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### **Russo-Japanese relations and maritime security**

For many decades, starting from the moment of restoration of official relations between Soviet Union and Japan in 1956 maritime security cooperation has always remained on the agenda of Russia-Japan relations as a minor but valuable part of this agenda.

It has never been given top priority and rather served as a sort of side dish for issues considered more important, first and foremost territorial dispute, business relations, regulation of fishing activities, cooperation on international problems. Being overshadowed by these larger issues, measures related to maritime security received little public attention. Nevertheless they were referred to, directly or indirectly, in all major documents setting a mutually agreed agenda for the relations between the two countries, like the 1956 Joint Declaration by the USSR and Japan, the Tokyo Declaration of 1993, the 1998 Moscow Declaration on Creative Partnership and the Joint Action Plan signed during the 2003 Russo-Japanese summit. This understanding also produced a number of legally binding agreements between the two governments, first and foremost the Sea Rescue Agreement of 1956 and the Agreement on the Prevention of Sea and Air Incidents outside Territorial Waters of 1993.

Mutual understanding of the need to address the issue of maritime security in practical terms resulted in building up working relations between government agencies, concerned with control of coastal waters, trans-border criminal activities and sea rescue operations. Sea rescue coordination was the first step in building up relations in this area. At a later stage the two foreign ministries facilitated setting up contacts between police and security authorities responsible for combating illegal fishery, illegal trade in sea products, attempts at drugs and arms smuggling and terrorist activities. Also, attention has been given to creating a system of communication between Russian and Japanese military authorities to prevent incidents involving sea vessels and aircrafts of the two countries, as well as to allow more transparency in military activities in the surrounding waters, which could be regarded as security concern.

A brief view of the related developments in the recent decade suggests that a considerable progress has been achieved in this area. Since 1994 regular consultations have been held by diplomatic and military authorities of the two countries to monitor functioning of the agreement on the prevention of sea and air incidents, the latest meeting being held last June in Tokyo. Regular exchanges of visits by navy vessels of Russian Pacific Fleet and Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force have been in place since 1996, each visit being followed

by joint exercise designed to practice cooperation in sea rescue operations, taking control of illegal fishery and smuggling, combating terrorist attacks.

Another line of exchanges has been established between Russian Border Guard Service and Japan Coastguard Agency with approximately the same agenda as that of naval exchanges. The latest visit of JCA vessels to Sakhalin last October involved joint exercise imitating coordinated rescue operation and arrest of an illegal fishing boat. Also plans have been announced to expand the exchange of information between police authorities and security bodies regarding transnational criminal and terrorist activities.

It is not easy to judge the effectiveness of the above mentioned activities, as the practical effect of numerous exchanges and joint actions is difficult to measure or evaluate. Naturally, the amount of information actually exchanged is not disclosed and its practical importance is hard to assess. Nevertheless it deserves credit that no major incident involving naval vessels or military aircrafts of the two countries has been reported in recent years. It could also be argued that personal contacts between high-ranking navy and border security officers helped achieve better understanding and reduce largely irrational mutual animosity characteristic of the Cold-War years. Finally, there is some ground for cautious optimism regarding coordinated action to impose stricter control over fishing and related activities. It is a well-known fact that fishing industry of the Russian Far East has been plagued by the proliferation of illegal or semi-legal business practices that account for generally low level of law consciousness in the industry. Concerned Russian officials privately admit that it would be extremely difficult to bring order to this industry without cooperative stance on the part of Japan's police and security authorities. Unreported exports of fishing produce to Japan constitute a very large part of estimated illegal proceeds fueling criminal businesses in the Russian Far East, and they could not be effectively contained without cooperation from Japanese official authorities.

Also, however small be the direct effect of the exchanges between Russian and Japanese bodies responsible for maritime security, the significance of cooperation goes beyond the immediate benefit of coordinating surveillance, rescue or policing efforts. It is nearly the only area of Russo-Japanese official contacts that has provided an example of successful interaction between the two governments in fulfilling practical tasks. Against all upturns and downturns of relations between the two governments, programs of the above-mentioned exchanges have remained largely unhampered and continued to win the praise of both sides. The latter seems especially remarkable if considered against the fact that this area of relations, differently from numerous trade issues, is largely free of private interests influence.

It is also notable that the issue of maritime security cooperation has been relatively immune from the adverse impact of the territorial dispute between Japan and Russia. Political constraints to contacts in this particular field have proved to be relatively weak, programs of exchanges and consultations did not suffer setbacks or revisions at times when official relations got strained in the face of mounting differences over territorial problem. This seems to be particular noteworthy if we consider the fact that the sea boarder between the two countries has not been formally agreed upon, and official views of the two governments on the issue remain very different with no compromise solution in sight.

Preserving and strengthening all the existing elements of Russian-Japanese joint infrastructure of maritime security would be highly welcome for several reasons. Firstly, it is of practical importance for shipping and fishing companies that operate in international waters adjacent to sea borders of Japan and Russia. Secondly, it helps reduce possible tensions between military and security authorities of the two countries, which remain a threat to stability. Thirdly, it could serve as an effective means to create an atmosphere favorable to overall upgrading of Russo-Japanese relations, which is essential for resolving larger issues of these relations. Finally it can contribute to better general security in the Northwest Pacific and have positive effect on developing new competitive sea transport services and products in this area.

Effectiveness of maritime security cooperation could be strengthened further if official contacts between Russia and Japan could be promoted to multinational level and/or cover sea areas extending beyond the surrounding waters, including security hotspots in the World Ocean. As an example, participation of Russian and Japanese vessels in the UN Anti-Piracy Mission in the Gulf of Aden could be a welcome development. Trilateral contacts between Russian, Japanese and US naval authorities are also a promising sign.

More consideration should also be given to involving Russian and Japanese non-government organizations in joint activities promoting maritime security. Joint efforts could be made to create a framework for a wider exchange of relevant information, which could be used not only by official bodies but also by private institutions and companies, as well as professional unions and civil organizations. Apart from resolving security issues it could help create a favorable environment for official talks on major unresolved problems of Russo-Japanese relations including territorial dispute and mutual investment climate.