

# REAFFIRMING RUSSIA'S REMOTE CONTROL: EXPLORING KREMLIN INFLUENCE ON TELEVISION COVERAGE OF RUSSIAN-JAPANESE RELATIONS AND THE SOUTHERN KURIL ISLANDS TERRITORIAL DISPUTE

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**Abstract:** This article examines Russian television coverage of Russo-Japanese relations and the Kuril Islands territorial dispute between October 2010 and February 2014. The article has three aims: to further understanding of Russian government influence over television; to illuminate Russian priorities in bilateral relations with Japan; and to assess the prospect of current territorial talks resulting in a compromise. While there are good economic and security incentives for both sides to agree to a settlement, nationalist framing of the territorial dispute on Russian television presents an obstacle to resolution. A territorial compromise would contradict television's nationalist framing of the dispute and undermine Russian leaders' credibility as defenders of territorial integrity. Findings suggest that public opinion as well as government influence shapes the content of Russian television reporting on the Kurils and relations with Japan.

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A marked improvement in Russian-Japanese relations began in 2012. Since 1945, conflict over the sovereignty of four islands that Russia calls the Southern Kurils and that Japan refers to as the Northern Territories had inhibited ties. Stalin occupied the four islands, situated between the Japanese island of Hokkaido and Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula, during the closing phase of World War II.<sup>1</sup> For the nearly 70 years since then, the dispute has prevented Russia and Japan from signing a formal peace treaty.

This article examines coverage of the changing diplomatic dynamics between Moscow and Tokyo on Russian television news. Specifically, it asks whether improving political and economic ties between Russia and Japan since 2012 are reflected in reporting on the Kurils dispute and/or coverage of bilateral relations on Russian state-controlled television. In answering this question, the article seeks to further understanding of government influence over television content in Putin's Russia.

Vladimir Putin's return to the Russian presidency in May 2012 began a remarkable turnaround in bilateral relations with Japan. Over the previous eighteen months, already cool relations had plunged to subzero temperatures when on November 1, 2010, President Dmitry Medvedev became the first serving Russian (or Soviet) head of state to land on Kunashir, the second largest of the four disputed islands.<sup>2</sup> Following in Medvedev's footsteps, several senior Russian officials—including Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov and Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov—also visited the disputed islands in 2010 and 2011, drawing diplomatic protests from Tokyo.<sup>3</sup> To the surprise of commentators and diplomats in both countries, in an interview with foreign journalists just prior to his re-election in March 2012, Putin offered to restart peace treaty negotiations with Japan. Using a term employed by judo referees to begin a match, Putin announced that if he became president, “we would give the order ‘*Hajime*’” on negotiations. Sparking optimism for a settlement in Japan, Putin stated, “We don't need victory, rather we need to reach an acceptable compromise, something like a tie.”<sup>4</sup>

Putin's Japanese counterpart at the time, Prime Minister Yoshihiko

<sup>1</sup> In descending order of size, the islands are Iturup, Kunashir, Shikotan and Habomai. For clarity, I use the islands' Russian names throughout.

<sup>2</sup> The date of Medvedev's visit to Kunashir was chosen to maximize the president's patriotic appeal. Medvedev landed on the island three days before celebrations for National Unity Day, a holiday commemorating the liberation of Moscow from Polish invaders in 1612. National Unity Day was reinstated as a public holiday by Putin in 2005 and is a symbol of Russia's revival. Tom Washington. 2010. “Russia Goes on Holiday.” *Moscow News*. November 4.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Weitz. 2011. “Why Moscow Has Escalated Its Territorial Dispute with Tokyo.” *Pacific Focus* 26:2 (August): 137–164; Kazuhiko Togo. “Medvedev Signals Intention to Enhance Russian Presence.” *Asahi Shimbun*. December 14, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> “Hoppo ryodo, saishu kecchaku ni iyoku ‘ukeire kanou na dakyo wo’ Putin shusho kaiken,” [Putin claims an acceptable compromise in the Northern Territories dispute]. *Asahi Shimbun*. March 2, 2012.

Noda, responded to the Russian president's conciliatory overtures in kind, by dropping his government's aggressive rhetoric towards Russia and agreeing to new cooperation on travel and fishing in the disputed territories. In recognition of Russian aid to Japan following the Great Tohoku Earthquake in March 2011, and as a symbol of warming relations, in July 2012 Tokyo gave the dog-loving Putin an Akita puppy, which Putin named 'Yume' (dream in Japanese).<sup>5</sup> Noda's successor, Shinzo Abe is continuing to build on positive developments in bilateral relations. Since Abe's return to office in December 2012, both he and Putin have devoted considerable time and energy to deepening cooperation and trust between their nations as a precursor to resuming territorial negotiations.<sup>6</sup> In April 2013, Abe visited Moscow—the first trip to the Russian capital by a Japanese prime minister in a decade. At the end of his visit, Abe and Putin released a joint statement announcing the resumption of negotiations over the Southern Kurils.<sup>7</sup> Demonstrating their personal commitment to finding a solution to the dispute, Abe and Putin met to discuss bilateral relations on four other occasions in the ten months following their first meeting in Moscow.<sup>8</sup> The leaders' efforts have already paid dividends. Preliminary territorial discussions began at the vice-ministerial level in Moscow in August 2013. A second round of territorial talks was held in Tokyo on January 31, 2014.<sup>9</sup> In November 2013, Russia and Japan held their first ever 2+2 talks between defense and foreign ministers, aimed at boosting military cooperation. Abe has been careful to limit the damage to restored relations emanating from Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014. Under pressure from Washington, along with the rest of the G7, Japan has imposed sanctions on Russia following its incursions in Ukraine. But Abe has kept his comments

<sup>5</sup> "Akita Puppy to 'Boost Ties' With Japan." *Ria Novosti*. July 28, 2012, at <http://en.ria.ru/russia/20120728/17482199.html>, assessed March 9, 2014. Yume was at Putin's side when he met Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on the sidelines of the Sochi Olympics in February 2014. *Vremya*, Channel 1, February 18, 2014, 21:00.

<sup>6</sup> Since signing a Joint Declaration with Japan in 1956, successive Soviet/Russian governments have been willing to hand over the smaller two islands (Habomai and Shikotan) in exchange for Japan dropping its claim to the larger two. Putin reiterated this offer in his negotiations with Prime Minister Mori in 2001. Japan, however, rejected Putin's offer, as the two small islands represent just seven percent of the total disputed territory. Tokyo continues to demand the return of all four islands, although previous Japanese governments have been willing to discuss a multi-phased return. Tsuyoshi Hasegawa. 1998. *The Northern Territories Dispute and Russo-Japanese Relations*. University of California, Berkeley International and Area Studies: 108; Jean-Marc Blanchard. 2010. "Economics and Asia-Pacific Region Territorial and Maritime Disputes." *Asian Politics and Policy* 1:4: 697.

<sup>7</sup> Takuya Suzuki. "Japan, Russia to Resume Northern Territories Talks After Long Hiatus." *Asahi Shimbun*. April 29, 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Abe and Putin met at the G8 summit in Northern Ireland in June 2013, at the G20 meeting in St. Petersburg in September 2013, at the ASEAN conference in Indonesia in October 2013 and following the opening ceremony of the Sochi Winter Olympics in February 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Mizuho Aoki. "Japan, Russia Discuss Territorial Issue." *Japan Times*. January 31, 2014.

on the Ukraine crisis to a minimum and, as of May 2014, a scheduled visit to Japan by Putin in fall 2014 had not been canceled. Despite sanctions against Russia, in May 2014, Japan announced it would accept a planned visit by Chairman of the State Duma, Sergey Naryashkin, a close aide of Putin.<sup>10</sup>

The purpose of this article is to analyze the framing of the Kuril Islands dispute on Russian television. National television is the most commonly used source of information in Russia, with 85 percent of Russians regularly tuning in to TV news programs.<sup>11</sup> This number rises to 90 percent among viewers of Channel 1.<sup>12</sup> In contrast, only 24 percent of Russians regularly visit news sites on the Internet, and just 20 percent get information from newspapers and print journals.<sup>13</sup> Russian audiences are avid consumers of television news. As shown in Table 1, of all the programs broadcast on national television, audiences are most interested in the news.

Channel 1 was chosen for this project for two reasons. Firstly, it is the channel with the widest audience reach in Russia. Its signal is received by 99.8 percent of Russian households.<sup>14</sup> Channel 1 also has the largest daily audience share of any Russian television broadcaster, receiving an average share of 19.2 percent, compared to 16.6 percent for second-placed *Rossiia*.<sup>15</sup> Channel 1's flagship news broadcasts—*Novosti* and *Vremya*—are routinely watched by more Russians than news programs shown on rival channels. Although approximately 25 percent of Russian households subscribe to satellite television, international news programs receive a relatively small audience share in Russia.<sup>16</sup> *Euronews*, the most popular international news broadcaster in Russia, receives an average daily audience share of just 0.7 percent.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>10</sup> "Japan to accept visit by Putin aide despite Ukraine crisis." *Kyodo News*. May 14, 2014.

<sup>11</sup> Public Opinion Foundation (FOM). *Kto smotrit obshchestvennoe televidenie* [Who watches public television]. August 31, 2013, at <http://soc.fom.ru/obshchestvo/11061>, accessed November 16, 2013.

<sup>12</sup> Although television is still by far the most popular news and entertainment source in Russia, the average number of hours Russians spend watching television has been declining over the past decade, especially among the young. Elena Poluenkhtova. 2012. "Dynamics of the Russian Television Audience." *Russian Social Science Review* 53: 2 (March–April): 46.

<sup>13</sup> FOM. *Kto smotrit obshchestvennoe televidenie*.

<sup>14</sup> Channel 1, at <http://www.1tvrus.com/about>, accessed November 20, 2013.

<sup>15</sup> Channel 1, at <http://eng.1tvrus.com/russia>, accessed November 20, 2013.

<sup>16</sup> Eutelsat. 2013. *Russia's Leading Satellite TV Neighbourhood at 36° East Reaches Record Audience and Prepares for New Growth*, at <http://www.eutelsat.com/home/news/communi-ques-de-presse/press-list-container/russias-leading-satellite-tv-nei.html>, accessed December 4, 2013.

<sup>17</sup> Channel 1, at <http://eng.1tvrus.com/russia>, accessed November 20, 2013.

**Table 1. Audience Interest in Television Programs**

Program Type	Percentage
News	67
Feature Films	58
TV Serials	29
Entertainment	28
Sports	26
Documentaries	22
Concerts, Theater Performances	21
Science	20
Analytical	17
Talk Show	17
Author's Programs	16

Source: Public Opinion Foundation, June 2013<sup>18</sup>

Secondly, although only part owned by the state, Channel 1 has reverted to its traditional role as the mouthpiece of the government under President Putin.<sup>19</sup> Previous studies of news coverage on Channel 1 have found political reporting heavily biased in favor of the Kremlin.<sup>20</sup> This article therefore anticipates that news framing on Channel 1 of the Kuril Islands dispute—and of wider Russo-Japanese relations—will reflect Russian government policy. The article's argument hypothesizes that improving bilateral relations and the resumption of territorial negotiations will correspond to a shift in narrative on Channel 1 news.

Content analysis is a seldom-used tool in Russian media studies for understanding how government policy shapes television content.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Respondents were asked 'What kind of television programs do you watch the most?' (up to three responses allowed). FOM. *Istochniki informatsii i telepredpochteniya Rossiyan* [Sources of information and television preferences]. June 4, 2013, at <http://soc.form.ru/obshchestvo/10938>, accessed November 16, 2013.

<sup>19</sup> Andrei Ryabov. 2004. "The Mass Media". In Michael McFaul, Nikolai Petrov and Andrei Ryabov, eds., *Between Dictatorship and Democracy: Russian Post-Communist Political Reform*. Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; Ivan Zassoursky. 2004. *Media and Power in Post-Soviet Russia*. London: M.E Sharpe.

<sup>20</sup> For example, Sarah Oates. 2006. *Television, Democracy and Elections in Russia*. New York: Routledge; Tina Burrett (2011) *Television and Presidential Power in Putin's Russia*. London: Routledge.

<sup>21</sup> Notable exceptions include Andrei Raskin. 2001. "Television: The Medium to Elect the President". In Kaarle Nordenstreng, Elena Vartanova and Yassen Zassoursky eds., *Russian Media Challenge*. Helsinki: Kikimora Publications; Sarah Oates. 2006. *Television, Democ-*

This study aims to begin filling that methodological gap. Furthermore, the study's analysis of reporting on the Kurils dispute by Channel 1 may provide international policymakers with insights into Russian government priorities in bilateral relations with Japan. It may also shed light on the Kremlin's willingness/ability to agree to a territorial compromise with Japan, and the tactics that the Russian government employs to achieve its diplomatic and strategic ends.

This project analyzed all news reports on the Kuril Islands dispute and/or bilateral Japanese-Russian relations broadcast between October 1, 2010 and February 28, 2014. The following programs were monitored:

- Novosti (News), 12pm, 3pm and 6pm
- Vremya (Time), 9pm
- Odnako (However), with Mikhail Leontiev, broadcast irregularly

Reports on domestic events in Japanese were excluded from analysis unless there was a specific reference to bilateral relations with Russia, or to the Southern Kurils (this exclusion extends to the majority of reporting on the March 2011 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster, which occurred in North Eastern Japan during the monitoring period). Coverage of sporting and cultural contact between the two states was also excluded. In total, approximately 50 news segments were analyzed. As many reports were less than two-minutes in length, it was possible for analysis to be conducted by a single researcher. Drawing on media discourse theory, reports were analyzed qualitatively for changes in framing (emphasizing or excluding specific facts and values to promote particular definitions and interpretations)<sup>22</sup>, narrative, rhetorical strategy, lexicon and visual imagery.<sup>23</sup> Quantitative methods were deliberately eschewed, as data-driven analysis would not adequately capture changes in lexicon, rhetoric and other linguistic evidence of a shift in discourse on the Kurils and relations with Japan.<sup>24</sup>

The hypothesis that news reporting on Channel 1 would reflect

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*racy and Elections in Russia*. New York: Routledge; Stephen Hutchings and Vera Tolz. 2012. "Faultlines in Russia's Discourse of Nation: Television Coverage of the December 2010 Moscow Riots." *Slavic Review* 71 (Winter): 873–899.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Entman. 1996. "Reporting the Environmental Policy Debate." *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 1:3: 77.

<sup>23</sup> Anders Hansen, Simon Cottle, Ralph Negrine and Chris Newbold. 1998. *Mass Communication Research Methods*. London: Macmillan; Barrie Gunter. 2000. *Media Research Methods*. London: Sage; John Street. 2001. *Mass Media, Politics and Democracy*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

<sup>24</sup> Pamela Shoemaker and Stephen Reese. 1991. *Mediating the Message*. London: Longman, 1991; Barrie Gunter. 1997. *Measuring Bias on Television*. Luton: University of Luton Press; Kimberly Neundorf. 2002. *The Content Analysis Guidebook*. London: Sage.

changes in government policy on the Kurils dispute was only partially proven. Reporting on Japanese-Russian relations in general—and on the Kurils dispute in particular—did not significantly change following the thaw in Russian-Japanese relations from early- to mid-2012, or after the agreement to resume peace treaty and territorial negotiations in April 2013.

On Channel 1 news, framing of the territorial dispute and/or bilateral relations with Japan was presented through four main lenses:

- Security (military defense and territorial integrity)
- Living standards and economic development (infrastructure and investment)
- Diplomacy and summitry (bilateral, regional and international)
- Patriotism and nationalism (Russian and Japanese)

Media theory suggests that the prevalence and framing of an issue in the media affects audience perceptions regarding its significance.<sup>25</sup> Studies by Elmer Schattschneider and Bernard Cohen conclude that although the media does not affect what people think, it influences what they think about.<sup>26</sup> Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw term this phenomenon the “agenda-setting function of the mass media.”<sup>27</sup> What agenda is set by Channel 1’s framing of the Kuril Islands dispute and of Russo-Japanese relations through the four thematic lenses identified above? In order to answer this question, news reports will be analyzed in the context of both the domestic and international strategic political needs of the Russian government. Although the state owns a majority stake in Channel 1, the over-saturation of the Russian television market, coupled with high production costs, means executives at the channel must consider the commercial appeal of news programming.<sup>28</sup> Analysis of news content on Channel 1 will therefore also consider the need to attract, entertain, and retain audiences as a factor influencing the framing of reporting on relations with Japan and of the Kurils dispute. The study asks to what extent, and under what circumstances, do media professionals at Channel 1 balance the preferences of their political paymasters in the Russian government against public opinion when the two do not coincide.

<sup>25</sup> James Dearing and Everett Rogers. 1996. *Agenda Setting*. London: Sage: 7-8.

<sup>26</sup> Elmer Schattschneider. 1960. *The Semisovereign People*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston: 68; Bernard Cohen. 1963. *Press and Foreign Policy*. Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press: 13.

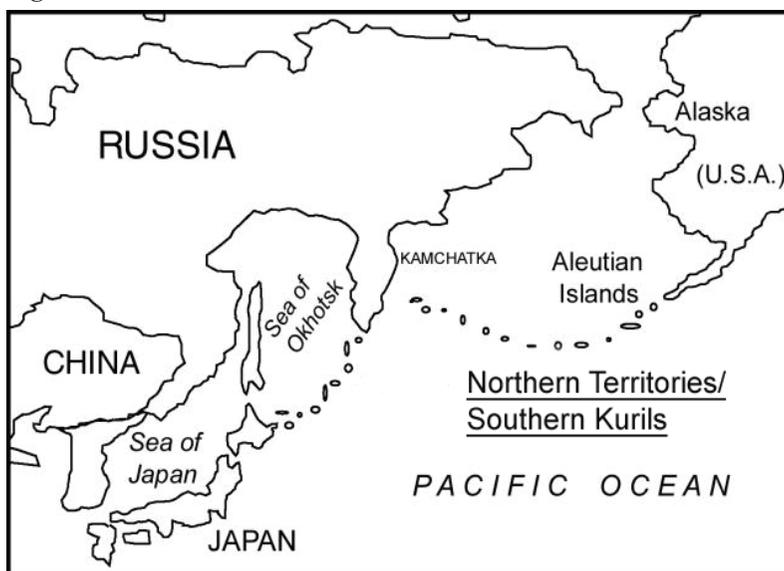
<sup>27</sup> Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw. 1972. “The Agenda-Setting Function of the Mass Media.” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 36: 176-87.

<sup>28</sup> Poluenkhtova 54.

## Security

Perhaps unsurprisingly, as the Southern Kurils have strategic significance, the islands dispute is frequently framed through the prism of security. Located at the southern gateway to the Sea of Okhotsk, the narrow passageway between Kunishir and Iturup has provided a secure route in and out of the Pacific for Soviet/Russian nuclear submarines in the Pacific Fleet since 1978 (Figure 1). Russian military planners argue that the loss of this deep-water channel would reduce the effectiveness of the Pacific Fleet and endanger Russian security in the region.<sup>29</sup> The strategic importance of the Pacific Fleet is amplified by current Russian suspicions regarding China's strengthened naval presence in the Arctic and Far East. On July 2, 2012, a Chinese icebreaking vessel—the *Snow Dragon*—became the first non-Russian ship to pass along the Northern Sea Route from Asia to Europe, close to the North Pole. On its way north, the *Snow Dragon* passed into the Sea of Okhotsk through the Soya Strait (also known as the La Pérouse Strait) that separates Sakhalin and Hokkaido. Frequent entry by Chinese ships into the Sea of Okhotsk—regarded as their exclusive preserve by the Russian military—is causing growing concern in Moscow.<sup>30</sup>

**Figure 1: Location of the Southern Kuril Islands/ Northern Territories**



Source: International Kuril Island Project, Washington University.

<sup>29</sup> A. Koshkin. 2008. "Rossiia i Iaponiia: Vozmozhen li Kompromis o Kurilakh." *Aziia i Afrika Segodnya* (November): 32.

<sup>30</sup> The National Institute for Defense Studies. 2013. *East Asian Strategic Review 2013*. Tokyo: NIDS: 277-279.

A report broadcast in July 2013 on Channel 1 is a typical example of security framing of the Kurils dispute.<sup>31</sup> The report follows President Putin's visit to Sakhalin, the administrative district that includes the Southern Kurils. In addition to meeting with officials charged with overseeing infrastructure and economic development projects in the region, Putin oversaw Russia's largest ever war games in the Far East. In the Channel 1 report, Putin is seen carrying out spot checks on the military readiness of the Eastern Military District. Viewers are told that the president personally gave the order to begin firing. The report was accompanied by film of troops conducting exercises on land, and shots of Russian warships at sea. Commenting on the "impressive" (*vpechatlyayuchchiy*) scale of the military games, Channel 1's presenter informed viewers that 160,000 personnel, 130 aircraft and 70 ships were involved in "the first exercises of this magnitude carried out in the country in 20 years."

On Channel 1, defense of the Kuril Islands is coopted into a broader narrative designed to present Putin as the champion of national security and national pride.

Research suggests that citizens respond emotionally to security threats, leading to enthusiastic public support for deployment of defenses to vulnerable regions.<sup>32</sup> When territory is threatened, it is easy for leaders to mobilize domestic support using nationalist rhetoric. In the face of danger, real or perceived, citizens "rally around the flag."<sup>33</sup> It was partly by draping himself in the Russian flag that Vladimir Putin first won the Russian presidency in March 2000. Aided by the state-controlled media, Putin cast himself as the defender of Russian security in the face of Chechen terrorism and oligarchic looting. Russian voters responded enthusiastically to Putin's promise to restore Russian unity, stability, and pride.<sup>34</sup> Association with past and present military achievements continues to play a central role in Putin's public persona.<sup>35</sup> Putin rarely misses an opportunity to remind Russians of his own past military service. Previous PR stunts include the president jumping into the cockpit of a fighter jet to extinguish wildfires,

<sup>31</sup> *Novosti*, July 16, 2013, 18:00.

<sup>32</sup> Krista E. Wiegand. 2005. "Nationalist Discourse and Domestic Incentives to Prevent Settlement of the Territorial Dispute Between Guatemala and Belize." *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 11:3: 360.

<sup>33</sup> Richard Brody. 1984. "International Crises: A Rallying Point for the President?" *Public Opinion* 6 (January): 41-43.

<sup>34</sup> Anna Kachkaeva. 2000. "Image Factory: Television as the Key Instrument for Creation of Political Myths", at <http://www.internews.ru/crisis/imagefactory.html>, accessed November 3, 2013; Peter Rutland. 2000. "Putin's Path to Power." *Post-Soviet Affairs* 16:4 (December): 313-54; Yitzhak M. Brudny. 2001. "Continuity of Change in Russian Electoral Patterns? The December 1999-March 2000 Election Cycle." In Archie Brown, ed., *Contemporary Russian Politics: A Reader*. Oxford: Oxford University Press: 154-178.

<sup>35</sup> Stephen Hutchings and Natalia Rulyov. 2008. "Commemorating the Past/Performing the Present: Television Coverage of Second World War Victory Celebration and the (De)Construction of Russian Nationhood." In Birgit Beumers, Stephen Hutchings and Natalia Rulyov eds., *The Post-Soviet Russian Media*. London: Routledge: 137-155.

or flying to campaign stops during an election.<sup>36</sup> For journalists working to tight deadlines, and who must vie for viewers with an increasing number of competitors, the photo opportunities provided by Putin's spin-doctors provide quick and easy copy.<sup>37</sup>

Reporting on the Kurils dispute on Channel 1 frequently references Russia's past military successes, in particular its defeat of Japan in WWII. The Great Patriotic War was perhaps the only moment of true *national* unity in the history of the Soviet Union.<sup>38</sup> As a result, the legacy of WWII retains a potent hold on the Russian national psyche as a symbol of national strength in the face of adversity. Recalling past victories can help reinforce the power and legitimacy of current governments.<sup>39</sup> The historical significance of WWII makes myths about the conflict a useful tool for President Putin in his quest to restore Russia's domestic and international pride. In a country as vast and culturally diverse as Russia, where the majority of citizens will never meet, the commemoration of past national achievements can help create shared memories that bind the "imagined community."<sup>40</sup>

Official ceremonies to mark national military holidays and anniversaries have become major television events in Russia since Putin became president in 2000.<sup>41</sup> On February 23 each year, Russians celebrate Defender of the Fatherland Day, a national holiday to commemorate those serving, or who have served their country, in the military. On February 23, 2012, *Novosti* reported from the Kremlin, where President Dmitry Medvedev officiated the annual Defender of the Fatherland Day ceremony. The pageant began with the president conferring the title of "City of Military Glory" on four Russian settlements, including Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky in Russia's Far East.<sup>42</sup> *Novosti's* reporter explained to viewers that soldiers

<sup>36</sup> Patrick Lannin. 2000. "Putin Woos Voters with Chechnya Fighter Jet." *Reuters* March 20; Tina Burrett. 2010. "Why Putin is good for Japan." *Japan Times* September 15.

<sup>37</sup> John Fiske. 1991. *Television Culture*. London: Routledge; Steven Barnett. 1998. "Dumbing Down or Reaching Out? Is it Tabloidisation Wot Done it?" In Jean Seaton, ed., *Politics and the Media: Harlots and Prerogatives at the Turn of the Millennium*. Oxford: Blackwell: 75-90.

<sup>38</sup> Geoffrey Hosking. 1998. "Can Russia Become a Nation-State." *Nations and Nationalism*, 4:4: 454.

<sup>39</sup> Ernest Gellner. 1983. *Nations and Nationalism*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press; Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger. 2012. *The Invention of Tradition*. 20th Edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press/Canto Classics.

<sup>40</sup> Benedict Anderson. 1992. *Imagined Communities*, Verso: London.

<sup>41</sup> Hutchings and Rulyov, "Commemorating the Past/Performing the Present"; Valerie Sperling. 2009. "Making the Public Patriotic: Militarism and Anti-Militarism in Russia." In Marlene Laruelle, ed., *Russian Nationalism and the National Reassertion of Russia*. London: Routledge: 218-270; Stephen Hutchings. 2008. "St. Petersburg 300: The Invention of a Russian (Media) Tradition." *Television and News Media* 9:1: 3-23.

<sup>42</sup> Putin introduced the "City of Military Glory" award in 2005 on 60th anniversary of the end of WWII for those communities that had contributed to wartime defense, but never received the prized Soviet accolade of "Hero City". Gerald Easter. 2008. "The Russian State in the Time of Putin." *Post-Soviet Affairs* 24:3: 222.

from Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky had “formed part of the troops that defeated the superior Japanese forces on the Kuril Islands” in 1945.<sup>43</sup>

To counteract the distancing effects of public ceremonies, Channel 1 also focuses on stories of personal heroism by individual members of the armed services. These stories inject a human element into reporting on security matters, and are featured in both news and entertainment programming. To mark Victory Day—the national holiday commemorating the end of WWII in Europe—in May 2012, Channel 1 ran a series entitled “Heirs of Victory” (*Nasledniki Pobedy*), which profiled currently enlisted service personnel with a family history in the military.<sup>44</sup> The episode broadcast on May 5, 2012, told the story of Hero of Russia awardee Air Force Major Ivan Nechaev, who miraculously survived when his plane was shot down during the Russian-Georgian war in August 2008.<sup>45</sup> Wearing his uniform and standing in front of a SU-25, similar to the one he flew in Georgia, Nechaev tells anecdotes about his grandfather, who fought against the Japanese on the Kuril Islands in WWII. Nechaev explains:

My grandpa was 13 when he left to be a cabin boy in the Pacific Fleet. When his ship was hit and sinking, he was scared to jump into the sea that was about six to seven floors below. There were no other ships nearby, but somehow, he survived.

By conflating past and present conflicts, Channel 1 lends the Russian-Georgian war some of the patriotic fervor inspired by WWII. Nechaev's words encourage this conflation when he says, “I am convinced our people today are as strong and brave as before.” Patriotic programming bolsters the Russian government's efforts to foster national unity and pride. It also serves to remind younger viewers of the sacrifices made by previous generations. Viewers are led to conclude that giving up the Southern Kurils to Japan would be disrespectful of the sacrifice made by Nechaev's grandfather and others.

As well as highlighting the sacrifice of past generations of soldiers, Channel 1 news also follows the fortunes of military personnel currently serving on the Kuril Islands. On February 26, 2012, a few days after Defense of the Fatherland Day, *Novosti* featured a report on the deployment of high-tech mobile medical stations to military units on the Kurils. The reporter at the scene explained that:

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<sup>43</sup> *Novosti*, February 23, 2012, 18:00.

<sup>44</sup> The series was broadcast nightly from April 29 to May 10, 2012, at the end of evening news broadcasts.

<sup>45</sup> *Heirs of Victory*, May 5, 2012, 18:30.

In remote areas it isn't always possible to provide a full hospital staff. In the past, soldiers had to pay to get x-rays at civilian clinics, a process that was expensive and inconvenient.<sup>46</sup>

In the footage accompanying the report, shirtless soldiers are shown waiting outside the medical trucks in an orderly queue. The report ends with the news that, "with the advent of mobile medical stations, the number of soldiers with lung disease, especially in the winter, has been significantly reduced." This report is just one example among many on Channel 1 reinforcing the government's commitment to improving the lives of soldiers and civilians living on the Kurils.

In the 1990s, living standards in the Russian Far East fell behind the rest of the country. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, President Boris Yeltsin failed to formulate a coherent Eastern policy, marginalizing the Far East from the rest of Russia. Putin has given more attention to Russia's far-flung regions, warning that neglect of the Russian Far East would lead to its loss.<sup>47</sup> Appearing on Channel 1 news in July 2012, Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev warned that allowing the infrastructure on the Kurils to fall into disrepair risked "the unraveling of the fabric of the state."<sup>48</sup> Putin has spoken on many occasions of the military as the key to modernizing Pacific Russia. From 2011, the Russian government has invested heavily in modernizing its defenses on the two larger islands, Kunashir and Iturup.<sup>49</sup> Following a strategy successfully developed during the Soviet period, the current Russian leadership hopes that increased military spending will lead to innovation and economic development on the Kurils and across the Russian Far East.

## Living Standards and Economic Development

Reporting on the living standards of the islanders and on efforts to improve infrastructure on the Kurils follows a similar pattern to coverage of security matters. Again, Putin, Medvedev, and a number of other federal government ministers are shown taking a personal interest in the development of the islands. In the numerous reports devoted to Medvedev's visit to Kunashir on November 1, 2010, the then-president is seen inspecting new power plants, hospitals, and schools.<sup>50</sup> Medvedev is shown visiting the

<sup>46</sup> *Novosti*, February 26, 2012, 10:00.

<sup>47</sup> Bobo Lo and Andy Rothman. 2005. *Pacific Russia and Asia*. CLSA Asia-Pacific Markets (September): 13.

<sup>48</sup> *Vremya*, July 8, 2012, 21:00.

<sup>49</sup> "Medvedev Orders Deployment of Weapons on Kuril Islands." *RT.com*. February 9, 2011, at <http://rt.com/politics/kuril-islands-medvedev-weapon>, accessed October 10, 2012.

<sup>50</sup> *Vremya*, November 1, 2010, 21:00.

newly constructed home of a local family. After listening to the family's concerns over a cup of tea, Medvedev promises to "invest more money [in Kunashir] because it is an important part of our land." He further pledges to ensure that, "living standards here are the same as in the rest of Russia." A voiceover explains that:

For more than 20 years, no new homes were built on the Kuril Islands. But three years ago, a program was implemented to build social housing. Apartments in one of the new buildings are totally free for teachers and health workers.

To demonstrate the success of federal investment in the islands, Channel 1's reporter tells viewers that, "over the last two years, the birthrate on the Kuril Islands has begun to increase for the first time [since the 1994 earthquake]." Further demonstrating the Russian government's commitment to the Kurils, Channel 1 reports that funding for development of the islands was "one of the few federal programs not cut during the financial crisis."<sup>51</sup>

In contrast to the federal government's concern for living standards on the islands, another recurring theme on Channel 1 news is the lackadaisical attitude and inactivity of local officials in executing projects to develop the Kurils funded by Moscow. In 2007, the Russian federal government allocated approximately US\$630 million for infrastructure and economic projects on the islands.<sup>52</sup> In several reports on Channel 1, Putin and Medvedev are seen berating local officials for failing to meet federal development targets. Visiting Kunashir in July 2012, Medvedev said, "It is a disgrace that [federal] money is not being spent."<sup>53</sup> Similarly, in a report on Putin's visit to the Russian Far East in July 2013, the president complained that, "the quality of management in the Eastern regions leaves much to be desired."<sup>54</sup> The report also informed viewers that in the past year, local officials had failed to implement more than half of all orders given by the federal government in relation to social and infrastructure projects in the Russian Far East.

The benevolent Tsar dressing down the inept regional bureaucrat is a commonly used device on Russian state-controlled television.<sup>55</sup> The purpose is to transfer responsibility for failing to deliver public services

<sup>51</sup> Regional Development Minister Viktor Basargin, speaking on *Vremya*, February 9, 2011.

<sup>52</sup> Kazuhiko Togo. 2010. "Medvedev Signals Intention to Enhance Russian Presence." *Asahi Shimbun*. 14 December.

<sup>53</sup> *Vremya*, July 8, 2012, 21:00.

<sup>54</sup> *Novosti*, July 16, 2013, 18:00.

<sup>55</sup> Catherine Fitzpatrick. 2004. "In Vesti There is News....And Propaganda." *RFERL*. March 12, at <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1343711.html>, accessed December 12, 2013.

from the federal government to local authorities. The poor quality of social services and infrastructure problems are consistently among the top concerns of Russian citizens.<sup>56</sup> The federal government and their supporters in the media, however, cannot simply pretend that these problems do not exist. Citizens have firsthand experience of the weaknesses of public services, and would not believe unwaveringly upbeat television coverage on this topic. The current Russian government have learnt from the propaganda failures of the Soviet era, when “the experienced viewer, comparing the paradise on the screen with what he saw himself, drew his own conclusions.”<sup>57</sup>

The close personal association of both Putin and Medvedev with the security and comfort of Russian residents living on the Southern Kurils presents a potential problem should Russia reach a territorial compromise with Tokyo. A settlement with Japan, which would require Russia to cede at least part of the disputed territories, could undermine Putin’s reputation as defender of national security and territorial integrity. President Putin’s sensitivity to his reputation on these issues was demonstrated by Russia’s military intervention in the Crimea, in the name of supporting Ukraine’s ethnic Russians, in March 2014. The economic dislocation and loss of international status that accompanied the collapse of the USSR ensures a significant role for nationalism in post-Soviet Russian politics. Left-wing nationalist parties have been the main rivals of all three post-Soviet Russian presidents. Putin’s enduring popularity with Russian voters is predicated on his media-constructed image as defender of Russian interests—including defending Russia’s borders and its overseas diaspora.<sup>58</sup> However, his decision to return to the presidency for a third term in 2012—coupled with fraudulent parliamentary elections in 2011—has cost Putin support among cosmopolitan, urban voters. In his third term, Putin is more reliant on support from provincial Russia, the Russia that fears territorial disintegration.<sup>59</sup>

A report by the *Public Opinion Foundation* in September 2013 found that 57 percent of Russian citizens believe their country is at risk of territorial encroachment.<sup>60</sup> In the current political climate, it is unlikely that Putin will risk further alienating public opinion by conceding to Japan more than the two uninhabited islands (Habomai and Shikotan). The continuing

<sup>56</sup> FOM. *O rabote rossiyskogo pravitel'stva* [On the work of the Russian government]. April 19, 2013, at <http://fom.ru/Politika/10895>, accessed November 29, 2013.

<sup>57</sup> Ellen Mickiewicz. 1999. *Changing Channels: Television and the Struggle for Power in Russia*. Second Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press: 20.

<sup>58</sup> Ivan Zassoursky. 2004. *Media and Power in Post-Soviet Russia*. London: M.E Sharpe: 144.

<sup>59</sup> Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holmes. 2012. “An Autopsy of Managed Democracy.” *Journal of Democracy* 23:3: 44.

<sup>60</sup> *O territorii Rossii i yeye tselostnosti* [On Russian territory and its integrity]. September 17, 2013, at <http://fom.ru/Politika/11086>, accessed November 27, 2013.

association of Putin with the defense and development of the Kurils on Russian television suggests that the president is aware of his political predicament and will not agree to a significant territorial transfer to Tokyo. After investing large sums of money in improving social infrastructure and military defenses on Kunishir and Iturup, it is unlikely that the Russian government will agree to cede any part of these two islands to Japan.

On previous occasions when Putin has settled border disputes by conceding territory to Russia's neighbors, he has circumnavigated potential public protestations by simply keeping news of the agreement off the television screens. In 2008, Channel 1 stayed silent when Russia transferred several disputed islands to China.<sup>61</sup> News of a territorial settlement with Japan would not be so easy to ignore for three main reasons. Firstly, unlike other territorial disputes, control of the Kuril Islands is bound up with the emotional legacy of WWII. Secondly, the islands ceded to China were largely uninhabited, while the Southern Kurils have a population of approximately 19,000.<sup>62</sup> Thirdly, after stoking popular interest in the fate of the Kuril islanders, Channel 1 could not drop its coverage of this topic without public notice and comment. For eighteen-months beginning in mid-2010, aided and abetted by state-controlled television, the Kremlin employed the Kurils dispute to stir up patriotic sentiment ahead of parliamentary elections in December 2011. Yet by enflaming anti-Japanese sentiments, as well as fears of territorial encroachment, the Kremlin has limited its future negotiating options on the Kurils. A victim of its own success, having used nationalistic television coverage of the Kurils to harden public opinion against a compromise with Japan, the Kremlin may find it difficult to shift public attitudes in the opposite direction should it choose to make a territorial deal with Tokyo.

## Diplomacy and Summity

In reference to international summity, reporting on bilateral relations between Russia and Japan on Channel 1 shows some signs of reflecting the rapprochement that has taken place since mid-2012. Hostilities between Russia and Japan were the focus of an extended *Vremya* report on the APEC summit held in Yokohama in November 2010.<sup>63</sup> The report highlighted the frosty reception received by President Medvedev from Japanese Prime Minister Naoto Kan. In the report, Japan is accused of "never having

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<sup>61</sup> Russia agreed to hand over Tarabarov Island and half of Bolshoi Ussuriysky Island to China. "Nearly 40 Years After Fighting Flared, A Border Deal is Reached." *The Economist*. July 24, 2008.

<sup>62</sup> "Kuril Islands: Fact File." *The Telegraph*. November 1, 2010, at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/japan/8101395/Kuril-Islands-factfile.html>, accessed December 4, 2013.

<sup>63</sup> *Vremya*, November 14, 2010, 21:00.

come to terms with the outcome of the Second World War.” The report also criticizes Japan for “stubbornly (*upryamo*) calling the Kurils *their* islands.”

Reports on President Putin’s five meetings with Prime Minister Abe between April 2013 and February 2014 take a more positive tone. There are no references to WWII or negative rhetoric directed at Japan. Instead, these reports focus on the growing economic cooperation between the two countries. From 2005 until the 2008 global financial crisis, bilateral trade grew rapidly, peaking at US\$29 billion in 2008.<sup>64</sup> Following a dip in 2009 and 2010, by 2012, bilateral trade had climbed to US\$32 billion.<sup>65</sup> Japanese investment in Russia has also surged in recent years, expanding from US\$567 million in 2006 to over US\$8 billion in 2009.<sup>66</sup> In 2003, the Japanese government abandoned its strategy of limiting economic ties with Russia in an attempt to pressure Moscow into making concessions on the Northern Territories. Recognizing Russia’s economic resurgence, Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi signed an agreement with President Putin to set aside the islands dispute and promote greater economic cooperation.<sup>67</sup> As a result of the deal signed by Putin and Koizumi, since 2007, Japanese car manufactures Toyota, Nissan and Suzuki have all opened new plants in Russia. In May 2009, Russia and Japan concluded a nuclear technology agreement potentially worth billions of dollars.<sup>68</sup> As a consequence of growing bilateral energy ties following the March 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster, 2011 became the first year in which bilateral trade exceeded US\$30 billion.<sup>69</sup> Between 2011 and 2012 Japanese imports from Russia grew by 9 percent.<sup>70</sup> In March 2014, the Abe government did not allow its deepening economic ties with Russia to be derailed by the crisis in Ukraine. Japan did not go as far as the U.S. and Europe in criticizing the movement of Russian forces into Crimea.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>64</sup> S. Blagov. 2008. “Russia Struggles to Encourage Japanese Investments.” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*. April 29, at [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no\\_cache=1&tx\\_ttnews\[swords\]=8fd5893941d69d0be3f378576261ae3e&tx\\_ttnews\[any\\_of\\_the\\_words\]=sergei%20blagov&tx\\_ttnews\[pointer\]=11&tx\\_ttnews\[tt\\_news\]=33588&tx\\_ttnews\[backPid\]=7&cHash=4d5e589aef](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[swords]=8fd5893941d69d0be3f378576261ae3e&tx_ttnews[any_of_the_words]=sergei%20blagov&tx_ttnews[pointer]=11&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=33588&tx_ttnews[backPid]=7&cHash=4d5e589aef), accessed March 20, 2013.

<sup>65</sup> “Japanese PM visits Russia to build ‘personal confidence-based relations’.” *RT.com*. April 28, 2013, at <http://rt.com/news/japan-abe-visit-russia-524>, accessed May 16, 2014.

<sup>66</sup> Weitz 147.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid* 146.

<sup>68</sup> Anatoly Medetsky. 2009. “Russia and Japan Sign Nuclear Deal.” *The Moscow Times*. May 13.

<sup>69</sup> “Japan-Russia Foreign Ministers’ Meeting between Foreign Minister Gamba and Foreign Minister Lavrov.” *MOFA*. January 28, 2012, at <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/russia/meet1201.html>, accessed February 22, 2013.

<sup>70</sup> “World Trade Statistics 2013.” *World Trade Organization*, at [www.wto.org/english/res\\_e/statistics\\_e/its2013\\_e/its2013\\_e.pdf](http://www.wto.org/english/res_e/statistics_e/its2013_e/its2013_e.pdf), accessed 9 March 2014.

<sup>71</sup> “Territorial Dispute Puts Japan in a Quandary Over Russia’s Incursion.” *Nikkei Asian Review*. March 3, 2014, at <http://asia.nikkei.com/Politics-Economy/International-Relations/>

Decoupling economic relations with Japan from the territorial dispute has long been a key aim of the Russian government. Reporting on Channel 1 has echoed the Russian government's call for a separation of economic and political relations with Japan. The benefits of growing economic ties with Japan were the central theme of Channel 1's coverage of Prime Minister Abe's visit to Moscow in April 2013. In one report, a newscaster commented that, "it is all the more strange (*stranno*)" that political relations between the two nations are bad when "over the past 10 years economic cooperation has grown."<sup>72</sup> Viewers are informed that, "compared to 2003, twice as many Japanese companies are today working in Russia," and that bilateral trade has increased eight fold in the past decade.<sup>73</sup> The report featured footage of Putin's meeting with Abe, during which the Russian president said that, "although Russia and Japan have reached a record level of turnover, it is still too small." Plans for Japan to build a cancer treatment facility in Russia, and for joint projects in the gas industry, were also discussed in the report.

Reporting on Putin's welcome to Abe at the opening ceremony of the Sochi Winter Olympic Games in February 2014 also highlighted the technological benefits to Russia of improved economic connections with Japan. Channel 1's reporter at the scene explained to viewers that over 12,000 Japanese video and audio devices could be found in the Olympic stadiums, and that most of the scoreboards for the event had also been produced in Japan. The reporter noted that this was significant because Tokyo's last-minute decision to boycott the 1980 Moscow Olympics had left the Soviet Union without vital equipment that had been contracted from Japan, including the Olympic torch.<sup>74</sup>

Showing the economic benefits of better relations with Japan is perhaps a means of convincing Russian viewers to accept growing political ties. This may be necessary, as the number of Russians who see Japan as friendly towards Russia is in decline. In 2001, 56 percent of Russians thought Japan was a friendly country, but by 2011 this had dropped to 33 percent. Over the same period, the number of Russians perceiving relations with Japan as "good" had also dropped by half, from 62 percent in 2001 to 31 percent in 2011.<sup>75</sup> It is difficult to verify whether this decline in public attitudes is due to negative television coverage of Japan in relation to the Kurils dispute. However, as the main source of information for Russian

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Territorial-issue-puts-Japan-in-quandary-over-Russia-s-incursion, accessed March 10, 2014.

<sup>72</sup> *Vremya*, April 29, 2013, 21:00.

<sup>73</sup> Channel 1's reporting on the visit to Moscow by Japanese Foreign Minister Koichi Gemba in July 2012 similarly centers on bilateral economic cooperation. *Vremya*, July 28, 2013, 21:00.

<sup>74</sup> *Vremya*, February 9, 2014, 21:00.

<sup>75</sup> FOM. *Rossiya-Yaponiya: istoriya otmoshenii* [Russia-Japan: the history of relations]. February 24, 2011, at <http://bd.fom.ru/pdf/d08rjio11.pdf>, accessed December 3, 2013.

audiences, it is likely that television played some role in changing public opinion. The emphasis on economics in Channel 1's reporting on bilateral relations may also be aimed at a Japanese audience. In meetings with Japanese leaders, President Putin has repeatedly asserted his belief that growing economic integration is the key to solving the territorial dispute.<sup>76</sup> News reporting on Channel 1 reiterates this message.

### Nationalism and Patriotism

Nationalist undertones ran through many of the reports on the Kurils dispute on Channel 1. But only in a small number of reports were nationalist activities the primary focus of the story. A slew of such reports were broadcast in response to Japan's annual Northern Territories Day activities on February 7, 2011.<sup>77</sup> Speaking at the 2011 Northern Territories Day rally in Tokyo, Prime Minister Naoto Kan termed Dmitry Medvedev's visit to Kunashir the previous November as an "unforgivable affront" (*nepozvolitel'nym oskorbleniyem*). Kan's speech was repeatedly featured in Channel 1 news programs broadcast on February 7, 9 and 11, 2011.<sup>78</sup> Channel 1 also gave prominence to the strongly worded response to Kan from Russian government officials. *Vremya* on February 9, for example, carried a speech by President Medvedev who stressed that, "These islands are the territory of the Russian Federation, and are completely covered by our sovereignty." The president further promised that, "We will take all necessary steps to strengthen our presence on the Kurils."<sup>79</sup>

Perhaps encouraged by the rhetoric of mainstream politicians, on Northern Territories Day in 2011, two Japanese extremist groups desecrated a Russian flag outside the Russian Embassy in Tokyo. News of the burning of a Russian flag "in front of on-looking Japanese police" was repeated on Channel 1 for several days.<sup>80</sup> Again, news programs gave significant airtime to the Russian government's response to events in Japan. On *Vremya* on February 7, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov accused the Japanese government of encouraging extremist behavior by "not only financing NGOs [supporting the return of the Kurils] but also this year increasing their funding." On the February 11, Lavrov was shown complaining that it was "futile" (*besperspektivno*) trying to conduct

<sup>76</sup> "Economic Cooperation Will Solve Japan Spat—Putin." *RIA Novosti*. March 2, 2012, at <http://en.ria.ru/world/20120302/171686314.html>, accessed December 11, 2013.

<sup>77</sup> In 1981, the Japanese cabinet decreed February 7 as Northern Territories Day, an annual holiday to keep the islands dispute in the public consciousness. The date was ironically chosen, as on this day in 1855, Japan and Russia began friendly diplomatic relations, signing a treaty on commerce and navigation.

<sup>78</sup> See, for example, *Vremya*, February 11, 2011, 21:00.

<sup>79</sup> *Vremya*, February 9, 2011, 21:00.

<sup>80</sup> See, for example, *Novosti*, February 7, 2011, 18:00.

conversations with Japanese about the Kurils while their government continued to take “radical and divisive approaches.”<sup>81</sup> Tit-for-tat exchanges over the Kurils were frequent news on Channel 1 for the next month, but came to an abrupt end when Japan was struck by a devastating earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011.

Channel 1's reporting on the undiplomatic verbal exchanges between Moscow and Tokyo in February 2011 made little attempt to explain the Kurils dispute in historical or political context. This lack of context likely owes more to the nature of televisual communication than to deliberate attempts at distortion.<sup>82</sup> Unlike the serious print media, which demands consideration of the causes and consequences of events described, communication scholars postulate that television works on the level of entertainment, turning political reality into “political spectacle.”<sup>83</sup> Manuel Castells, for example, writes:

The television mode of communication has become a radically new means of transmitting information, whose characteristics can be defined as follows: attractiveness; the sensual simulation of reality; and ease of perception, requiring a minimum of psychological effort.<sup>84</sup>

On television, politics becomes dramatized, transforming political actors into heroes and villains. In Channel 1's reporting on the Kurils dispute, it is clear that Putin, Medvedev, and their fellow ministers are the heroes, and the Japanese the villains. As Murray Edelman contends, a visible enemy is important in politics because it creates the illusion of conflict and musters public support for established leaders and the interests they represent. Without the spectacle of conflict, leaders cannot expect to mobilize public support.<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, by focusing on leadership as an explanation for political developments, television news—consciously or unconsciously—reinforces the assumption that political leaders are crucial

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<sup>81</sup> *Novosti*, February 11, 2011, 18:00.

<sup>82</sup> Iyengar Shanto. 1991. *Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

<sup>83</sup> The “political spectacle constituted by news reporting continually constructs and reconstructs social problems, crises, enemies and leaders and so creates a succession of threats and reassurances. These constructed problems and personalities furnish the content of political journalism and play a central role in winning support and opposition for political causes and policies.” Murray Edelman. 1988. *Constructing the Political Spectacle*. London: University of Chicago Press: 1.

<sup>84</sup> Manuel Castells. 1997. *The Information Age: The Rise of the Network Society*. Oxford: Blackwells: 332-3.

<sup>85</sup> Edelman 51.

to the course of national and international events.<sup>86</sup> Television's portrayal of Putin as central to all political developments, however, may have unintended consequences. Putin's omnipresence on Russian TV screens raises huge expectations of the president and makes it difficult for him to escape responsibility for unpopular policies and negative events. It is for this reason that anti-government protests since March 2010 have gathered under the banner of "Russia Without Putin" (*Rossiia bez Putina*).<sup>87</sup>

One of the few discussions of the historical roots of the Kurils dispute on Channel 1 appeared on *Odnako*, the analytical political show presented by Mikhail Leontiev. In a polemic filled with nationalist rhetoric, Leontiev accused the United States of creating the current Kurils impasse by encouraging Japan to claim the Southern Kurils at the San Francisco Peace Conference in 1951.<sup>88</sup> Leontiev further criticized the United States for not carrying out a "German-style denazification in Japan" during its occupation. As a result of this failure, Leontiev argues that the Kurils issue has become an outlet for Japan's "humiliated samurai spirit (*unizhennogo samurayskogo dukha*)."<sup>89</sup> To remind viewers of the historical origins of the dispute, Leontiev's speech was accompanied by footage of fighting between Russian and Japanese forces from WWII.

## Findings Overview and Conclusions

Although the lenses through which the islands dispute was interpreted on Channel 1 remained largely the same throughout the monitoring period, following improvements in bilateral relations from mid-2012 and the start of new peace treaty negotiations in August 2013, there was a significant change in rhetoric and lexicon. Specifically, there was a noticeable reduction in the use of overt nationalist rhetoric. Negative references (spoken and visual) to WWII in connection with Japan also declined. When reporting on the death of Hiro Onoda—a Japanese Imperial Army officer who did not surrender in 1945, but continued to hide in the Philippines' jungle until 1974—Channel 1 praised his fighting spirit. Onoda's death was not used to remind viewers of the war between Russia and Japan over the Kurils in 1945 nor of Japanese aggression against its Asian neighbors in WWII. In contradiction of Leontiev's description of Japan's "humiliated samurai spirit," Channel 1's presenter praised Onoda as a "legendary personality" (*legendarnoy lichnosti*), "a warrior" (*voin*) and as "the last samurai" (*poslednim samurayem*).<sup>89</sup>

Nationalist references, however, did not disappear from Channel

<sup>86</sup> Ibid 46.

<sup>87</sup> "Putin dolzhen uyti! [Putin must go!]." *Yezhednevnyy Zhurnal*. March 11, 2010, at [www.ej.ru/?a=note&id=9935](http://www.ej.ru/?a=note&id=9935), accessed March 10, 2014.

<sup>88</sup> *Odnako*, March 3, 2011, 21:35.

<sup>89</sup> *Vremya*, January 17, 2014, 21:00.

1 altogether after Putin's return to the presidency and the thawing in Russo-Japanese relations from mid-2012. During his annual televised press conference in December 2012, for example, President Putin was asked whether one of the Kuril Islands should be renamed "Putin Island" (*Ostrov Putina*).<sup>90</sup> Politely suggesting Pushkin or Tolstoy as more suitable names, Putin told viewers that the newly elected Japanese government had indicated their "willingness to conclude a peace treaty" and that he looks forward to a "constructive dialogue on this issue." By December 2012, although nationalist framing of the Kurils issue continued on Channel 1, the harsh rhetoric of 2010 and 2011 had been replaced with more conciliatory language.

Prime Minister Abe's fifth one-on-one meeting with Putin in Sochi on February 8, 2014, came just 24 hours after the Japanese leader had attended the annual Northern Territories Day rally in Tokyo. In its report on the leaders' meeting, Channel 1 made no reference to Abe's speech at the rally. In sharp contrast to 2011, when Prime Minister Kan's Northern Territories Day speech sparked a diplomatic war of words with Russia that was covered in detail on Russian television, Japan's 2014 Northern Territory Day commemorations went unnoted by Channel 1. Rather, the channel's report on Abe's talks with Putin emphasized Japan's gratitude for Russian support after the Tohoku earthquake, the establishment of new bilateral mechanisms for political cooperation, and expanding economic ties.<sup>91</sup> On February 7, the day Abe attended the controversial rally, Channel 1's only report from Japan featured a group of Japanese fans devoted to Russian ice-skating duo Tatiana Volosozhar and Maxim Trankov. Channel 1's decision to ignore Japan's Northern Territories Day commemorations, and its generally positive coverage of Abe's meeting with Putin at Sochi, suggests the channel has been coopted by the Kremlin to support its current policy of building better relations with Japan.

Abe's presence at the Sochi Olympics opening ceremony featured in several Channel 1 news reports.<sup>92</sup> The Japanese prime minister's attendance at the ceremony points to his commitment to improving bilateral trust and cooperation with Russia. Following the controversial passage of anti-homosexual legislation by the Russian parliament in June 2013, the leaders of many major democracies stayed away from Sochi, including U.S. President Barak Obama, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and British Prime Minister David Cameron.<sup>93</sup> Channel 1's focus on Abe was

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<sup>90</sup> *Press Conference With Russian President Vladimir Putin*, Channel 1, December 20, 2012, 16:00.

<sup>91</sup> *Novosti*, February 8, 2014, 18:00.

<sup>92</sup> See, for example, *Novosti*, February 8, 2014, 18:00 and *Vremya*, February 9, 2014, 21:00.

<sup>93</sup> Shaun Walker. 2014. "Sochi Winter Olympics: Who Is Going to the Opening Ceremony?" *The Guardian*. February 5.

not, therefore, exclusively in aid of Russo-Japanese relations. As the leader of a key democratic state, Abe's presence at Sochi gave diplomatic cover to Putin. Furthermore, attending the Olympic ceremony required Abe to leave Japan during a parliamentary session. By convention, Japanese prime ministers are present in parliament far more than their international counterparts. Japanese leaders only travel aboard when parliament is sitting in exceptional circumstances (for example, to attend a G8 summit).<sup>94</sup> Abe's decision to travel to Russia during a parliamentary session further demonstrates his commitment to improving relations with Moscow.

Along with a reduction in nationalist rhetoric in reference to the Kurils on Channel 1 from mid-2012, another important finding of this study was the exclusion of reporting on Russia's diplomatic overtures and concessions to Japan. For example, Putin's offer to restart territorial talks—made prior to his re-election as president in March 2012—was not covered on Channel 1. Nor did the channel mention Russia's current negotiating position—namely that Putin's government is willing to cede the two smaller disputed islands—Habomai and Shikotan—in exchange for a peace treaty and Japan abandoning its claim to the larger two. In March 2012, when the Japanese government dropped the term “illegal occupation” (*nezakonnaya okkupatsiya*) regarding Russia's control of the Southern Kurils, replacing it with the less confrontational occupied “without legal mandate” (*ne imeyet yuridicheskikh osnovaniy*), this news was given just 24 seconds on *Vremya*.<sup>95</sup>

Japan's conciliatory gesture did not fit with Channel 1's previous discourse accusing the Japanese of deliberately escalating tensions with its aggressive posturing over the Kurils. Part of the explanation of why Russia's rapprochement with Japan has not fully extended to coverage on Channel 1 lies in Channel 1's dual role in Russian society. On the one hand, since Putin returned to power, it has been the channel's role to communicate and promote “official” policies and positions on domestic and international events. On the other hand, there is a need for the channel to respond to, and accommodate, popular grassroots voices, not only in terms of ratings, but also to retain credibility. Public opinion in Russia is firmly against territorial concessions to Japan. According to a survey by the *Levada Center* in February 2011, 90 percent of Russians oppose handing over any of the Kuril Islands to Japan.<sup>96</sup> Only four percent are ready to return one or more of the islands. Furthermore, Russian opposition to a handover is hardening. In 1991 only 67 percent of Russians were against

<sup>94</sup> “Diet Clearing Path to Boost Abe's Diplomacy.” *Daily Yomiuri*. March 9, 2014.

<sup>95</sup> *Vremya*, March 2, 2012, 21:00.

<sup>96</sup> *Ob otnoshenii k Yaponii i spornykh ostrovakh* [On relations with Japan and the disputed islands], February 18, 2011, at <http://www.levada.ru/print/press/2011021808.html>, accessed December 13, 2013.

it. Appearing to take a soft line on a territorial compromise with Japan would put the Russian authorities and their supporters in the media on the wrong side of public opinion.

Being seen to support a territorial compromise with Japan would undermine Putin's credibility as defender of the national interest. Having deployed a nationalistic framing of the Kurils dispute, Russia's leaders have encouraged the public to see retaining the islands as a matter of national pride. In so doing, they have limited their maneuverability with regard to negotiating a settlement with Japan. Furthermore, sensationalist media reporting of assertive Japanese claims to the Kurils have played into public fears over the security of territorial integrity.

The framing of news reports on the Kurils disputes suggests that the Russian authorities may also be attempting to use Channel 1 to send a message to Japan. Reiterations, by Russian politicians appearing on Channel 1, of Russia's continuing commitment to retaining the Southern Kurils may be a warning aimed at the Japanese, as well as a reassurance to Russian citizens. As recently as February 2014, in response to a question from a Japanese correspondent, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stated that Russia did not regard the Kurils dispute with Japan as a territorial issue, as Russian control of the islands was recognized under the 1945 UN Charter.<sup>97</sup>

The continued focus on the Kurils on Channel 1, and the association of the territorial dispute with patriotic themes, suggests the Russian government is not preparing audiences for anything more than a minimal territorial concession to Japan at best. Both Putin and Medvedev have publically stated their commitment to maintaining Russian sovereignty over the islands, and to the improvement of infrastructure and living standards on the Kurils.

In light of Russia's growing security concerns about China, since Prime Minister Abe's return to power in December 2012, the Japanese media have become tentatively optimistic about a favorable territorial deal with Moscow.<sup>98</sup> Yet the ongoing nationalist framing of the Kurils dispute on Russian television suggests there is little reason for optimism. Despite powerful economic and security incentives to conclude a peace treaty on both sides, Russian public hostility to territorial concessions—in part created by television coverage of the Kurils issue—makes it unlikely that Putin will offer Japan a better deal than the two islands he put back on the table in 2001.

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<sup>97</sup> "Russia Does Not Think It Has a Territorial Dispute with Japan—Lavrov." *Voice of Russia*. February 18, 2014, at [www.voiceofrussia.com/news/2014\\_02\\_18/russia-does-not-think-it-has-territorial-dispute-with-Japan-Lavrov-6519](http://www.voiceofrussia.com/news/2014_02_18/russia-does-not-think-it-has-territorial-dispute-with-Japan-Lavrov-6519), accessed March 10, 2014.

<sup>98</sup> Putin: Lack of Treaty 'Abnormal'." *Japan Times*. February 22, 2013; "Putin Hints at Dividing Disputed Islands Between Russia and Japan." *Asahi Shimbun*. May 1, 2013; "Abe and Putin Begin with Confidence Building." *Yomiuri Shimbun*. October 9, 2013.

