japan is actively working with the Russian military as we speak. But the fact of the matter is that since the Crimean invasion occurred, Japan-Russia mil-to-mil defense cooperation, which has been very superficial-it's nothing more than confidence building, accident/incident at sea procedures and protocols, and port visits-those have been suspended, and it will not be resumed I'm presuming. I just don't think that you will find the US "lending its resources", using your words, backfiring on the alliance, I don't think that'll happen and I think there are a couple of people in the room that can vouch for that. Do you want to say something with that James?

**Kendall:** Yeah, I would actually. Prior to the Crimea situation there were quite a few people in the United States government who thought, who looked upon Japan's relationship with development in Siberia as a good thing, strategically, because it prevented or discouraged the Russians from completely throwing in their lot with the Chinese and giving the Russians a reason to sit a little bit on the fence and play both sides, both selling energy to Japan and getting development and all that kind of assistance in Siberia, as well as working with the Chinese on other projects. So this recent phenomenon creates a real problem for the United States strategically that you don't see talked about on the news that much, where we were fairly favorable of what Japan was doing...we the United States have to do a strategic calculation of which is more important- Eastern Europe and Ukraine or what is going on in the Pacific. Obviously we are tilting far more towards what's going on in Crimea and what's going on in Eastern Ukraine is far more important right now than what Japan may have going on with Russia. As far as the whole idea of us "pouring money" ...we don't spend that much on Japan.

**Tatsumi:** We wish we got all of that money -laughs-

**Kendall:** Yeah, the Japanese pay for: heating, air conditioning, power, construction of new assets and everything else in Japan for United States forces. So far from being rogue they're doing everything they can, and we actually have kind of a bargain basement kind of deal with the Japanese from the strategic perspective of the United States, they pick up a lot of the tab for that. As far as the assertiveness of Japan, the Japanese-and this has been going on for several years this is not an Abe phenomenon, this has been going on for ten years- the Japanese have seen the gradual erosion, relative erosion and actual erosion, of American power in the Western Pacific and they understand they have to do more to fill the gap because we're not going to-can't. So, this rise of militarization, this is a drum that's been beaten since the 70s, so you need to be careful of that. Given the relative weakness of the United States military in the Western Pacific militarily compared to what we used to have, and then the rising power of China never used to be a factor. Now, resurgence in what the Russians are doing, although I don't think that's that significant, makes the Japanese feel that they have to fill the gap, and flex a bit, and grow their own capabilities. Because they're not quite sure-somebody else mentioned-about the strength of American commitment on issues like the Senkaku islands. They're not quite sure where we actually stand on that. So they feel the need to develop their own capabilities and expand it more. All of their amphibious shipping and all that, that's all homegrown, paid by the Japanese tax payer. That's not an American...it's not like Iraq or something like that or Egypt, or somewhere, where we are pouring money into a country's military.

**Tatsumi:** Thanks James. Sir, I think you had a question, thanks for being patient.

**Williams:** Skip Williams from RAND. I just wanted to follow-up on your question a little bit, and ask it a little different way. Beyond the US relationship with Japan and even with Russia, is there something in terms of Japanese strength that could be worked with Russia for the international community that Japan is particularly able to do, either from a standpoint of its capability or its moral authority or things like confidence and stability, but also nuclear proliferation, other proliferation, things like that. Are there areas that Japan is more suited than other nations, or other international groups, to work with Russia?

**Hirose:** Thank you for your question. Actually, Japanese people are trying to make cooperation not only from the point of view of the territorial dispute but also cultural cooperation, technological cooperation, and so on. We believe that such kinds of barriers of cooperation be some kind of mutual confidence. But unfortunately now it cannot be said that we are sharing such kind of confidence. But to think about Russian society, usual Russian people like Japan so much. For example, there are so many Japanese restaurants in Moscow, and they love Japanese novels, for example Haruki Murakami, Ryu Murakami and so on, they are always bestsellers. So to think about grassroots, we can share the same mind to seek a peaceful society. But maybe in the political field it would be very difficult to cooperate between each other.

**Tatsumi:** Mike, and then after that...

**Mosettig:** I just wanted a clarification on something you said a couple times, and make sure I understood it correctly, that you indicated or said that Russia was shifting its focus or priority from Eastern/Central Europe to Asia? That you think Ukraine and fixing its borders there is no longer the top

Russian priority compared with dealing with China and Japan? I just wanted to make sure I was clear on your point there.

**Hirose:** Thank you. Actually I said that the Russian priority will be moved from Europe to Asia. But it's not so concrete. It's not so permanent policy, but maybe temporary policy. Historically, Russia changed their diplomatic priority from Europe to Asia or Asia to Europe depending on the war situation. So now we can see that present Russian priority is in Asia, but I don't know that after the Ukrainian crisis will be resolved, maybe there will be some changing.

**Tatsumi:** Sir –

**Weintraub:** Thank you; I'm Leon Weintraub from the University of Wisconsin. I understand how important is the return of the Northern Territory to the government of Japan. But I think being realistic in this environment, with what we see in the historical record of the government of Russia and of Putin, and if anything the government of Russia is moving in a more nationalistic, a more xenophobic, type of a phase. I think the government of Japan runs the risk of seeking a phantom, seeking something that's not there, that's not gonna happen, at the risk of alienating the United States and the European allies. To say, for a country with the status of Japan, to say "Ukraine is not an interest of ours", if you were maybe the government of Fiji I could understand that, but not for the government of Japan. I can understand if there was a realistic option of getting the northern islands back, but I think in this environment that is so remote. It seems to me the government is risking its alliances and its friendship with other democracies in the chase for something that isn't going to happen.

**Hirose:** Thank you for your question. Actually, I think you are right. In addition, now the Russian nationalism is very exciting, especially by the annexation of Crimea. But it's also began to run a problem for the Japanese government. So it's kind of part of the dilemma for Japan. To think about just the Russian situation, a strong leader such as Putin is good for Japan, but maybe nationalism is the really big difference for Japan. Some people say that now is the chance, but some people now is not chance, so it depends on the point of view. I think it is controversial argument.

**Tatsumi:** Dimitri...

**Dimitri:** Thank you very much, my name is Dimitri I'm an intern here at Stimson. I'm not a Japan expert but I am Russian and spent 20 years of my 22 year life in Moscow, so I thought I could be available on my personal perspective on the issue. First I would like to say that the fact there is no peace treaty between Russia and Japan has not affected the perception of Japan among the Russian population. As you said, Japanese soft power is quite a big thing in Russia. People are interested in Japanese culture; people do read Haruki Murakami, [Kafka on the Shore](#) is my personal favorite. People do travel to Japan, and I would have to say that they don't think about Japan in political terms at all. For example, among the youth people are more interested in the United States from a political standpoint, not Japan. And certainly I don't think people perceive Japan as a political puppet, Japanese is thought of as a sovereign nation in East Asia. But it is true that as far as bilateral relations go Russia is much more interested in China. We need China on many fronts, we need Chinese know how to develop our Far East because we lack the infrastructure in Central and Eastern Russia, so Chinese experience of developing their border

regions is very useful to us in that respect. Also, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization is a very big deal, and every Russian leader will say that. It's very good for flexing muscles in the face of the West, saying "you have NATO, well big whoop we have China", and that is very important. And, of course, China is seen as a major strategic partner, and Japan is less important in that way I think because I think Putin is quite happy with the status quo. The important thing is the energy and trade for us right now. On that front I think things are going quite well: the exchange of liquefied natural gas is ongoing, their major projects on Sakhalin Island that is quite okay. So I think the two countries have reached a certain *modus vivendi* in the sense that they know how this operates, and Putin I think does not seek to review the situation. But it does seem to me that the Japanese government is more interested in changing the situation right now. Which also makes me think, and this is my question, how perfectly aligned are the interests of Abe's government and the US government right now, and whether they might be diverging.

**Tatsumi:** Vis-à-vis Russia? Is that your question or just in general?

**Dimitri:** Ah, no no. The interests between the Abe government and the US government...

**Tatsumi:** Just in like a foreign policy/diplomatic relations in general.

**Hirose:** As I said, for Japan the alliance with the US is the most important diplomatic policy. On the other hand, now I think Japan can be said that biggest power in East Asia, maybe it can be said that China is also a big power. But maybe from the point of view of European standard, Japan is most reliable partner for the US and Europe. So I think for the US leaders they hope that Japan will be working with the US and Europe with the democratic standard for the Russia, China and other issues in the world. In this sense maybe the time of restrict for using the military in Japan. But maybe from the democratic point of view, Japan will be cooperating with the US from all aspects in the world's situation, maybe including economic support and so on. Now we are at a critical point because there are many serious problems in the world, not only Ukraine but also Syria and Iraq and so on, so in all aspects Japan has a positive idea to cooperate with the US to give peace in the world.

**Tatsumi:** Any other questions? I think actually the purpose of this project is to introduce Japan's regionalists who doesn't focus on US-Japan relations into Washington's audience and today I think you got a taste of that. And then, actually, the project is supposed to be mutually beneficial for these regionalists to get Washington perspective. Because at often times Russian experts kind of get together with fellow Russian experts across the board and talk about the issue they are deeply familiar with among themselves. This broader view, or how external audiences look at some of these issues, doesn't often come into their conversations. So I hope this session was useful and helpful to you, it was certainly helpful to me, and I certainly hope it was helpful for Dr. Hirose. She's working on a paper; we will bring her back next spring along with three other authors who focus on three other topics next spring. This is her first session that she's had in public forum in DC, policy focused audience so hopefully this experience won't scare her. So with that I'd like to thank Dr. Hirose and I'd like to thank you all for your contributions.

**Hirose:** Thank you so much