

October 17, 1956
**Memorandum of Conversation of N.S. Khrushchev
with I. Kono on October 17, 1956**

Citation:

"Memorandum of Conversation of N.S. Khrushchev with I. Kono on October 17, 1956", October 17, 1956, Wilson Center Digital Archive, RGANI, f. 52, op. 1, d. 596, ll. 54-59. Contributed by Sergey Radchenko and translated by Allison Smith.
<https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/208806>

Summary:

Kono and Khrushchev continue the previous day's discussion of the peace agreement and the transfer of two islands to Japan, highlighting that this territorial transfer can give the Japanese leverage to demand that the United States return Okinawa as well.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Blavatnik Family Foundation

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

Memorandum

of conversation of N.S. Khrushchev with I. Kono on October 17, 1956

(The conversation began at 10:00, ended at 10:50)

Kono. I will not debate too much today. I want to present some facts connected to our course of conduct during the Moscow negotiations.

The Liberal Democratic Party, to which Hatoyama and I belong, chose a new course in relation to negotiations. I want to explain to you why and under what circumstances this new course came about. There are some elements inside our party that sharply opposed our trip to Moscow, because they believe that if we end up in Moscow an agreement will definitely be signed, which these elements are afraid of. On this basis, a certain group of party members have created systematic interference and obstacles in resolving issues connected with the normalization of relations. Hatoyama and I tried to get it so that a majority of the party and the Government would accept our course and mandate us to leave to Moscow. We achieved this, but on some conditions. The last time I was in Moscow for discussions regarding fishing, I visited Chairman of the Council of Ministers Bulganin, and had a conversation with him about the territorial question. Mr. Bulganin then stated to me the following: the Soviet Government will transfer the Islands of Habomai and Shikotan to Japan. This was already talked about repeatedly in London, but the transfer of the referenced territory [Habomai and Shikotan] is the maximum that the Soviet Union can go on the territorial question. I know, continued Mr. Bulganin, that the Japanese people demand the return of Kunashir and Iturup, but the transfer of that territory to Japan is completely inconceivable and impossible. Right now, this is about transferring Habomai and Shikotan to Japan. We will decide everything else later. For now, the parties should agree on issues where points of view overlapped.

Such was the general outline of Mr. Bulganin's statement.

I should note that the Liberal Democratic Party at the time took such a severe course of negotiation, which was completely unacceptable for the Soviet side. Therefore, the development of a new course and a new policy was decided on, and this new course was wholly based on the above-mentioned statement by Mr. Bulganin, which I reported to the [Liberal Democratic] Party and the Government. I was told to go to Moscow with Hatoyama in order to achieve the normalization of relations in the manner laid out in Bulganin's statement. In other words, it involved returning Habomai and Shikotan to Japan.

Khrushchev. Mr. Kono somewhat inaccurately interprets the conversation with T. Bulganin. The Soviet Government repeatedly communicated to the Japanese side in London through Y. Malik, and in several conversations in Moscow, that we agree to transfer the islands of Habomai and Shikotan to Japan on the conditions of concluding a peace treaty and establishing diplomatic relations between our countries. But it turned out that there is no unity in the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan on the issue of negotiations. Therefore, the Japanese side proposed to not touch the territorial question right now, but to limit [negotiations] to eliminating the state of war and restoring diplomatic relations, which we agreed to. But, by agreeing to this new version we meant that the transfer of the islands of Habomai and Shikotan will follow only after concluding a peace treaty.

Our proposals are such.

Wishing to meet the Japanese delegation, yesterday I put forward a new and different version [of the proposal], which is beneficial for Japan. Meanwhile, I want to confidentially highlight that Japan can also successfully use our version in its propaganda goals because the Soviet Union's obligation to transfer the referenced territory to Japan can serve as a sufficient basis to put pressure on the United States and to demand that it return Okinawa and other territories under control of the USA. A joint declaration could include a paragraph regarding the transfer of the islands of Habomai and Shikotan to Japan after the conclusion of a peace treaty and the return of Okinawa and other territories under control of the USA. But apart from that, orally and without a record, it could be agreed that we will transfer the referenced territory after the conclusion of a peace treaty and will not connect this transfer to the return of Okinawa and other territories. We want to help Japan achieve the liberation of Okinawa and other territories, and for this our scenario for resolving the territorial

question would be quite acceptable. In this case, Japan, could give the Soviet Union as an example, and mobilize internal and international public opinion in the support of the struggle for liberating Okinawa with this example.

Yesterday, Mr. Kono asked if I am certain that the USA will transfer Okinawa to Japan. Of course, I am certain of this. I understand that the USA does not want to return this territory, but history often makes you do what you do not want to do and the USA will need to give Japan what belongs to it if the Japanese people will fight for this. I think that after the normalization of relations Japan will very quickly be convinced of the usefulness and necessity of concluding a peace treaty, that is, that after the conclusion of a treaty we will return the islands of Habomai and Shikotan to Japan without connecting this to the issue of Okinawa.

Kono. I understand your thought well and, therefore, I would propose the following wording of the article about the territorial question (delivers following wording).

“To meet the wishes of Japan and taking into consideration the interests of the Japanese Government, the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics transfers the islands of Habomai and the island of Shikotan to Japan.

The Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics and Japan will continue negotiations regarding the conclusion of a Peace Treaty and, also, after the establishment of normal diplomatic relations between both nations, will ensure a comprehensive settlement of issues which have emerged between them as a result of the state of war.”

We do not need to agree on the timeframe of the transfer of the referenced islands now.

Khrushchev. The wording of the first part regarding the transfer of Habomai and Shikotan is poorly written. Everything is laid out here very categorically, and after such wording, if we do not quickly transfer the referenced territory to Japan, then the public opinion of Japan would consider this a refusal by the Soviet Government to fulfill this obligation. We want an honest normalization of relations. We want public opinion to understand us correctly, because every obligation that the Soviet Union takes on will be fulfilled honestly and accurately. We always keep our word.

Kono. If this wording is not acceptable, I ask that you propose your version.

Khrushchev. Mr. Kono should understand that our proposal gives Japan the actual and legal right to fight for the return of Okinawa and other territories. I know, that there is a pro-American group in Japan that is not satisfied with our negotiations, but this is something that can be ignored. The main thing is that in the final resolution in our version, Japan receives the ability to exert strong pressure on the USA. Keep in mind that your territories that are in the hands of the Americans will not be returned to you without a fight.

Kono. The Japanese side agrees to consider any version you propose. Hatoyama and I have decided to sign documents without consulting our government.

Khrushchev. Understand, Mr. Kono, that we only want one thing: to create favorable political conditions to launch a struggle for the return of Japanese territory under American control. We have already decided to transfer the islands of Habomai and Shikotan to you. Therefore, we have lost all interest in them and this is only about how the transfer itself would benefit Japan. After eliminating the state of war between our countries, there will not be any issues that will separate us like before. We are reaching an agreement on everything now, including the territorial questions. Consequently, we will sign a Peace Treaty and then we will transfer Habomai and Shikotan to you. When the Soviet Union transfers these islands to Japan, you can use this situation in the struggle for the return of your territories that the Americans have because by then the Soviet Union will have already returned the territories promised to Japan, but the USA will stick to its previous position as before. In this way, the Soviet Union's example can force the USA to reconsider its relationship to Japanese lands.

Kono. I ask you to study my version and correct it, if you believe it necessary. I would like to meet with you again on this issue. Therefore, I ask that after you correct my version, send me one copy and name any time for a visit with you.

Khrushchev. We will send you our points in writing. Study them, and, if you need a

meeting, I am always ready to see you.

Rozhetskin recorded the conversation on
October 17, 1965