

Japan to Push for WWII-Era Peace Treaty with Russia

"We both do not want this to drag out into another generation," the Japanese Prime Minister said Friday.

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Global Research, January 06, 2019

[teleSUR](#) 4 January 2019

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Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said Friday he intends to move towards a World War II peace treaty with Russia during a summit in Russia later this month. The treaty has been hindered for decades by a territorial dispute.

Abe is due to meet Russian President Vladimir Putin in the 25th summit where they are expected to end a disagreement over a collection of islands seized by Soviet troops in the final days of the war.

"I'll visit Russia later this month and intend to push forward with discussions towards a peace treaty," he said, adding that there had been "absolutely no progress" on the issue for more than 70 years.

Abe said that, while there were no guarantees of an agreement, the two nations had been cooperating over issues concerning the islands, as well as economic issues, over the past two years "as never before."

Putin caught Abe off guard in September when, on stage with the Japanese leader at a conference in Vladivostok, he suggested signing a peace treaty by year-end "without any pre-conditions."

Abe later rejected the proposal, repeating Japan's stance that the countries must resolve a question of sovereignty.

After the two met again in Singapore in November, the Japanese prime minister said they had agreed to advance negotiations based on a 1956 joint statement in which Moscow agreed to transfer the two smaller islands to Japan after a peace treaty was established.

Putin may be open to a deal now with the expectation that better ties will act as a counter-balance to China and draw more Japanese investment and technology, some experts say.

However, others doubt whether Putin really wants an agreement, partly because many Russian citizens are opposed to returning any of the islands, known in Japan as the Northern Territories and in Russia as the Southern Kurils.

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