

Black Ships from the North

The Period of Preparation for Territorial Demarcation

On the surface, the forty-year period between Golovnin's release in 1813 and Putiatin's arrival to Nagasaki in 1853 was relatively calm. While both Russia and Japan continued to maintain high levels of mutual interest, they were basically preoccupied with other matters. This in itself allows us to identify another aspect of Russo-Japanese relations that has continued to the present day: neither country has necessarily given priority to their mutual relations, and each has tended to pay attention to the other only when diplomatic developments with other powerful nations have permitted. After all, diplomatic affairs are not necessarily prioritized according to primary and secondary considerations, and where possible diplomacy is practiced on a concurrent and parallel basis. With this in mind, it might be more advisable for us to see these forty years as a period of skillful behind-the-scenes maneuvering in preparation for the next major development. Perceptively turning his attention to this, Professor Stephan remarked that these four decades were "deceptively quiescent."¹

Be that as it may, in the West Russia dissipated her energies first in the war against Napoleon (1812–14) and forty years later was obliged to turn her attention to war in the Crimea (1853–56) against the Ottoman Empire and its allies, Great Britain and France. During that period, the course of the Russian-American Company's growing activities bypassed Japan and headed toward Hawaii, Alaska, and California. For Japan too, with the Russian menace temporarily allayed, and the Nanbu and Tsugaru clans both appealing that the financial burden of maintaining troops in the Land of Yezo was exhausting their resources, the shogunate in 1814 withdrew its garrisons from all areas outside Matsumae and Hakodate, later, in 1821, abolishing direct rule of Yezo, and returning administrative control to the Matsumae clan.

Khvostov's and Davydov's raids and Golovnin's incarceration highlighted the necessity to decide the border between Japan and Russia. In fact, that was among the main reasons why Golovnin had been sent to Japan. On his return to his homeland, Golovnin proposed the border be set between Uruppu and Etorofu, and gradually this idea became widely accepted in Russia. For example, in 1813 the governor of Irkutsk, Nikolai Treskin, wrote to the governor of the Matsumae clan, proposing that Uruppu become a neutral commercial center between Russia and Japan. Although the shogunate showed no inclination whatsoever toward wanting to enter into trade with Russia, it welcomed the fact that the proposal was based on the premise that both Etorofu and Kunashiri were Japanese territories. In 1814 it was decided by the shogunate that Uruppu would be a neutral zone, with the islands south of and including Etorofu Japanese, and those north of and including Simushir, Russian:² "With regard to the establishment of a national boundary, both Japan and Russia agree that Japanese territory shall be deemed to be the islands as far as, and including, the island of Etorofu, and Russian territory as far as the island of Simushir. Neither Japan nor Russia shall build dwellings on those islands between these two [Uruppu, Chirpoi, Makanruru]. Inform them that if Russia encroaches upon Etorofu, Japan will take action to repel them."³

However, in 1813, 1814, and 1816, thick fog and other bad weather prevented envoys sent by the shogunate from conveying its intention to the Russians. Similarly, Russian vessels dispatched to receive the Japanese response managed to reach Etorofu, but were unable to contact their Japanese counterparts. Although they were unable to manage a rendezvous, we should note that both countries intended to acknowledge that the islands from Etorofu (inclusive) south were Japanese territory, and that formal agreement on this point was in train.⁴

It is also important to remember that Governor Treskin saw matters the same way. In 1814, after questioning Golovnin and Ricord about the border issue and Russo-Japanese relations in general, Treskin wrote an eight-point report to the governor-general of Siberia, Ivan Pestel, proposing specific policy lines toward Japan. His sixth point stated that the channel between Uruppu and Etorofu was the natural boundary between Russia and Japan. The specific wording was:

Six: Regarding what is proposed as the border between Russia and Japan. Golovnin has confirmed that the Japanese government sees the natural border with our side as being between the 18th island of Uruppu from where Russian territory extends northwards, and the natural border with Japan as the 19th island of Etorofu which is inhabited by Japanese. In the current circumstances, it would be counterproductive to seek to expand the Russian border further beyond this point, and there is no reason to demand that the Japanese allow expansion of the Russian border.⁵

The late Professor Yoshimitsu Kōriyama of Kagoshima University commented thus on the significance of this sixth point: "This represents the opinion of Governor Treskin in his position as the highest ranking official of the day in the Russian Far East. . . . This established fact became the officially accepted Russian position." In other words: "While no treaty had been concluded between Japan and Russia, the natural limits of each country's authority meant that Russian territory came to be seen as those Kurile Islands north of, and including Uruppu, with those south of there being Japanese."⁶ Professor Toshiyuki Akizuki of Hokkaido University also concluded, "It is certain the Siberian authorities of the day acknowledged that the islands south of and including Etorofu were Japanese territory."⁷

Around the time Japanese and Russian attention toward the Kuriles temporarily waned, the United States and Britain, motivated by the thought of profit through whaling and otter pelts, the need for ports in which to restock, and the desire to establish commercial relations with Japan, began to encroach on the islands from the Pacific. Surprised by these developments, Russia reacted by claiming nearly the entire North Pacific Rim coast of North America as the monopolistic preserve of the Russian-American Company and declaring it off limits to foreign vessels. In order to establish this exclusion-zone Russia needed to clarify the extent of her own territory. This led to the issuing, on September 4, 1821, of an *ukaz* (Imperial Decree) by Tsar Alexander I, which is Item 5 in the Joint Compendium. Paragraph 2 of the Second Special Directive issued to the Russian-American Company on September 13, 1821, has exactly the same content.⁸

In attempts to justify Russian claims to the entire chain of islands, Russian academics in Soviet days often quoted these decrees.⁹ However, upon closer examination of the original texts, it is quite obvious that both decrees limit the area in question to "the Kurile Islands, *that is* [*to est*: Russian] the islands extending from the Bering Straits down to the southern cape of the island of Uruppu, that is as far as latitude 45 degrees 50 minutes North" (*italics added*).¹⁰ Alexander's decrees are in keeping with Treskin's proposals of 1813 and 1814, and in specifying only the islands from Urup northward as subject to Russian protection, exclude Etorofu and Kunashiri from Russian territory. The Russian government of the day was well aware that Japan had not only set fishing grounds around Etorofu, but had also established an administrative presence there. Akizuki thus wrote that "without exception" Russian and Japanese materials originating from the early years of the nineteenth century acknowledge that the actual border between the two countries fell between Uruppu and Etorofu.¹¹

Tsar Alexander I's decrees are also significant as Russian official documents that interpret the Kurile Islands as those north of, and including, Uruppu. This is indeed important for interpreting the extent of the "Kurile Islands"

with regard to the Treaty of Shimoda of 1855, the Sakhalin-Kurile Islands Exchange of 1875, and the San Francisco Peace Treaty of 1951. Professor Stephan draws the following thoroughly logical conclusion from this: "Far from confirming Soviet claims, Alexander's decree indirectly supports Japan's rights in the southern Kuriles."¹² In what is probably the best recent example of a Japanese work covering the history of "Russo-Japanese relations in the Bakumatsu Period," Professor Kōriyama judged it entirely appropriate to interpret Alexander I's ukaz of 1821 as signifying the establishment of the border between Russia and Japan. He even went so far as to suggest that the Treaty of Shimoda, concluded thirty-four years later, represents no more than Russian confirmation of this to Japan. He stated:

In Japan it is generally considered that the border between Russia and Japan was established with the Treaty of Shimoda in 1855, but as many as thirty-four years before that, Russia had, by means of internationally proclaimed Imperial decrees, announced that the southern boundary of her territory was the island of Uruppu. While this was well known in the West, the shogunate was completely unaware of this, and predictably it served to complicate the negotiations with Putiatin carried out from 1853 through to 1855.¹³

The preface to the Joint Compendium indicates exactly the same position as Professor Kōriyama. It says, "By the middle of the nineteenth century, a Japanese-Russian border emerged between the islands of Etorofu and Uruppu. This frontier was *legally* [*iuridicheski*] established by the Treaty of Commerce, Navigation, and Delimitation Between Japan and Russia of February 7, 1855" (italics added).

The Dispatch of Putiatin

Russia was aware that China's defeat in the Opium Wars (1842) had led to ports being opened and was witnessing other nations, such as Britain and the United States, placing increasing pressure on Japan to open up to the outside world. Thus she knew that her interests in the Far East and Pacific area were beginning to be threatened. From 1843 onward, Tsar Nicolas I (who ruled from 1825 to 1855) seriously considered the need to send a naval expedition to press Japan to open her doors to the outside world and to conclude a treaty establishing commercial relations. However, as had previously been the case, domestic affairs took precedence, and another ten years were to pass before this was put into effect.

During that decade, while for the main part Russia focused her attention on the Crimean War (1853–56), she also stepped up her activities in Sakhalin, the Amur River area, and toward Japan. At that stage the chief executors of Russian Far East policy were the governor-general of Eastern Siberia, Nikolai

Muraviev, and a naval officer, Gennadii Nevelskoi, who had earned Muraviev's favor. In 1849 Nevelskoi led an expedition to the Amur River area, discovering that Sakhalin was an island and confirming that the Amur River Bay and estuary could be negotiated by seagoing vessels. However, these "discoveries" were made a full forty-two years after the noted Japanese explorer Rinzō Mamiya had made identical observations. Nevelskoi went on to proclaim Sakhalin and the entire Amur River Russian territory, and in 1851, in recognition of his deeds, Tsar Nicholas I decorated him, uttering in 1855 the famous words, "Where once the Russian flag has been raised, it must not be lowered again."¹⁴ (It did not, however, prevent Alexander II from selling Alaska to the United States in 1867, thereby lowering the Russian flag.) In 1860, Muraviev renamed the city of Haishenwai, ceded by China in the Treaty of Peking, "Vladivostok," that is, "rule" (*vlati*) "the east" (*vostok*). This has tended to be interpreted as an example of Russian expansionism, but at least partially represents a response to Anglo-American encroachment in the region. There are occasions when territorial expansion that includes an element of defense, or was started on the pretext of being for defense, loses its original objective and ends merely as expansion. This, though apparently a contradiction in terms, can perhaps be called "defensive expansionism."¹⁵

When Nicolas I heard that the United States had dispatched Commodore Matthew Perry with four warships to Japan, he judged further delay out of the question and immediately decided to send Rear-Admiral Evfimii Putiatin as leader of a delegation to China and Japan. Following Laxman's (1792) and Rezanov's (1804) missions, this was Russia's third diplomatic mission to Japan. On October 7, 1852, Putiatin set off from Kronstadt aboard the frigate *Pallada*, on a voyage that would take him about three hundred days. At Chichi-jima in the Ogasawara Islands, the *Pallada* assumed the role of flagship of a squadron of three other Russian vessels, and on August 21, 1853, finally arrived in Nagasaki, approximately one month after Perry's arrival at Uraga.

At Futami Port, on Chichi-jima, a messenger handed Putiatin an additional set of instructions from the tsar. The existence of these previously unreleased instructions, and the nature of their content, were made public in the October 4, 1991, issue of *Izvestiia*, causing great shock waves amongst those involved in Russo/Soviet-Japanese relations. I shall cover their content in some detail. But let me first briefly summarize the document's impact.

These "instructions" represented the first appearance of the terminology Nicholas used (and that appeared later in decrees) for recognizing the Northern Territories as Japanese territory and for authorizing Putiatin to negotiate on that basis. The lengthy *Izvestiia* article was coauthored by Konstantin O. Sarkisov, then head of the Center for Japanese Studies at the Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, and an acknowledged expert

on Russo-Japanese studies, and Kiril E. Cherevko, senior fellow at the Institute of Soviet History.¹⁶ That very same day, the evening edition of the *Asahi Shimbun* reported that Professor Koichi Yasuda (Okayama University) had unearthed historical documents with exactly the same content in the naval archives in St. Petersburg, and approximately ten days later, the *Asahi Shimbun* published an article by Professor Yasuda describing their nature.¹⁷ The timing of the release of these articles in Russia and Japan was by no means coincidental. The truth of the matter is that by separate routes Professors Yasuda and Sarkisov had already learned of the existence of these documents in St. Petersburg and Moscow, but Yasuda had acquiesced in Sarkisov's suggestion that politically speaking, it would be preferable for that information to be offered from the Russian side rather than by a Japanese researcher, as it was precisely the kind of announcement that would be obviously favorable to Japan. However, getting wind of this, *Asahi Shimbun* and NHK (7 p.m. and 9 p.m. news on October 4) made a partial announcement.¹⁸ Be that as it may, in the background were the momentous processes of glasnost and perestroika commenced by Gorbachev. In this context, all manner of previously hidden historical truths were being exposed to the light of day.

The Directives to Putiatin

The document in question is the Draft of the Additional Instruction to Admiral Putiatin, issued on February 27, 1853, in the name of Tsar Nicholas I. The front page states, "His Majesty the Emperor wrote the following on this document with his own hand: 'Be it so enacted.' February 24, 1853." In other words, this document regarding the approach to negotiations with Japan on commerce and national borders is not merely something which Nicolas I approved, but is better described as his specific "orders" to Putiatin.

Sarkisov's and Cherevko's article opens with the following explanation of the Imperial Directive: "In order to understand the process of the formation of borders between the two countries, we should remember that Russia was the initiator of their establishment. This basically amounted to 'a demand' to draw the border. To some extent this Russian initiative was the result of tactical considerations. Knowing that the shogunate followed a self-isolationist policy, and would probably refuse to establish contacts and sign a treaty, Russia came up with a proposal on borders."

They go on to move their focus to the substance of the document, which "sheds light on the history of the establishment of borders between Russia and Japan. In order for the reader to get a clear understanding of the following lines, we should remind you that during the whole postwar period Soviet historians actively advertised the idea that the Kuriles, including the Southern Kuriles, have always belonged to Russia. And the fact that in the

course of territorial negotiations they had been transferred to Japan was explained as the unjustified concession of a Russian admiral. Where is the truth? Recently discovered documents contain the answer to this question.” From here the two authors quote Tsar Nicholas I with the following passage, which features as Item 6 in the Joint Compendium.

On the border issue, it is our wish to be as indulgent as possible (without compromising our interests), bearing in mind that the achievement of the other goal—trade benefits is of vital importance to us. *The southernmost island of the Kurile Islands that belongs to Russia is Uruppu, which we could identify as the last point of Russian authority in the south—so that from our side, the southern tip of this island would be [as it actually is today] the border with Japan, and from the Japanese side, the northern tip of the island of Etorofu would be considered to be their border.* (italics added)

The section quoted here, specifically the sentence I have highlighted, is of particular significance. In other words, before the official negotiations with the shogunate even commenced, Tsar Nicholas I had already issued secret instructions to Putiatin to be prepared to acknowledge that the territory south of and including Etorofu belonged to Japan. Almost in one fell swoop, this testimony resolved the issues many Japanese and Russians had disputed. There is little wonder that Sarkisov and Cherevko were so excited by their finding. After revealing the nature of the Imperial Directive, the two go on to reveal their excitement in a way quite unexpected from normally calm and collected researchers, writing, “It seems we have discovered the truth!”

After interpreting that the crux of the tsar’s directive to Admiral Putiatin included acknowledgment that Etorofu and the islands south of there were Japanese territory, and Uruppu and the islands north of there Russian territory, Sarkisov and Cherevko go on to state:

The historical documents quoted above make it possible for us to honestly evaluate the history of our relations with our Eastern neighbor [Japan]. Will we lose anything from this? No. On the contrary, freed from false ideas, we will be able to liberate ourselves. The lies that have been instilled in the consciousness of the Russian and Soviet people for decades have poisoned our national consciousness and complicated the resolution of the territorial problem with Japan. They have aroused feelings of pseudo-patriotism and nationalism which have nothing to do with love for one’s Motherland.¹⁹

Delimitation of National Boundaries: The Treaty of Shimoda

After arriving in Nagasaki, Putiatin commenced negotiations on January 18, 1854, with shogunate representatives Toshiakira Kawaji and Masanori Tsutsui. Kawaji and the other Japanese negotiators did their utmost to play for time.²⁰ They put off the demands of their unwelcome visitors, who, as Putiatin’s

secretary, Ivan Goncharov (a famous nineteenth-century author of novels such as *Oblomov*) wrote, were “made to feel decidedly unwelcome.”²¹ As the Russian mission’s arrival coincided with the outbreak of war in the Crimea, after proposing a treaty covering friendly relations, commerce, and territorial delimitation, Putiatin took his squadron out to sea again to avoid being attacked by marauding Royal Navy warships. After hearing that on March 31 of the same year Japan had finally been opened through conclusion of the Treaty of Peace and Amity Between the United States and the Empire of Japan (normally referred to as the Kanagawa Treaty) with Commodore Perry, Putiatin sailed the sloop-of-war *Diana* into Osaka and pressed Japan to conclude a similar treaty with Russia. As the shogunate had already promised Putiatin that Russia would receive the same privileges conferred by Japan in any treaties it might conclude with other foreign nations, it was in no position to refuse the admiral’s approach. So, on December 22, 1854, Kawaji and Tsutsui recommenced negotiations with the Russian delegation in Shimoda, on the Izu Peninsula.²²

Right in the middle of the negotiations, the area was struck by a massive earthquake, and the huge tidal wave that followed sank the sloop *Diana*. Both parties worked together to cope with the disaster, and with the cooperation of local Japanese a new vessel, named the *Heda*, was built in the port of the same name.

It is noteworthy that both sets of negotiators at the talks in Nagasaki and Shimoda, although intent on protecting their national interests, were friendly and respectful toward their counterparts. For example, Professor Seizaburō Satō (University of Tokyo) wrote that Kawaji was strong in his praise of Putiatin. “Kawaji was amazed that Putiatin, despite having had his sloop destroyed by a tidal wave, and knowing that Russia’s British and French enemies in the Crimean War being fought at that time had a vastly superior presence in the Far East, would attempt to seize a French warship when it happened to enter the port of Shimoda.”²³ Also, in the Russians’ eyes, Toshiakira Kawaji was judged to possess an intellect discernable beyond the obvious differences in culture and race. Goncharov, who covered the negotiations in minute detail, wrote:

We all liked Kawaji. . . . He was extremely intelligent. We could not help but admire the intellect behind his skillful rebuttals of our arguments. Each and every one of his words, each look in his eyes, each gesture hinted at his sound judgment, keen insight, wit, and skill. Wisdom is unvarying wherever one goes. While differences may exist in terms of race, dress, language and religion, and while even views on life itself may vary, there is a common characteristic amongst wise men.²⁴

After five meetings, the Japanese and Russian representatives finally reached agreement on February 7, 1855, and at the Chorakuji-temple, Shimoda, signed

the Treaty of Commerce, Navigation, and Delimitation Between Japan and Russia (normally referred to as the Treaty of Shimoda).

Article 2 of the Treaty of Shimoda (see the Joint Compendium, Item 7) describes the border between Russia and Japan in the Kuriles in terms of the islands north of, and including, Uruppu as Russian territory and those south of, and including, Etorofu as Japanese territory, with no border set in Sakhalin, "as has been the case up to this time." Professor Kōriyama saw this as no more than a ceremony between the two countries, marking official acceptance of a position the Russians had previously acknowledged. In 1981 the Japanese government of Zenkō Suzuki set February 7, the day when the border between Russia and Japan was officially established by the Treaty of Shimoda, as "Northern Territories Day." The Treaty of Shimoda, conducted against a peaceful background, is recalled for designating the four islands of the Northern Territories as Japanese territory.

The Theory of "Pressure on Putiatin" Is Mistaken

The view that Japanese pressure forced Putiatin to give up Etorofu, Kunashiri, Shikotan, and Habomai to Japan was prevalent in the Soviet Union during the Brezhnev years. The standpoint of special correspondents to Tokyo of the two main Soviet newspapers, *Izvestiia* and *Pravda*, can be seen as typical of this.

First of all are the comments by Iurii Bandura (then Tokyo correspondent of *Izvestiia*, later deputy-editor of *Moscow News*) in his feature article, titled "Outrage Against History," which appeared in the June 16, 1981, issue of *Izvestiia*. "The person who signed this treaty [Treaty of Shimoda: Kimura] was the Russian diplomat Putiatin, who at the time was effectively being held hostage in Japan under the gun-barrels of warships of Russia's British and French enemies. . . . Subsequently the tsarist government indicated to Japan that Putiatin's signing of the treaty was in fact contrary to the directive he had received from his homeland, and therefore that the Treaty of Shimoda is not, and never could have been, an instrument by which Japanese 'inalienable rights' [over the Northern Territories] are recognized."²⁵

Even in 1989, as many as five years after the advent of the Gorbachev administration, Igor' Latyshev (former special correspondent of *Pravda*, subsequently an affiliated member of the Institute of Oriental Studies) was making comments similar to Bandura's. He commented:

In an attempt to strengthen their own demands on the Kurile Islands in legal terms, those proponents of the Movement for the Return of the Northern Territories normally quote the Russo-Japanese treaties of 1855 and 1875 (Treaty of Shimoda and Treaty of St. Petersburg). However, these two treaties were signed by the tsarist government because of the *pressure* it faced having the British and French navies

menacing the Russian Far Eastern borders from their position of predominance in the Pacific. As the tsarist government did not have the ability to defend the Kurile Islands, it was placed in a difficult position, and the Japanese government used that situation to the fullest extent possible. By exerting *pressure* on Russian diplomats who lacked foresight and determination, Japan managed in the first treaty (1855) to have Russia cede the southern islands of the Kurile Archipelago and then in the second treaty (1875) the northern part of the archipelago.²⁶ (*italics added*)

As it happens, the stance adopted by the likes of Bandura and Latyshev can only be seen as irrational, in that it flies in the face of the popular view espoused by such Soviet historians as Esfir' Fainberg who was awarded a PhD in history from the Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences. Although her book *Russo-Japanese Relations 1697–1875* has been criticized as “full of factual distortions,” it heaps praise on Putiatin for finally securing the Treaty of Shimoda from the shogunate and evaluates the treaty itself highly.²⁷ She stated, “With this, after one hundred years of futile attempts, Russia established a commercial treaty with Japan.” Fainberg even went on to state that rather than being prejudicial against Russia, the Treaty of Shimoda was actually unfavorable for Japan. While stating, “The Treaty of Shimoda was effectively an unequal treaty in the same way as the other treaties forced upon feudal Japan by the Western Powers,” Fainberg went on to write proudly that in approaching Japan to conclude this treaty tsarist Russia did not put *pressure* on it by a threat of military force. In other words, a foundation for Russo-Japanese friendship was laid before a peaceful background. Putiatin’s actions in peacefully concluding this treaty represented a faithful expression of tsarist government policy of the day:

In contrast to the United States, Britain, and France, tsarist Russia did not use the threat of military force to apply pressure on Japan. At that time, Britain and France were resentful of the Treaty of Shimoda being concluded. . . . While some foreign historians repeatedly cast slurs on tsarist Russia for harboring “invasion plans” against Japan, the vast majority of historians see Putiatin’s mission as having laid the foundation for neighborly relations between Russia and Japan, and recognize that his activities illustrated the peaceful nature of Russian policies of the day.²⁸

More recently, the *Izvestiia* article by Sarkisov and Cherevko (October 4, 1991) makes it clear that the views of the likes of Bandura and Latyshev are completely mistaken. Sarkisov and Cherevko wrote:

The fact that in the course of territorial negotiations they [the four islands of the Kuriles from Etorofu southward: Kimura] had been transferred to Japan used to be explained as an unjustified concession by a Russian admiral. Where is the truth? The following document [Instruction from Emperor Nicolas I to Putiatin: Kimura] contains the answer to this question. “Russia always acknowledged Japan’s right to it [the Northern Territories] *voluntarily, without any pressure from outside.*”²⁹ (*italics added*)