

JAPAN SAYS DISPUTED ISLANDS 'ILLEGALLY OCCUPIED' BY RUSSIA

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Japan described four islands whose ownership it disputes with Moscow as “illegally occupied by Russia” in the latest version of a diplomatic report released on Friday, using stronger language to describe the territorial flap than other recent versions and underscoring the chilled relations between the two sides amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The description in the 2022 Diplomatic Bluebook, an annual report on Japan’s foreign policy issued by the Foreign Ministry, uses that phrasing for the first time in nearly two decades.

Japan, which is struggling to improve ties with Moscow to regain control of the Kurils, which Tokyo calls the Northern Territories, had previously described the dispute in a softer tone.

“The Northern Territories are a group of islands Japan has sovereignty over and an integral part of Japan’s territory, but currently they are illegally occupied by Russia,” the Ministry said in the report.

The dispute over the Russian-held islands, which the former Soviet Union seized from Japan at the end of Second World War, has prevented the two countries from signing a peace treaty to end their war hostilities.

The report last used a similar expression in 2003 but had toned down its phrasing until last year, when it described the dispute as “the greatest concern between Japan and Russia” and noted that “Japan has sovereignty” over the islands.

Dispute with S. Korea

In another territorial dispute, the Ministry said the island that Japan calls Takeshima is “illegally occupied” by Seoul, which calls it Dokdo.

South Korea’s Foreign Ministry protested Japan’s “repeated inclusion of unjust sovereignty claims over Dokdo,” calling the island an integral part of South Korean territory.

It said Tokyo’s claims are in “no way conducive to efforts to establish a future-oriented ties.

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