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Record of Soviet-Japanese Talks, 8 October 1973

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Summary:

Brezhnev and Tanaka discuss Soviet-Japan relations since World War II.

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RECORD OF SOVIET-JAPANESE TALKS

8 October 1973^[1]

The talks were conducted:

From the Soviet side - L.I. Brezhnev, A.N. Kosygin, A.A. Gromyko

From the Japanese side - Prime Minister K. Tanaka, Minister of Foreign Affairs M. Ohira

[...]^[2]

Morning meeting (11:30-13:40)

At the start of the talks Prime Minister Tanaka says that the government of Japan would like to present some literature on Japan in Japanese as a gift to the Lenin State Library. (Tanaka passes the list of books and one of the books to L.I. Brezhnev).

L.I. Brezhnev thanks K. Tanaka.

Tanaka. First of all, I would like to express gratitude for the invitation to visit the Soviet Union.

I was born in Niigata prefecture, situated on the shore of the Sea of Japan. From my childhood I heard about the wonderful country, which is located on the other side of the Sea of Japan, and dreamed about visiting it. Unfortunately, until now I have not had the opportunity to visit your country. I am grateful for your invitation to visit the Soviet Union and for the opportunity to meet you.

17 years ago Prime Minister [Ichiro] Hatoyama visited the Soviet Union. And we are satisfied by the fact that during the years that have passed since the normalization of relations, contacts between our countries have widened and strengthened. I would like to use the current visit to the Soviet Union on your invitation to strengthen friendly relations between our countries. The population of your country is 2.5 times greater than the population of Japan, and the territory is 60 times greater than ours.

L.I. Brezhnev. That's not our fault (laughter).

Tanaka. Flying over the huge territory of your country, I witnessed the greatness of the Soviet Union. Allow me once again to express my gratitude for the invitation to visit your country. We would like to expect your visit to Japan. Allow me also to pass greetings from Emperor Hirohito and the people of Japan.

L.I. Brezhnev. Thank you, Mr. Prime Minister, for the kind words and sentiments, which were expressed by you, and also for the greetings you conveyed.

Yesterday you were welcomed on the aerodrome by the leading figures of the Soviet Union, representatives of the workers. Today, in our ancient palace, in the St. Catherine Hall of the Grand Kremlin Palace, allow me to welcome you, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and your accompanying colleagues, in connection with your arrival in our country. Allow me also to express the hope that the talks will be useful and contribute to the task of further development of Soviet-Japanese relations, mutual understanding and cooperation in the interest of our peoples. We attach great significance to your visit. We have to discuss a wide range of questions. In this connection I would like to express some considerations and thoughts.

Relations between Japan and the Soviet Union were different at different times. There were gloomy and cold times. To our satisfaction, not just the normalization of diplomatic relations but many other things were done to make our relations become these of good neighbours so that cooperation does not have a formal character in political and economic spheres, which is something Japan and the Soviet Union are equally interested in.

I touched on the question of our relations during different times not in order to stir the past. I am convinced that one must not do that. It is important during the talks to look to the future. Japan is a highly developed country and, like the Soviet Union, it is evidently interested in the future, not in the past.

We look to the future. You are evidently familiar with the decision of our Party Congress and statements of the Soviet government, which expressed the Soviet Union's policy with regard to Japan.

The USSR and Japan will exist for centuries. Therefore the leading actors of the Soviet Union and Japan, present here, must take care of the present and the future of our countries. This is especially important because our countries are close neighbours. If we direct our efforts to the right channel, we will find - must find - mutual understanding. Then the visit will have positive results and have a favourable influence on our relations. The talks should be conducted to this end. We must speak about good neighbourliness, about mutually beneficial economic and trade relations, about the exchange of cultural artefacts, about consultations, technical cooperation, etc. Both the Soviet Union and Japan attained great successes in science and technology.

This is how we envision the forthcoming talks. If the prime minister agrees, we are prepared to listen to him and begin talks on the substance of questions.

I hope the talks will be frank, direct, and honest. We are used to exactly such talks, and we count on reciprocity.

I would like to make a few additions. We in the Soviet Union see relations with Japan as positive. The trade has increased, our relations have widened in economic terms. There are several positive developments in the fisheries sphere, contacts have been strengthened. All of this leads to the deepening of mutual understanding. This has led, for instance, to the exchange of letters, which took place this year.

I am convinced that now is the time for a sharper turn in Japanese-Soviet relations so as to provide for reliable and mutually beneficial development of relations of cooperation between our countries.

It occurs to us that such development would serve the interests of both countries, and would facilitate the strengthening of principles of peaceful coexistence between states with different social systems. For this one requires a realistic approach to the questions being discussed, efforts by both sides, strengthening of mutual confidence. As for us, we are prepared for this.

I would like to stress and draw specific attention to the fact that we speak about this not on the basis of some conjectural considerations. This is our policy. This was enshrined in the decisions of our party and our government. We proceed from the assumption that such an approach, the attainment of such aims, serve the interests of our countries, the interests of all countries, the task of peace and the strengthening of security. Both you, Mr. Prime Minister, and we know well what war means. Therefore we have the duty to make sure that wars are excluded from the life

of the human kind. This is the duty of the leaders of both our countries.

We hope that the talks will be beneficial. We are prepared to hear your thoughts.

Tanaka. The main direction of Japan's foreign policy is to support peace. Japan, in addition, thinks only about its own defence, and does not think about increasing its military forces.

L.I. Brezhnev. I wonder: who does Japan want to defend itself against?

Tanaka. The world has 140 independent states. They all have means of self-defence. The Japanese military forces have been created with the aim of self-defence in case of the infringement of the country's security, and cannot be sent abroad. This is written into the constitution. They are more of a police force.

Japan's foreign policy is directed towards the development of friendship and cooperation with all countries, widening of relations and ties with states irrespective of their social systems. We are especially interested in the development of such relations with your country - our neighbour and a great power. We want to strengthen Japanese-Soviet relations.

Since Prime Minister Hatoyama visited the Soviet Union 17 years ago, our relations have been widening. Turning to trade, one can see that the goods turnover in 1973 reached 1.1 billion dollars. At the same time, the general volume of Japan's trade with foreign countries in 1973 reached 70-80 billion dollars. Japanese-American trade accounts for 30%. The USSR is bigger than the US in terms of its territory and population. The USSR and the US are our neighbouring countries. But if we are divided from the US by the vast Pacific Ocean, we are only divided from the Soviet Union by a narrow strip of water of the Sea of Japan. Japanese-American diplomatic relations were established after the war. The history of Soviet-Japanese relations is longer. The USSR's influence on Japan is greater, especially in the field of literature. As you noted correctly, we have many fields for cooperation. Using the current visit and the talks with you, I would like to find common fields of cooperation between our countries.

I have one important question, which I would like to pause upon. In order to strengthen genuine friendship, truly friendly relations, we have to reach mutual understanding on some questions, which sometimes appear insignificant. The resolution of such questions will benefit our relations.

Although man is not eternal, the human kind will exist always. We must think about our relations. We must solve questions if they exist. There are such questions.

True friendship means having no secrets from each other, so that we speak frankly to each other. I believe that relations between our countries will continue to develop. Trade will continue to widen, increasing by 10-20% per year. But real friendship will only be attained when the peace treaty is signed. The condition for concluding the peace treaty is the resolution of the question of the four islands of the Kurile chain. Flying over the Soviet Union, I saw for myself the greatness of your country. Your territory has many rivers, large and small lakes. The four islands of the Kurile chain appear merely like a drop in the sea.

In Japan, people attach great significance to my visit to the Soviet Union. They are closely following the visit and hope that our talks will become the point of departure for the establishment of truly friendly relations and the resolution of the problems that exist between us.

In the last quarter of a century Japan was able to resolve all of the questions that existed with other countries. Therefore in Japan they are waiting for this visit to resolve the questions that remained between our countries after the war. As for the practical questions – agreements on science and technology, migratory birds, etc. – we can sign them during the visit.

If you have questions, I am prepared to answer them.

L.I. Brezhnev. The first part of your statement is understandable – you spoke about good neighbourliness [and] peaceful coexistence, if I understood you correctly.

A.N. Kosygin. I would like to ask a question concerning the economic sphere. What problems and spheres are you interested in, and is there a developed programme of economic ties with the USSR? How do you propose to implement it?

Tanaka. We do not have an approved program of economic relations with the USSR. There is no firm, clear thinking. The government looks at every question pertaining to cooperation with the USSR separately. After restoring relations between Japan and the Soviet Union economic ties widened from year to year, and they will continue to widen. I think that as a result of this visit they will be developed further. However, one must conduct business in such a way as to create genuinely friendly relations between Japan and the USSR for millennia. In order to rule out the possibilities for the appearance of conflicts and troubles, we must do everything possible to conclude a peace treaty. I would welcome if this were done during the visit.

Genuine friendship is possible by means of concluding a peace treaty. During the Second World War, Japan was in conflict with the US, China, England and France. In relations with the US, an agreement was reached to return the islands of Okinawa. With China, we agreed to establish relations, forgetting about the past. There were certain difficulties with England, France and other European countries, as they blamed us for losing their colonies in Southeast Asia. These European countries lost their positions in this region. However, as a result of a recent visit to Europe we reached an agreement on such questions as the provision of aid to countries [and] cooperation in the sphere of energy resources. Thereby we drew a line under the results of the Second World War in relations with these countries also. Japan fought with the US, China, Holand. There was essentially no fighting between Japan and the Soviet Union. However, in spite of this, we have not concluded a peace treaty. This fact warrants regret, especially because the Soviet Union is a neighbouring country.

A.N. Kosygin. If one were to speak about the results of the Second World War, then the US left for itself certain islands in the Oceania.

Tanaka. The United States of America is not such a territorially large country as the Soviet Union. But one can understand that the US do not intend to expand their territory.

Territories and countries, which were long under the administration of other countries, though they had attained self-rule, continue to feel poverty and tribulations. Therefore they need aid from the US. They also hope to receive aid from the Soviet Union and China.

30 years ago the US proclaimed the Monroe doctrine [sic], and at the time they possessed 70% of the world's gold reserves. During these years they used up the gold and turned, if one were to express oneself so, into a good-natured uncle. You, Mr. Brezhnev, visited the United States and understand the situation they find themselves in. Your country and the US concluded different agreements on cooperation.

L.I. Brezhnev. Would you like, Mr. Prime Minister, to touch on some other questions?

Tanaka. There are several concrete questions. [...][\[3\]](#)

Evening meeting (19:00-21:30)

L.I. Brezhnev. Do you have, Mr. Prime Minister, any other questions in addition to the ones that you spoke about during the morning meeting?

Tanaka. We have questions about visits by Japanese citizens to the places of burial of their relatives on the Soviet territory, about reaching an agreement on sustainable sea fishing, etc. But I would like to discuss these after I hear your opinion on the questions, which I touched upon in the morning meeting.

L.I. Brezhnev. In my answer I will touch only on some of the questions. The rest can be discussed tomorrow during the meeting in the narrow format.

During my greeting at the dinner I recounted the main directions of our policy with regard to Japan. Today your and our positions coincide on the main direction – the willingness to develop our relations.

What should one specifically stress? This is the aspiration in Japan and the Soviet Union to live in peace and good neighbourliness, and on this basis to develop all-sided cooperation in the political, economic and other spheres.

It was not intended so, but it just happened, that the draft of my statement, which was given to you in the morning, did not refer to the “peace treaty.” I received your statement in the course of our conversation. It referred to the desirability of the conclusion of a peace treaty. And so that one does not get the false impression that we rule out this question, I amended my statement with a phrase about the desirability of concluding a peace treaty, which would fortify our cooperation for the long-term. However, this question was not detailed in either my or your statement. After all, since we have agreed to begin talks on the conclusion of a peace treaty, we have only had one meeting of foreign ministers of our countries, A.A. Gromyko and M. Ohira.

The reference to the fact that you will treat with understanding the continuation of talks on this question was not, in our view, accidental. I won't go into the details. I only want to say that this question is affected by many factors, connected to the results of the last war. Also of considerable significance are the consequences, which we have as a legacy of this war. Your reference to the islands is not sufficient today to lay down the basis of the treaty. We state today that irrespective of the presence of the treaty we have moved far in the sphere of cooperation – in trade, economics, etc. This movement is the testament of good will of the USSR and Japan. And I must say that we value that. This is one side. The other side, how can we crown such important talks, which we are conducting after a 17-year pause? We could think, irrespective of the continuation of the talks on the peace treaty, about concluding agreements, or note in the joint statement or a communique that the two sides have agreed about peaceful, good neighbourly relations and mutually beneficial cooperation. This would not only fortify the factual situation in our relations but would serve, as I think, as the basis for mutual understanding between the peoples of the USSR and Japan at the new stage. We would determine the principles of our relations for the foreseeable future – to live in peace, not to attack one another, to cooperate in the economic and other spheres.

An agreement or a communique would introduce an element of trust towards each other, an element of principled relations, trust. Such an important political document would have a serious influence on the ties of our countries in all other spheres, including economic cooperation. As for the peace treaty, well, evidently, one needs to instruct the ministers of foreign affairs to continue the negotiations that had begun. [...][\[4\]](#)

Tanaka. I thank you, Mr. General Secretary, for your kind explanations.

For my part, I would like to touch on two questions. After the Second World War, Japan did not resort to diplomatic tactics and tricks in relations with other foreign states. Thirty years have passed since the end of the war. My visit to your country is taking place 17 years since the visit of Prime Minister Hatoyama. I based myself on the premise that as a result of my trip to the Soviet Union, a way will be found to realize the aspirations of the entire Japanese people – the return of the four islands of the Kurile chain to Japan. I would like to say that without the resolution of the question of the four islands of the Kurile chain, it will be difficult to finalize the settlement of Soviet-Japanese relations.

The government of Japan and I personally are prepared to conclude a peace treaty with the Soviet Union if we reach a settlement of the question of the four islands. I must say that Japan's opposition parties demand not just the return of the four aforementioned islands but other territories as well.

I do not doubt that our relations will continue to develop even in case a peace treaty is not concluded. However, for further development of relations, for strengthening the relations of genuine friendship and good neighbourliness, it is necessary to conclude a peace treaty.

It seems to me that the present moment is favourable for the settlement of this difficult question. Some say that we waited to conclude the treaty for a quarter of a century, and we can wait for another 25 years. However, this will not benefit our countries. We understand that the question is a complex one, but we would like for you to make the decision on the basis of higher considerations.

I thank you, Mr. General Secretary, for the detailed explanation of the plans of economic development of Siberia. I believe that the extraction of the natural riches of Siberia will benefit the Soviet Union, Japan, and other countries. Japan, for its part, would like to cooperate with the Soviet Union. We agree also that the FRG and other countries participate in this cooperation.

Since Japan is a country of free enterprise, cooperation from our side will be conducted by private companies. If an appropriate agreement is reached, the government would be prepared to support the realization of this or that project. You spoke about cooperation in the energy sphere, including in the sphere of atomic energy. I believe that our specialists could meet and discuss all these questions.

The main aim of my visit to the Soviet Union is the settlement of the question of the peace treaty and the four islands of the Kurile chain. If these questions, which are the most important ones, are settled, then the prospects for solving other questions will open up.

The question of the peace treaty and the four islands must be solved. Only the highest leaders of our countries have the ability to make the decision in this regard. This is the duty of the highest leaders of our countries. I would like for you to show understanding of this question and to make a decision on the basis of the interests of the future of our countries for many years ahead.

L.I. Brezhnev. Understanding must be mutual.

Ohira. Mr. General Secretary, how shall we arrange our work tomorrow, October 9?

L.I. Brezhnev. Today we worked a lot. Since the level of our talks is high, I ask that we pay attention to the information for the press. How do you feel if we begin our work tomorrow at 11:00? As far as I know, at 10:00 you will be with the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR N.V. Podgornyi.

Tanaka. We agree to meet tomorrow at 11 o'clock. What will be the circle of participants of our meeting in the narrow format?

L.I. Brezhnev. How would you prefer?

Tanaka. We will consult on this question and inform you as to who will participate in the meeting from the Japanese side.

Recorded by: N.N. Solov'ev.

[1] The record of conversation has not been reviewed by the participants [note in the original - SR].

[2] Omitted here is the list of other participants.

[3] Omitted here is the discussion on fisheries, gas, coal, and timber, pp. 8-13 in the original [translator's note].

[4] Omitted here is Brezhnev's discussion of the possibilities of economic cooperation between the Soviet Union and Japan, and the prospects for Siberia's development, pp. 15-23 in the original - translator's note.