

Relations with Japan(1992-1999) under Yeltsin era

1. First Term(1992-1995)

In the short-lived months after the demise of the Soviet Union in 1992, when Russian foreign policy was directed primarily toward the West, Japan occupied the conductor seat in Russian policy toward the East. But after the failure in reaching a breakthrough that resulted in Yeltsin's cancellation of his September 1992 visit, relations stagnated for four years.

2. Second Term(1996-1999)

During Yeltsin's second term, when Yeltsin was at the height of his leadership in the autumn of 1997, he displayed initiative in his policy toward Japan that animated the relationship with an unforeseen momentum until the spring of 1998. The period ends with declining momentum, but enough to be rekindled in the first year of Putin's presidency.

1) Before the Krasnoyarsk Summit

Foreign Minister Primakov visited Japan in November 1996 when Yeltsin was still on leave to recover from his heart operation. He emphasized the importance of enhancing relations with Japan. He explicitly withdrew his suggestion to defer the territorial issue to the next generation.

Primakov also proposed consideration of further economic cooperation on the disputed four islands without harming the legal position of the two sides. It was an approach based on realism and step-by-step progress in bilateral relations. The Japanese side reacted positively.

2) Prime Minister Hashimoto's speech on July 24, 1997

The weakest link which needs to be strengthened among the four countries(Japan, Russia, China, and the United States) was Japan-Russia;

Warm appreciation of Russia's reform efforts and Hashimoto's personal message of friendship toward Yeltsin;

Readiness to expand the relationship, including energy cooperation;

Resolution of the territorial issue based on the principles of trust, mutual interest, and a long-term perspective.

3) Krasnoyarsk Summit on November 1, 1997

Hashimoto presented a new proposal to enhance economic cooperation called the Hashimoto-Yeltsin plan.

Just as Yeltsin's proposal (to conclude the peace treaty by 2000) to resolve the territorial issue was a surprise for the Japanese leadership, the Hashimoto-Yeltsin plan was a surprise for Russia.

4) Kawana Summit on April 19, 1998

The proposal made was an extension of Primakov's idea of economic cooperation; to build a joint marine-product processing factory on the disputed islands.

The proposal of Japan was a combination of drawing a border line between Urup and Etorofu (assigning sovereignty over the four islands to Japan) but leaving the current status of the islands for some time to come (with all administrative rights to Russia).

The Russian administration and media soon united to oppose it.

4. Geopolitics

Multipolarity and treating Japan as a possible pole also permeated Russian policy toward Japan. This approach envisaged a step-by-step development of relations.

It carried the imprint of Primakov's thinking, and his views are well reflected in Russian proposals related to the four islands.

5. Russian Proposals

To support the fishery negotiations (Nov. 1996)

To propose joint economic activities (Nov. 1996)

To propose a joint marine-product processing factory (April 1998)

To establish a “special legal regime” to bridge the gap between the first treaty and the second treaty(Nov. 1999)(Togo, 96)

Territorial issue under Yeltsin years

1. Five-stage proposal for solution

This proposal by Yeltsin was a step forward, as the first public acknowledgment by a senior Soviet politician of the territorial dispute.

The gist of the proposal was that the Soviet Union first of all “officially declare that it acknowledges the existence of a territorial dispute” in Soviet-Japanese relations.

The second step was to designate the disputed territory as a Soviet-Japanese “joint free-enterprise zone.”

The third and fourth steps involved “demilitarizing the islands” and then “signing a peace treaty.” On the basis of these steps being carried out during a fifteen-to twenty-year period.

The fifth and last step would leave the final solution to “the discretion of a new generation,” that would choose between joint administration, independent, free status, and reversion to Japan.

2. Modification of Japan’s Soviet Policy

A policy of “balanced expansion or expanded equilibrium” to replace the previously rigid adherence to the principle of “inseparability of economics and politics.”

“Balanced expansion” did not require that progress on economic cooperation be delayed until steps were taken toward resolving the territorial dispute.

In other words, although there was an unbreakable link between these two factors, “political” and “economic” matters could be expanded in a carefully balanced

manner.

1) Yeltsin's visit to Japan on October 11-13, 1993

Compared to Gorbachev's visit(April 1991), Yeltsin's resulted in two steps forward for Japan.

First, Yeltsin officially apologized for the long detention of Japanese prisoners of war in Siberia after World War Two. Gorbachev had gone no further than to express sympathy or condolence in referring to the detainees.

Progress on the territorial issue was the second step forward. Yeltsin reiterated that a territorial problem existed.

3. Japan's more positive approach toward Moscow

The new Russia policy was described as "multilayered." Efforts would be put into a broad range of areas in Russo-Japanese relations.

This approach had begun to be applied in 1992-93, but a good example of its more intensive application was the accelerated progress in the security dialogue and defense cooperation that occurred in 1996-97.

The agreement that the two governments concluded in February 1998, covering safe operation of Japanese fishing vessels in the seas around the four islands, can also be seen as a product of this approach.

Further progress was made in September 1998, when Japan decided to give Russian residents of the islands entry on a visa-free basis to receive emergency humanitarian assistance.

Similarly, in September 1999 Russia agreed to allow Japanese former residents and members of their families to make visa-free visits to the islands.

4. Hashimoto's new diplomatic policy toward Russia

Hashimoto advocated that the key elements of a new Japanese policy toward Russia

should be,

First, the need to promote “Eurasian or Silk Road Diplomacy.”

Second, he emphasized that Russo-Japanese relations should be governed by three guiding principles, “trust, mutual benefit, and a long-term perspective.”

Third, he made concrete proposals designed to strengthen Russo-Japanese relations.

- One was a call for cooperation in Russia’s energy development projects in Siberia and the Russian Far East.

- Another was that the Japanese government provide business-training programs for young Russians.

5. To summarize

By spring 1999, the diplomatic euphoria stirred by the “no-necktie” summits of November 1997 and April 1998 appeared to have evaporated.

Hashimoto’s and Yeltsin’s diametrically opposed proposals illustrated all too clearly the vast gap between their two nations when it came to settling the dispute over the islands.