

October 16, 1956

**Memorandum of Conversation between N.S.
Khrushchev and [Japanese Minister of Agriculture] I.
Kono**

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Summary:

Ichirō Kōno, the Japanese Minister of Agriculture, raises questions about the normalization of relations between the Soviet Union and Japan. Issues that must be addressed prior to this happening include disputes over fishing rights and the transfer of the islands of Habomai and Shikotan to Japan.

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Memorandum of Conversation
between N.S. Khrushchev and I. Kono

The conversation took place on October 16 from 14 in the afternoon to 15:45.

Kono. The internal situation in Japan is very difficult. I hope that Mr. Khrushchev is well informed by the Soviet representative in Tokyo Tikhvin on this issue.

There were serious objections on the part of a number of party factions in connection with the trip to the Soviet Union by Prime Minister Hatoyama and all of our delegation. However, despite these objections, Minister Hatoyama and I resolutely decided to go to Moscow and conduct negotiations to the end.

I should express gratitude to the Soviet Government for having shown good will in May of this year when we conducted negotiations about fishing issues. However, it seems to me that the Soviet Government still does not completely comprehend our complicated internal situation and does not know that inside political parties in Japan there is an acute struggle of a number of factions.

A letter was sent through Minister Ishkov to the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, Bulganin, from Premier Hatoyama and Kono, which set out some of the requests of the Japanese side. Do you know about this?

Khrushchev answers that he knows.

Kono. Yesterday, I met with Ishkov again and laid out my views to him in detail. Were you informed of this?

Khrushchev answers in the affirmative.

Kono. If something needs to be added to this, I said earlier that I agree to do this.

Khrushchev. Answers that he is not against additional remarks by Kono.

Kono. The Prime Minister and I believe that the normalization of relations between the USSR and Japan should be reached on the basis of the 5 points laid out in Prime Minister Hatoyama's letter and in Bulganin's answer. As you know, after the exchange of letters in Moscow, our Commissioner Matsumoto was sent for a more detailed presentation of our views regarding the organization of negotiations. We believe negotiations should be completed in the spirit of those five points. But the internal political situation of Japan and, above all else, the acute conflict inside the ruling political party (meaning the Yoshida faction) makes our position in Moscow extremely difficult and impedes the resolution of a number of issues. The Japanese side believes that we need a quicker normalization of relations, as is feasible. But in order for the normalization of relations to go smoothly and without consequences, it is necessary to return the islands of Habomai and Shikotan to Japan. Everything else can be resolved at another time. I apologize that I am suggesting somewhat of a retreat from the five points, but Japan's internal political situation forces me to do this.

Khrushchev. Negotiations regarding the normalization of relations, which are being conducted between our countries, are lengthy. We have a complete picture of those issues, for which the parties already reached a general point of view, and of those points that are not acceptable for the Japanese side. If I correctly understand, the main and only issue preventing the normalization of relations between the USSR and Japan is the territorial question. All other issues, it seems, are sufficiently discussed and resolved.

On the territorial question, we studied the possible difficulties and, in due course, suggested to conclude a peace treaty, which provides for all the conditions for the normalization of relations, including the territorial question. Going to its meeting with Japan, the Soviet Government was ready to relinquish its rights to the islands of Habomai and Shikotan that belong to us. In doing so, we were guided by the fact that these specific islands are very close to the island of Hokkaido, and that this situation could serve as a pretext for tension between our countries in the future. However, the transfer of the specified territory would serve as a pretext for strengthening friendly relations. All of this was instructed to be communicated to the Japanese through Mr. Masumoto in London. Subsequently, the Japanese stated that these conditions for a peace treaty were not acceptable because the Japanese government is bound by certain obligations to parties and the internal political situation in the country hinders

this. Studying the Japanese's statement, the Soviet Government has postponed the conclusion of a peace treaty, hoping that there will come a time when the powers in Japan advocating peace and friendship with the Soviet Union are victorious. Then, it will be possible to resume negotiations regarding the conclusion of a treaty.

Last year, I thoroughly and clearly laid out the Soviet Union's point of view to the Japanese parliamentary delegation in Moscow. Further, after Mr. Shigemitsu's visit to Moscow during his negotiations with Minister of Foreign Affairs T. Shepilov, our position was again concisely and clearly laid out. However, it turned out that the Japanese side was not in a position to conclude a peace treaty, and in September of this year, pursuant to the Japanese Prime Minister's proposal, a new question regarding the form of concluding negotiations emerged. This is about the so-called five points set out in Prime Minister Hatoyama's letter, which was addressed to the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, T. Bulganin. The Soviet Government agreed with the letter's basic provisions, and Hatoyama's five points were accepted as a starting point. Meanwhile, it was decided that the territorial question will not be resolved. All of this was stated in T. Bulganin's responding letter.

The documents, which were presented by the Japanese delegation yesterday, strictly stem from the five points mentioned. We cannot understand why the new conditions for the conclusion of negotiations are not acceptable for Japan, as stated by Mr. Kono, and why they will not be supported by public opinion in Japan.

Mr. Kono raises the question about transferring Habomai and Shikotan. But this is a question that can only be resolved with a peace treaty. But the Japanese side stated that it is not ready for the conclusion of such a treaty. How can a territorial question be resolved without the basic treaty governing relations?

The Japanese side wants to get Habomai and Shikotan without the conclusion of a peace treaty and subsequently decide some other unknown territorial questions, which actually do not exist. The Soviet Government wants to settle with Japan as quickly as possible and it will not use territorial questions for bargaining. But I must again utterly and categorically state that we will not accept any of Japan's complaints regarding the territorial question, except Habomai and Shikotan, and refuse to discuss any proposals in this regard.

The Japanese Government should also understand the Soviet Government's position. Our people know that we made great territorial concessions. We are giving away the islands of Habomai and Shikotan to Japan. But our people would not understand us if we made even greater territorial concessions and gave Japan new territory, legally belonging to our nation. We cannot and will not make any further concessions. Habomai and Shikotan could be transferred to Japan through a peace treaty, but with the transfer of the referenced islands the territorial question should be considered completely and entirely resolved.

I think that the referenced conditions are quite acceptable for Japan. As much as can be determined from the Japanese press, the majority of the Japanese people agree with our proposed conditions for a peace treaty, which will enable us to end the state of war between our countries, normalize relations, develop trade, exchange cultural achievements and thereby create the conditions for friendship between our peoples. Such a resolution is in the Japanese people's interest. I am referring to Japan's interests today and in the future.

We will regret it if Japan cannot now come to normalize relations. In this case, we would have to wait until conditions were ripe in Japan for the normalization of relations between our countries.

We really value the efforts that Prime Minister Hatoyama has made in improving relations between our countries. I spoke about this yesterday and repeat it today. Despite his age and physical ailment, he stopped at nothing and came to Moscow in order to finish negotiations. We also value your efforts very much, Mr. Kono. You worked very energetically to reach the normalization of relations between the USSR and Japan. I want to note that in the end the normalization of relations is much more advantageous for Japan than for the Soviet Union.

Maybe such an option will be acceptable for the Japanese side: we can record that the Soviet Union agrees to transfer Habomai and Shikotan to Japan. But this will mean that in this case, the well-known position that negotiations regarding the territorial

question will be conducted during the conclusion of the peace treaty between both parties, is excluded, because the transfer of Habomai and Shikotan will constitute a final resolution of the territorial question. This issue could be formalized in the following manner. We will concede the referenced islands to Japan and record this position in the document [the Declaration]. However, the actual transfer of the referenced territory to Japan will follow after the conclusion of a peace treaty and after the USA transfers Okinawa and other historical Japanese territories that were captured by the USA to Japan. The Soviet side is ready to accept such a resolution in order to make the Japanese delegation's position easier. Of course, the Japanese side has a choice: either it can agree to conclude negotiations on the conditions of just the five points or Habomai and Shikotan can be supplemented to the five points.

Kono. My apologies for the Japanese side annoying you with all kinds of questions. We examined the draft of the joint declaration and protocol that was presented to us yesterday. We believe that these documents are completely acceptable, except for the territorial question. We have a number of additional requests in connection with these documents.

1. The Japanese side would request to conduct an investigation into finding Japanese citizens who disappeared and are not included on the list received from the Soviets.

2. The Japanese side is grateful to the Soviet Union for its position regarding Japan's admission to the UN. I am not at the mercy of words, like Shigemitsu, therefore, your assurance that you will support Japan's request for admission to the UN in the next session this year will be enough for me.

Khrushchev. Regarding the issue of the Japanese citizens who are missing, there is nothing I can say on top of what has already been said about this issue before. We do not have any other Japanese, except for those that are included on the list that was provided to you. But if the Japanese delegation believes that inserting a general sentence in the draft declaration will be helpful to ease its position, then we obviously, will not be against this, even though it should again be noted that we do not have any Japanese except for what has already been communicated. If such a person were found, we would quickly send them to Japan.

Kono. We request that such a phrase is included in the text.

Khrushchev. Regarding Japan's admission to the UN, everything will depend on Japan itself, specifically, the extent to which the documents regarding the normalization of relations are legally formalized at the time when Japan's admission to the UN comes up. Our word is strong, as you will see.

Kono. Allow me to express some thoughts on the territorial question. We want to resolve the issue regarding the territories regardless of the San Francisco peace treaty i.e., without involving the USA and other allied powers. Japan is ready to resolve the territorial question, standing in unoccupied positions. We could not go to the conclusion of a peace treaty, but we can agree on signing a series of documents, which, in content, do not differ from a treaty. In these documents, we can resolve almost everything that can be resolved by a peace treaty.

Unfortunately, we cannot accept the position of the Soviet Union regarding the territorial question due to the internal political situation in our country.

We strongly ask the Soviet Government to quickly return the islands of Habomai and Shikotan to us without making it contingent on other issues.

As for the ownership of the remaining territories, at the moment it is difficult to say something about this. As long as the Soviet Union controls the referenced territories there will not be any changes in relation to this [situation] in the near future. Your proposal of including the transfer of Habomai and Shikotan in the general declaration but actually returning them after the United States returns Okinawa to Japan would make a highly unfavorable impression on the Japanese people's public opinion because the Soviet Union has already agreed to transfer these territories to Japan in the event of the conclusion of a peace treaty, which all Japanese know.

Your statement that the transfer of the specified territories is directly dependent on the United States returning Okinawa and other territories really disappointed us. We would not like to consider all of the referenced Japanese lands the same. I again ask the Soviet Union to quickly transfer Habomai and Shikotan to us.

We believe that normalizing relations should definitely be finalized now because Prime Minister Hatoyama will already no longer be able to come to Moscow anymore. Consequently, if we give up this current opportunity, this will mean that we will give up the possibility of settling our relations for many years.

Khrushchev. I want to clarify what I said regarding the transfer of Habomai and Shikotan to Japan so that there are no misunderstandings.

The Soviet Government agrees to transfer Habomai and Shikotan to Japan in the event that a peace treaty is concluded now. The transfer will occur after the ratification of this treaty. I do not know what kind of technical difficulties there can be in connection with the transfer [of the islands]. Obviously, there is some equipment on these islands that needs to be removed or transferred. I want to note that the transfer of the referenced territories is connected to the ratification of the treaty. If the peace treaty is not signed, even if the Japanese side agrees with the documents that were presented to it yesterday, then obviously the issue could be resolved in the following manner:

The Soviet Government agrees to transfer Habomai and Shikotan. We can report this in corresponding documentation and openly announce it. The Soviet Government legally gives up its rights to the referenced islands, but practically the transfer will come after the conclusion of a peace treaty and after Okinawa and other territories that are in the hands of the USA are returned to Japan. We do not want an unequal position in relation to this. Why does the United States hold Japanese territories, place their military bases directed at us, and demand that we give Japan territories that belongs to us? This is not fair. We protest such discrimination. The Soviet Government wants to resolve all issues for the quick normalization [of relations], but we will never go to still greater concessions than that which are already known by the Japanese side. Think about it, Mr. Kono, maybe we can still meet and discuss this issue. Our proposed conditions improve your position because you have the ability to choose one of two resolutions.

Kono. Do you believe, Mr. Khrushchev, that the United States will ever return Okinawa to Japan?

Khrushchev. It is difficult for me to speak for the United States, but I think that the resolution of Habomai and Shikotan we are proposing will contribute to freeing Okinawa. No one doubts that Okinawa is Japanese territory. We will transfer Habomai and Shikotan to Japan any time the appropriate conditions are met for this. I think that sooner or later the United States will return Okinawa and other territories to Japan. Of course, I cannot say when this will be.

Kono. Do you agree that the Soviet Government will return Kunashir and Iturup to us if the United States leaves Okinawa?

Khrushchev. I didn't know the Japanese are so persistent. You keep hammering one point.

Kono. Of course, Kunashir and Iturup are not economically significant for Japan. But if we could launch a movement for the return of Okinawa and other territories and connect this to the return of Kunashir and Iturup, then, maybe we would achieve success as the argument of a onetime return of territories belonging to Japan by two great powers sounds very convincing.

Khrushchev. Kunashir and Iturup have absolutely nothing to do with this and the question about them has been decided long ago. Economically, these territories do not have any significance. On the contrary, they bring us sheer loss and put a heavy burden on the budget. But considerations regarding the country's prestige play a deciding role here, and also the strategic side of the matter.

Kono. I ask that you take into account our position and think about our requests that I have expressed today.

Khrushchev. We will consult with the Minister of Foreign Affairs regarding how to formalize the documentary question regarding Habomai and Shikotan.

Kono. If you do not mind, I would like to see you one more time.

Khrushchev. As far as I know, there is a set meeting between Mr. Hatoyama and N.A. Bulganin tomorrow.

Kono. I would still like to see you before this meeting. Allow me to visit you at 10.

Khrushchev agrees.

Kono. In conclusion, I want to say that the Japanese delegation's position is very difficult. It is making all decisions without approval from Tokyo because if we asked for consent, we would definitely receive a denial. It will be very difficult for us to win over the Japanese Parliament and public opinion to agree with the acts we sign in Moscow. Therefore, we really need the support on the part of the Soviet Government.

Rozhetskin recorded the conversation on
October 16, 1956