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***Session III: Mixed Drivers***

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## Territorial disputes in the Asia-Pacific region: the Russian view, the Russian experience

Over the last year there was a noticeable worsening of territorial disputes in the Asia-Pacific region. Countries involved in these disputes not only exchanged harsh statements, but attracted air force and navy in order to make pressure on their opponents. However, so far the aircraft only inspected the disputed areas, but did not attack the "enemy" with missiles and bombs. Patrol boats used not real guns but water guns in order to force fishing boats of other countries out from territorial waters.

Observing the situation in the region, experts and journalists expressed the hope that tension will not grow up to the level, where using of lethal weapons would become possible. However, it seems their hope was not very strong. And there were some reasons not to be too confident and to believe in a "happy end" of the thriller about territorial disputes. A couple of years ago, experts and journalists said that countries involved in territorial disputes - Japan, China, and South Korea – were major economic partners; that under the condition of market economy economic interests prevailed over the political ambitions and nationalism; and that nobody would allow the territorial disputes to cause damage to the mutually beneficial economic cooperation. It seemed to be an axiom.

However, the reality turned out to be quite the opposite. In the summer of 2012 in response to the decision of the Japanese Government to nationalize several Senkaku islands, Beijing, which considers these islands as its territory named Dyaoyudao, made strong statements of protest. Then there were a series of anti-Japanese demonstrations. They led to a decline in production at Japanese plants, located in China. Part of the Japanese expressed the desire to transfer their businesses from China to India and Southeast Asia. Although the main reason for this step was the reduction of the profitability of production in China due to rising labor costs, an important role in this step still was played by the deterioration of relations because of the dispute over the Senkaku (Diaoyu).

Anti-Chinese sentiments and manifestations have caused damage also on political relations between China and Japan. The same can be said of Japan's relations with South Korea, which have deteriorated in the last year because of the activation of the demands of Japan to return Dokdo (Takeshima).

Here are just some of the **negative political consequences** of aggravation of territorial disputes in the Asia-Pacific region.

- 1.) China's strong reaction to Japan government's purchase of some of the Senkaku islands forced the Japan to increase cooperation with the U.S. in the field of security. It is not very good news for China. Along with the so-called North

Korean threat, China's reaction became an excuse for demands to change Article 9 of the Constitution of Japan and to transform the Japanese Self-Defense Forces into full-fledged Military Forces with giving them the rights to strike the territory of other countries and to use special forces to protect the disputed islands. In fact, China with its own hands pushed Japan to participation in the process of building a broad international coalition aimed at containing China, lobbied by the United States.

2.) The escalation of disputes between China and the countries of the South China Sea forced Vietnam and the Philippines to strengthen dialogue on defense with the United States. This, of course, is not suited to China's interests.

3.) Revitalization of Japan's claims on the return of Dokdo (Takeshima) which is under the jurisdiction of South Korea now, has led to the disruption of the signing of agreements between Japan and South Korea on cooperation in the exchange of intelligence information.

4.) The escalation of disputes about the ownership of Dokdo (Takeshima) and Senkaku (Diaoyu), according to some Russian experts, slowed down the process of negotiations between Tokyo, Beijing and Seoul on the formation of a free trade area with mutual settling not in dollars but in the currencies of Japan, China and South Korea.

There is one interesting aspect in all these cases: the government and politicians of the countries involved in territorial disputes are well aware of the bad impact of the worsening situation, but as if enchanted continue to follow the course of the aggravation.

This is due to two main reasons.

**The first reason: the pressure of public opinion.** Politicians and governments involved in territorial disputes have become hostages of the public opinion formed under the influence of propaganda campaigns they conducted. These campaigns were designed to shift public attention from internal problems to problems in relations with the outside world, sometimes contrived, to fighting an external enemy.

In particular, after a surge of pro-democracy student movement in China in 1989 in the mass consciousness have been actively implanted the idea of China as a country that has experienced in the recent past the humiliation caused by the policy of other countries - the great powers who were trying to turn China into a colony, as well as from Japan, unleashed a full-scale aggression against China. This campaign was designed to switch the attention of the population, especially young people, from the problems with democratization of the political system of China to the issue of

relations with its neighbors, complicated by the burden of past grievances. An additional aim of this campaign was to create in the minds of the population striving for what would be "revenge" upon former offenders: catch up and overtake them in economic development. The Chinese government especially actively promoted anti-Japanese sentiments. Perhaps their first serious clash came in 2005, when Japan's educational authorities recommended for use in schools textbooks which, in the opinion of Beijing, questioned the Chinese version of the number of victims Nanjing massacre of 1937. However, according to some experts, Chinese authorities, encouraging, or at least not discouraging the initial protests, accompanied by attacks of the offices of Japanese companies, have expressed dissatisfaction not only with the new Japanese history textbook, but also with Japan's attempts to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council.

Last summer's massive anti-Japanese riots manifestations across all of China arose because of the dispute over the Senkaku Islands (Diaoyu). Many Japanese experts believe that the protests were initiated by the China's government, were under its control and were intended to divert people's attention from internal problems and political scandals, particularly the scandal with the informal leader of the Chinese lefts, Bo Xilai. However, according to some Russian experts, the huge scale of the protests was an unexpected and unpleasant surprise for the Chinese authorities themselves. The authorities even had to use force to restrain the proliferation of protests and then put them down.

The Russian expert community has two diametrically opposite assumptions about the reasons and objectives of the last outburst of anti-Japanese demonstrations in China.

A) They have become part of the preparations for the transfer of power in China's new generation of senior managers;

B) They are the result of the situation when the Chinese authorities, busy with reacting to the scandal with Bo Xilai and the threat posed by the Chinese left, did not react in time to the emergence of mass indignation of the Chinese population to the nationalization of the Senkaku Islands (Diaoyu) by Japanese government, and did not stop it in its beginning.

It is interesting that the supporters of both versions used to say that after the approval of Xi Jinping as chairman of the China, anti-Japanese sentiments in China will calm down and the country will return to normal cooperation with Japan. However, this did not happen.

Xi Jinping and other Chinese leaders continue to make statements about the firmness of Beijing's position in the territorial disputes. There is no reduction of the level of anti-Japanese propaganda in China. Chinese TV channels show every day serials about the struggle of Chinese people against Japan in different periods of history. Some experts attribute this to the need to divert people's attention from internal problems in China. But it is clear that the deterioration of relations with Japan and other neighbors over disputes about the islands creates external problems for China that may affect the stability in the region, China's economic cooperation with neighboring countries and exacerbate the internal problems of China.

Similar trends of worsening of the situation because of territorial disputes are also observed in China's relations with the countries of the basin of the South China Sea and in the relations with South Korea.

**The second reason** for the aggravation of territorial disputes in the Asia-Pacific region is an exacerbation of rivalries in the region between the United States, trying to maintain and strengthen its leadership in the region and in the world, and China, which is suspected of having claims at least to regional leadership, or, –even claims to world domination. Although the Chinese officials eagerly urge not to believe the rumors about the "China threat", there is at least one factor that makes it credible: publications of high-ranking Chinese military or military analysts, which, in fact, justify the right of Beijing to global leadership. Of course, the Chinese authorities dissociate themselves from such publications, stating that they do not reflect the official position of Beijing and are no more than private opinions that can be legally expressed in a free China.

Even if it is so, and China does not have dreams about world hegemony, the rapid development of this country, its growing economic, political and military power are perceived in the United States as a challenge to their current leadership. We can see that the U.S. in response to this Chinese challenge is trying to build a broad international coalition to contain China. In addition to old allies like Japan, the United States is trying to attract into coalition new forces, such as Vietnam and India, which, like Japan, have territorial disputes with China. In Beijing they look at this process attentively and with growing irritation.

**And here we have a vicious circle.** The rise of nationalism prevents China from choosing the correct policy of relations with the neighbors in order to curb the severity of territorial disputes. On the contrary, the demands to return the islands and territories claimed by China sound more insistent. This strengthens the confidence of China's neighbors in the correctness of their desire to strengthen defense ties with the US. This, in turn, results in increasing of the negative attitude towards these countries

in China and gives a new reason for the Chinese nationalists, including nationalists among senior military officials, to put more pressure on the government to make it to tighten its position of China on territorial disputes.

It should be noted that opponents of China's territorial disputes make an important contribution to the aggravation of the situation. In the summer of 2012 the Japanese government did not consider it necessary to explain clearly to China the reasons of its decision to buy some of the Senkaku Islands from private owners to public use. As was announced later, Japanese government purchased the islands in order to prevent their purchase by the mayor of Tokyo Shintaro Ishihara. The government feared that Ishihara, who is considered to be a nationalist, can take an action on the islands, which would lead to a sharp deterioration of relations with China and could even provoke an armed clash around Senkaku. But in China, this move of the Japanese government was considered as a desire to put the Senkaku under strict state control and impede China's struggle for their return.

As a last example of the steps that complicate the solution of the territorial dispute one can point to the joint Japanese-American military exercises in California in June. They were initiated by Japan, concerned about the deterioration of relations with China because of the Senkaku Islands, and fears that China will try to get back the islands using military strength. In the exercises Japan and U.S. simulated the liberation of some territory occupied by some enemy. China asked Japan and the United States to refrain from the exercise, but the request was ignored.

It seems obvious that Japan and the United States, gaining the skills in liberating Senkaku from China, hope very much that these skills will not be needed in reality. It is also clear that the conduct of the exercise, which in China were perceived as provocative, does not diminish, but, on the contrary, increases the possibility of the Sino-Japanese conflict around the Senkaku, since it strengthens the position of the Chinese nationalists and hardliners in China's foreign policy, including the policy on territorial issues.

Compared to the situation of worsening relations between the participants of disputes about the ownership of Dokdo (Takeshima), Senkaku (Diaoyu) and Paracel islands, the present situation in Russia's relations with China and Japan is looking very favorable. In the year 2001 Russia and China settled the final issues of border demarcation which had been hindering their relationship since the 1960-s. Japan still has territorial claims against Russia, but now they are not a serious irritant in bilateral relations and do not prevent the positive development of Russian-Japanese cooperation in various fields.

I would like to mention here a few things that may seem interesting and useful in finding ways to solve or, at least, to reduce the severity of other territorial disputes in the Asia-Pacific region.

It is worth mentioning that the experience of settling the Russian-Chinese border issues was met with great interest in Japan. It is no accident, perhaps, that in recent years some Japanese diplomats and politicians made informal appeals to resolve the territorial dispute with Russia using the "Chinese model", that is to divide the disputed territory in half. These appeals were immediately disavowed by Tokyo, which requires the return of all four disputed islands, but still it would be useful to describe some of the factors that allowed Russia and China to resolve their border issue.

1.) The political will of the elites of Russia and China to address the border issue originated from understanding the importance of bilateral cooperation. At the moment of finishing of the process of settling the border issue in 2001, Russia and China were strategic partners. This is not an empty phrase, Russia and China had (and have now) similar or identical views on major world issues and acted (and act now) on the world stage, sharing the same or similar positions. Russia and China are pushed to rapprochement by problems in their relations with the West. These problems, by the way, have contributed to a compromise on settling the border issue from the side of the main opposition force in Russia - the Communist Party, which considers relations with China as extremely important for Russia, especially in the face of difficult relations with the West.

2.) Awareness of the economic benefits of cooperation between Russia and China at the "grass-roots" level. Economic cooperation between Russia and China had a positive impact on living standards, the well-being of a big part of the population of Siberia and the Russia's Far East. It helped to weaken the influence of the "China threat" in the Russian media perception of China.

3.) The fact that public opinion in Russia was ready for settling of the border issue. Thanks to the first two factors, public opinion in Russia and China quite easily accepted a compromise version of the settling of the border issue.

**In the case of Japan, the situation is somewhat different.** The importance of good neighborly relations with Japan and economic cooperation with it were well understood even at the Soviet period. Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev agreed to convey to Japan 2 of 4 South Kuril Islands as a goodwill gesture. This provision of the Soviet-Japanese joint declaration of 1956 has not been implemented for a variety

of reasons. (The main reason was that the Japan began to demand the return of all four South Kuril Islands. Moreover, the Soviet Union was considering the strengthening the Japan-US defense alliance as an obstacle for the transfer of the islands.) But alongside with some criticism toward Japan, Soviet media, as a whole, created a very positive image of Japan as a country with an amazing culture, science and industry, courageous, hard-working and talented people. The warm feelings of the Soviet people, and then the Russians towards Japan could not be spoiled even by the efforts of Japanese politicians and diplomats, who used to demand the return of the all four South Kuril Islands, and efforts of Japanese nationalists, demanding the return of all Kurils and the southern part of Sakhalin Island. But it ought to be mentioned, that the rigidity of these demands, as well as the frequent changes of Japanese prime ministers, greatly hampered the Russian-Japanese negotiations on the territorial issue.

Russia offered to Japan its version of the motion towards solving the territorial problem by creating a favorable environment through the development of mutually beneficial economic cooperation. This proposal was met in Japan with a large grain of salt: Japan suspected that Russia only wanted Japanese investments and technology while at the same time refusing to return the Kuril Islands because of possible protests by parts of the Russian population.

But such talk could not contain the inflow of Japanese investment in Russia, which began in the early years of the twenty-first century with the improvement of the economic situation in Russia and the increasing attractiveness of Russia as an economic partner.

There are two factors now that mitigate Japanese demands the return the South Kuril Islands:

- 1) The activation of Beijing's demands to return the Senkaku.
- 2) The deterioration of relations with Seoul because of its unwillingness to acknowledge the existence of a territorial dispute with Tokyo over Dokdo (Takeshima).

Thanks to the Russian media Tokyo is aware of the fact that Chinese experts close to the Foreign Ministry probed in Moscow the possibility of forming a united front of Russia, China and South Korea to put pressure on Japan over territorial disputes. However, Russia's position is that the territorial problems should be discussed only in a bilateral format. Russia does not intend to interfere in territorial disputes that do not involve her personally and is against interference of a third party in territorial disputes with its neighbors. Russian experts - historians and diplomats -believe, for example, that it was the intervention of the third party - the United States that at least once



prevented Russia and Japan to resolve their territorial dispute in accordance with the joint declaration of 1956 by means of a compromise - that is, the transfer to Japan of two of four of the South Kuril islands.

Russia praised Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's willingness to focus on the development of mutually beneficial cooperation with Russia in the economy, in solving international problems and even in the sphere of security and in mitigating demands for an immediate solution of the territorial dispute.

In Moscow we have no illusions or hopes that Tokyo will "forget" about the South Kuril Islands, but we intend to use the current situation for the development of cooperation, which will really help in the future to create an atmosphere in bilateral relations, in which the solution of the territorial dispute with Japan will be less difficult.

One more way toward constructing of better atmosphere in Russia-Japan's relation is the cooperation of historians of both countries in writing a book on the history of Russian-Japanese relations. This work is being conducted under the auspices of a Russian and Japanese joint commission on the complex issues of history (co-presidents are MGIMO director academician Anatoly Torkunov and professor of Prefectural University of Kumamoto Makoto Iokibe).

It is important that Mr. Torkunov has experience with a similar Russian-Polish Commission on the complex issues of history. One of the results of its work was the publication of a book about the relations between Russia and Poland in the twentieth century.

Russian and Polish historians were not intended to achieve a complete convergence of views on controversial issues of history (this is unrealistic). Each chapter of the book was written by two authors - Russian and Polish - and thus gives the reader the possibility to become acquainted with both the Russian and the Polish positions. The book was published in Russia and Poland, and in both languages.

The works of Russian and Japanese historians are organized in the same way. Project participants clearly understand that the book they write and will publish in Russian and Japanese in Russia and Japan (and in the case of the apparent success of the work - in English in the U.S.) will not be able to change the situation of bilateral relations between Russia and Japan dramatically, but it will undoubtedly contribute to a better understanding between the Russian and Japanese people and, in particular, will have some impact on the public opinion in both countries as well as the mood of the elites.

It is noteworthy that Japan tried to do similar work on the joint study of complex historical issues with China and South Korea, but they refused, as Mr. Iokibe said.

Understanding the reason why Russia has agreed to cooperate with Japan while China and South Korea did not agree is extremely important for understanding some of the important causes of the current crisis in Tokyo's relations with Beijing and Seoul. The reason is: Russia does not have a complex of "looser" or "humiliation" by Japan, but China and South Korea have such a complex. And therefore Russia agreed not only to jointly explore complex issues of history of relations with Japan, but also recognized the territorial dispute, but China and South Korea are very sensitive about every step of Japan, which may cause damage to the national pride of the Chinese and Koreans.

It should also be noted that Russia does not consider Japan as the enemy or threat. With regard to relations between Japan and China, and between Japan and South Korea, mutual fear and mutual suspicion is very strong. Fear and suspicion of Japan towards China are fueled by the growth of China's military potential. Fear and suspicion of China towards Japan are fueled by the intensification of Japan's cooperation with the U.S. in the field of defense, by the desire of the current Premier-Minister Shinzo Abe to revise article 9 of Japan's "peaceful" constitution, and by Japan's attempts to bring the countries of South-East Asia which have territorial disputes with China into the anti-Chinese alliance.

In fact, we are witnessing in the Asia Pacific region the formation of a new line of confrontation between China and the United States and its allies.

It can be assumed that this process would be beneficial to the stability in the Asia-Pacific region, as it will balance the forces of China and its opponents, but it does not facilitate the solution of regional problems, including territorial ones. On the contrary, it complicates their solution. The experience of the last few years has shown that unresolved territorial disputes in the APR only worsen relations between countries with such disputes. Therefore, there is no doubt that the formation of new alliances and blocs in the region, aiming to unite the efforts to put pressure on another country, including on the territorial problems, will not lead to anything good.

It is obvious that the existing territorial disputes in the Asia-Pacific region cannot be solved through the international court or historians' debate: each of the parties to such disputes has many historical documents proving the correctness of their respective position. None of the parties will agree with the decision of the court or commission of historians, contrary to its interests. They will call such a solution politically motivated and will not obey it.

Perhaps the most reliable, though not the easiest way to solve the territorial issues in the Asia-Pacific region would be to postpone the resolution of these disputes to the future and do the best to construct a new architecture of relations in the APR, which will not have blocs, camps and dividing lines.

A few years ago, Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and Japanese Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama have expressed the ideas of building a community in the Asia-Pacific region, similar to the European Union.

But at the moment, these ideas have been declared difficult to implement as the APR has a lot more problems and conflicts than Europe. It is hard to argue with that statement. But perhaps the ideas of Rudd and Hatoyama have been rejected for other reasons. Their implementation would require some countries to give up their leadership ambitions, habits to command, and to be prepared to build a relationship with other countries, based on genuine equality and partnership.

This idea may seem utopian, but it seems that there is no alternative.