

Japan, Russia to Boost Ties Regardless of Row

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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TOKYO — The foreign ministers of Japan and Russia agreed Saturday to strengthen economic and security cooperation but made no progress on resolving a longstanding territorial dispute that has kept the two nations from concluding a peace treaty.

Foreign Minister Koichiro Gamba and visiting Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said the two countries need to address the row over islands off northeastern Japan in a calm manner. Gamba said resolving the dispute and forging a peace treaty officially ending their hostilities in World War II is "more necessary than ever."

"As the security situation in the Asia-Pacific undergoes major changes, the Japan-Russia relationship has taken on new importance," Gamba said at a joint news conference following what he called a "fruitful" two-hour meeting.

"We reaffirmed that we want to strengthen our cooperation in security, defense and economic

matters, particularly energy modernization," he added.

Lavrov welcomed the increased trade between the two nations, which grew last year to 2.45 trillion yen (\$31 billion).

"We want our international cooperation to expand," Lavrov said.

The two sides signed an agreement to simplify visa procedures to boost visitors and business interaction, particularly from Japan to Russia.

Ties between Japan and Russia soured in late 2010 when Dmitry Medvedev became the first Russian president to visit the disputed islands, called the Kuril Islands in Russia and the Northern Territories in Japan. They were seized by Soviet troops in the closing days of World War II, but Japan says they are part of its territory.

The islands are surrounded by rich fishing grounds and are believed to have oil, natural gas and mineral deposits.

"Resolving this problem and concluding a peace treaty is more necessary than ever," Gemba said. "But unfortunately ... our positions are different. We hope to resolve this through dialogue."

Lavrov said tackling the matter would have to wait until a new leader is chosen in Russia's presidential election on March 4.

"Both countries need to address the row over the islands in a calm manner without getting emotional or critical," he said.

Lavrov and Gemba were to discuss North Korea over a working lunch in the second part of their meeting.

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