

The Soviet-Japanese Joint Declaration of 1956: a Difficult Path to Signing, a Difficult Fate after Ratification

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Abstract. The article aims to study the process of formation and evolution of the territorial problem in the relations between the Soviet Union and Japan after the end of WWII up to the conclusion of the Soviet-Japanese Joint Declaration of 1956. Under consideration are the agreements of the Allied Powers over the postwar territorial limits of Japan.

The author insists that the position of the U.S. towards the territorial provisions of the 1945 Yalta Agreements was repeatedly altered before and after signing the San Francisco Peace Treaty. Changes took place, on the one hand, because of the deterioration in the U.S. relations with the USSR, and, on the other hand, in correlation with Washington's aim to "protect" itself from Tokyo's demands to return Okinawa. It is noteworthy that Japan's attitude to the problem of South Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands was from the very beginning not immutable either and has undergone multiple corrections.

The paper gives a detailed examination of the process of the Soviet-Japanese negotiations on the normalization of bilateral relations in 1955-1956, providing an analysis of the reasons for the Soviet leadership's readiness to hand over the Habomai islands and Shikotan to Japan. The author assesses the significance of the conclusion and the ratification of the Joint Declaration of 1956 for both the Soviet Union and Japan, as well as the attitude of both the Soviet/Russian leadership and the Japanese government to the possibility of the implementation of its territorial article.

After Prime Minister Abe had stated in November 2018 that the Japanese side is ready to hold negotiations on the basis of the territorial article of the 1956 Joint Declaration, Russo-Japanese negotiations on the conclusion of the Peace Treaty were launched. However, compared to the Japanese side, for which the pivotal aim is to fix an agreement on the ownership of the islands and the borderline, much more important in the Russian motivation is to acquire Japan's recognition of the legality of the Russian possession of the Kuril Islands, to obtain guarantees that the Japan-U.S. security alliance would not be aimed against Russia's interests, as well as to lay a base for a broader development of bilateral relations with Japan. Against the background of the unwillingness of the public opinion of the two countries to accept the 1956 Declaration as a base for resolving the territorial problem, the possibility to achieve a Peace Treaty in the foreseeable future is seen as unrealistic.

Keywords: territorial problem, the San Francisco Peace Treaty, the South Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands, the Habomai islands and Shikotan, the Soviet-Japanese negotiations of 1955-1956, the visit of Prime Minister Hatoyama to Moscow, The Soviet-Japanese Joint Declaration of 1956

San Francisco Peace Treaty with Japan: the Birth of the Territorial Problem between Moscow and Tokyo

As we know from the history of mankind, wars not only solve territorial problems, but also create them. After the defeat in the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-05, Russia ceded Southern Sakhalin to Japan. Due to its participation in the war with Japan in August 1945 at the final stage of the World War II, the Soviet Union, in compliance with the agreement between the allies, the United States and Great Britain, regained Southern Sakhalin and obtained the Kuril Islands, which had belonged to Japan under the Russo-Japanese Treaty of 1875. However, the Peace Treaty with Japan concluded in San Francisco in 1951 has not determined in favor of which state they were alienated, although these territories have been withdrawn from the Japanese sovereignty.

That was a paradox of the international legal practice, giving birth to the territorial problem between Moscow and Tokyo, which remains on the agenda of Russo-Japanese relations at present.

The Peace Treaty with Japan was concluded in the Cold war era, when the recent allies, the USSR and the United States, became irreconcilable rivals. In its initial geopolitical calculations with regard to Japan, Washington mostly sought to transform through radical reforms the authoritarian and militaristic state into “a country of democracy and a bulwark of anti-communism in the Asia-Pacific region”. Accordingly, Japan was to be turned from the U.S. enemy into an American ally, and to be “brought up” as a barrier against the spread of the Soviet influence in the region.

The Soviet Union assumed that a defeated and weakened Japan would not pose a military threat to Moscow in the foreseeable future, and that a broad Japanese democratic movement which had developed in the post-war period could be used, among other things, for weakening the American domination on the Japanese Archipelago. The Soviet Union also faced the need for a legal fixation of its sovereignty over the territories obtained due to its participation in the war against Japan.

The struggle between Washington and Moscow “for Japan” became particularly obvious in the period of preparation and conclusion of San Francisco Peace Treaty.

Clashes between the Soviet leadership represented by Stalin and the American political and military elite headed by President Truman over the territorial provisions of the Yalta agreement had sparked even before signing of the Act of surrender of Japan. Moscow assumed that the Soviet Union’s acquisition of Southern Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands had been “legally guaranteed” by this document of the three Allied powers, while Washington believed that “the final solution” of the territorial problem should be reached at a peace conference.

On August 15, 1945, President Truman transmitted to Stalin a telegram with the text of his General Order №1, which distributed the zones where Japanese troops were to surrender to either the American or the Soviet armed forces. It stated, in particular, that Japanese troops

should surrender in Southern Sakhalin, but did not mention their surrender on the Kuril Islands.

It was already on August 16 that in a reply telegram to the American President Stalin demanded that in accordance with Yalta agreements all the Kuril Islands should be included in the Soviet zone of accepting the surrender of Japanese troops [FRUS 1945a]. Truman agreed with this request, but in a message to the Soviet leader on August 25 he explained that although President F. Roosevelt had agreed to support the Soviet claims on these islands, this issue should be finally resolved by a separate agreement [FRUS 1945b]

Undoubtedly, this explanation of the American position was perceived in Moscow as a signal that Washington had no intention to comply with the Yalta agreements concerning the Kuril Islands. In January 1946, Vice Secretary of State Dean Acheson stated that the Yalta decisions regarding the Soviet occupation of the Kuril Islands were not to be treated as the final territorial settlement [New York Times 1946].

The victory of the Communist party in China in 1949 and the outbreak of war in Korea in 1950 prompted Washington to speed up preparation of Peace Treaty with Japan. Japan was to be secured on the pro-American positions and to be guaranteed from falling under the communist influence of the USSR and China.

It should be emphasized that the U.S. position on the territorial provisions of the Yalta agreements and, accordingly, on the problem of the Kuril Islands changed several times before and after the signing the San Francisco Peace Treaty, evolving along with the deterioration of relations with the USSR and with the growing need to “protect itself” from the claims of Japan for the return of its territories occupied by the Americans [Rozman 2000, pp. 15-29].

In September 1950, the State Department prepared a draft of Peace Treaty that focused on Japan’s involvement in the American legal strategy of confrontation with the Soviet Union [FRUS 1950]. After receiving the draft, Moscow spoke out against the conversion of the Ryukyu Islands and the Bonin archipelago into an American military base and the deployment of American troops on the Japanese territory,

and drew attention to the fact that the draft allowed Japan to pursue a policy of remilitarization. The Soviet side was not satisfied with the lack of a clear definition of the Soviet Union's ownership of Southern Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands, as was defined by the Yalta agreement. Finally, Moscow voiced its protest against the exclusion of the PRC from the Peace Treaty negotiation process. Soviet Union consistently maintained this position until the conclusion of the Peace Treaty with Japan. However, Moscow's failure to elaborate its own draft of a peace treaty put it in the "defending" position.

In Japan the conservative majority of politicians, led by Yoshida Shigeru, one of the most influential political figures of 1940-s and 1950-s, believed that the only chance for Japan to gain independence was to link its security interests to the American foreign policy strategy, and advocated signing the Security Treaty – the military and political alliance with the United States, while maintaining the presence of the American troops on the Japanese territory. At the same time, Japan insisted on regaining its sovereignty over the territories of the Ryukyu Islands and the Bonin archipelago that had been put under the U.S. administrative control by San Francisco Treaty. Meanwhile, it was considered that the path of reviving the armed forces and increasing the military production, which many American politicians and the military had insisted on the final stage of occupation in the late 1940s, does not fit Japan's interests. The decision was made to focus on the economic revival of Japan, while shifting the responsibility for its security on the United States. This position gave birth to the *Yoshida doctrine*, which became known by the name of the Japanese Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru.

It is important to keep in mind that initially Japan's position on the problem of Southern Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands was also not coherent, undergoing numerous changes and adjustments. For example, on March 8, 1951, Prime Minister Yoshida stated in Parliament that, in the opinion of the Japanese government, the Habomai Islands should be returned to Japan, since they are not a part of the Kuril Islands. It was for the first time that Japan officially made an open claim for the return of the Habomai Islands. No other territorial claims were mentioned, but

a number of Members of Parliament tried to prove that the Island of Shikotan belongs to the Habomai Islands. At that time Japan did not try to prove that the Islands of Iturup and Kunashir are not included in the geographical name of the Kuril Islands [Hara 1998, pp. 31-32].

According to the U.S. Secretary of State John Dulles, who had a meeting with Prime Minister Yoshida at the San Francisco Peace conference, the latter requested the United States to declare that the Habomai and Shikotan Islands are not part of the Kuril Islands. At the same time, he did not mention Iturup and Kunashir [Hara 1998, p. 32; FRUS 1955-1957, pp. 208-209].

In January 1951, J. Dulles paid a visit to Tokyo as Special Counselor to the State Department, and after his talks with Prime Minister Yoshida a preliminary (provisional) Memorandum was concluded. Dulles did not agree with the Japanese side's demand for the return of Japan's sovereignty over the Ryukyu and Bonin Islands. But the document noted that the Peace Treaty should clearly record the return of Southern Sakhalin to the Soviet Union. As for the Kuril Islands, they should be transferred to the Soviet Union only after determining their geographical borders by a bilateral agreement or by some other legal procedures of dispute resolution to be defined by the Peace Treaty. Moreover, Southern Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands should be transferred to the Soviet Union only if it signed the Peace Treaty [FRUS 1951a].

On March 23, 1951, the United States finished drafting the Peace Treaty. Under Article 5, Japan was obliged to return Southern Sakhalin and to extend the Kuril Islands to the Soviet Union. In this version of the draft, the USSR is still preserved as the recipient of territories from Japan. However, in its Article 19, the draft does not provide for any right, title or claim to countries which have not signed it. And Article 20 of the draft prohibited Japan from granting a state which is not a signatory of the present Treaty "greater advantages than those provided" by the Treaty [FRUS 1951b; Slavinsky 1996, p. 161].

After consultations with London, the U.S. – British draft of Peace Treaty was elaborated by June 14. According to article 2, Japan renounces all right, title and claim to the Kurile Islands, and to that

part of Sakhalin Island and the Islands adjacent to it over which Japan acquired sovereignty as a consequence of the Treaty of Portsmouth of September 5, 1905. The article did not contain any geographical definition of the Kuril Islands and did not specify to which state they should be transferred. Under the same article, Japan renounced all right, title and claim to Formosa and the Pescadores, the Spratly Islands, and the Paracel Islands.

Washington deliberately constituted this article in such a way as to create a number of territorial problems that would in future “surround” Japan and “restrain it”. They were later manifested in Tokyo’s relations with Moscow, Beijing, Taipei, Seoul, and Pyongyang.

At the same time, the U.S. “secured” itself by article 3. It does not contain any time frames for Washington to exercise full administrative, legislative and judicial authority over the territories and inhabitants of the Ryukyu and Bonin Islands and a number of other smaller islands.

Article 25 was formulated in such a way that if the USSR (like any other state) decided not to sign and ratify the Treaty, it would not be able to use its provisions, i.e. it would not be a beneficiary of Japan’s renunciation of the Kuril Islands. (Southern Sakhalin became part of Japan as a result of Japanese aggression against Russia, while the Kuril Islands belonged to Tokyo on “legal grounds” under the Russian-Japanese Treaty of 1875). While formulating this article, American lawyers clearly “overreached it”. The Soviet Union’s signature to the Treaty did not mean its acquiring sovereignty over the listed territories. The mechanism of such acquisition was also not determined.

Article 26 appeared in the text of the Treaty as an additional tool of “super-insurance” in the context of the U.S. intention to create problems for the Soviet Union with Japan. It stated that “within a three-year period after the entry into force of the Treaty, Japan would be ready to conclude a Peace Treaty with any state that was at war with Japan but did not accede to the San Francisco Treaty, under the same or substantially the same terms as provided for in it. Should Japan make a peace settlement or war claims settlement with any State granting that State greater advantages than those provided by the present Treaty,

those same advantages shall be extended to the parties to the present Treaty” [Treaty of Peace with Japan 1951].

It follows from this text that after a three-year period Japan was entitled to conclude peace treaties with foreign countries at its discretion and on terms agreed with those countries. On the one hand, the Americans set a relatively short time period for the limitation of Japan’s freedom of action, because they believed that the longer this period was, the more time Moscow would have to “change its mind” and join the Treaty.

On the other hand, Dulles, who was already serving at that time as Secretary of State, did not have any strong counter-arguments to the statement Japanese Foreign Minister Shigemitsu at their meeting on August 24, 1956, that the validity period of Article 26 of the Peace Treaty is limited to three years. The Japanese side later insisted that the time limit mentioned in Article 26 meant that they could now conclude any agreement with the USSR without being obliged to give similar or equal privileges to the signers of the San Francisco Treaty [Elleman 1998, p. 501].

It should be noted that during the period of validity of San Francisco Treaty, while its expiration date was not set (and at the same time its perpetuity was not determined), its provisions, especially those relating to territorial issues, were repeatedly ignored. Japan concluded treaties with other countries without making any amendments or additions to the Peace Treaty.

In 1972, the U.S. were compelled to extend full sovereignty over the Ryukyu and Bonin Islands to Japan, bypassing the “intermediate stage” provided by Article 3 – the initial transfer of these territories “under the UN trusteeship system, with the United States as the sole administering authority”.

In 1952 Japan signed a Treaty with Taiwan (Formosa), recognizing its independence as sovereign state. 20 years later, the heads of government of Japan and the PRC, Tanaka Kakuei and Zhou Enlai, signed a statement in which Japan recognized the government of the PRC as the only legitimate government of China and expressed “full understanding and respect” for the PRC statement that Taiwan is an integral part of

China's territory. In 1972, the United States passed over the Senkaku archipelago to Japan as part of Okinawa Prefecture, which created for Japan a territorial problem with China and Taiwan.

All these cases can be viewed as examples of direct ignoring the provisions of the San Francisco Treaty. Consequently, not convincing is Japan's argument that it is not entitled to recognize Russia's sovereignty over the Kuril Islands, which have been renounced by Japan under the San Francisco Treaty.

On June 14, the U.S.-British joint draft of Peace Treaty was released among the countries invited to the conference, with the instruction to provide their comments by August 13. This project was severely criticized in the Soviet press. But for unknown reasons the Soviet side did not issue an official statement or propose any amendments. This was, undoubtedly, a wrong decision.

Russian researcher Boris Slavinsky, examining documents in the Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, discovered a Soviet project of the Peace Treaty with Japan, which was to be presented at the Peace conference in opposition to the U.S.-British project. It consisted of 10 parts, including the provision of Article 7 by which Japan recognized full sovereignty of the USSR over the Southern Sakhalin with all adjacent Islands and the Kuril Islands, renouncing all right, title and claim to these territories [Slavinsky 1996, p. 172-173].

However, initiating a draft proposal was seemingly too late at that moment, so it was decided not to submit it to the conference, but to put forward the amendments to the U.S.-British project. On July 20, the United States and Great Britain sent the Soviet side an official invitation to the San Francisco Peace conference, which was convened in September 1951. When the invitation was extended by the U.S. Ambassador in Moscow, it was stressed that the conference is convened exclusively for the ratification of the US-British draft of the Treaty and that no additions or amendments are permitted.

Apparently, the American side proceeded with such formulation of the invitation, i.e. that the participation of the Soviet Union in the conference was provided purely for the aim of its signing the Treaty,

under the premise that Moscow would refuse the invitation. However, the Soviet leadership decided to participate in the conference, and sent a delegation headed by Deputy Foreign Minister Andrey Gromyko.

The San Francisco conference was held on September 4-8, 1951, with the participation of 52 countries, including the USSR, Poland, and Czechoslovakia. Three countries – India, Burma and Yugoslavia – did not accept the invitation. On September 5, Gromyko criticized the project of Treaty at the conference, and proposed eight amendments. Of particular importance was the amendment of article 2, which was proposed in the following way: “Japan recognizes full sovereignty of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics over every part of Sakhalin Island and the Islands adjacent to it, and the Kuril Islands, and renounces all right, title and claim to these territories” [Gromyko 1951]. Other additions included provisions for the withdrawal of foreign troops from Japan, the issue of reparations by Japan, further democratization and the prohibition of fascist and militaristic organizations in Japan, restrictions on the Japanese armed forces, free passage of all merchant ships through the Soya, Nemuro, Tsugaru and Tsushima Straits, and the exclusive passage right through these Straits for warships of the countries bordering the Sea of Japan.

The Soviet proposals were not discussed at the conference on the grounds, as was stated by the American chair of the meeting, that this was not on the agenda of the conference. As a result, the Soviet Union, Poland, and Czechoslovakia did not sign the Peace Treaty with Japan. Meanwhile, China, India, Burma, and Yugoslavia did not participate in the conference.

Thus, the state of war between Moscow and Tokyo was not terminated formally, and a base was laid for the Russo-Japanese territorial problem, designed by the United States so insidiously and skillfully. Besides, for Japan there remained unresolved issues, such as the repatriation of the prisoners of war, Japan’s membership in the United Nations which was blocked by the Soviet veto, and the Japanese fishing rights in the economic zone of the Soviet Union.

Dulles, addressing the conference on September 5, stressed that the limits of territorial sovereignty of Japan are defined by the Potsdam

conference, and that the Yalta agreements do not have a binding effect on either Japan or any of the Allied Powers. As for the Habomai Islands, in the opinion of the United States, they are not included in the geographical name of the Kuril Islands, but this is the matter of consideration by the International Court of Justice [Dulles 1951]. It is obvious that Dulles did not mention the Island of Shikotan deliberately, leaving the United States a space for further playing the “island card” in the Soviet-Japanese contradictions.

The speech of the head of the Japanese delegation Yoshida at the conference is especially noteworthy. First of all, he denied that the Kuril Islands and Southern Sakhalin had been captured by Japan as a result of aggression. Of particular attention is Yoshida’s complete disregard for the fact of Japan’s gaining Southern Sakhalin at war. In his words, this allegedly happened not after Japan’s aggression against Russia in 1904, but because Japan in 1875 had ceded Southern Sakhalin to Russia in order to settle the territorial dispute. Following the logic of his speech, under the Portsmouth Treaty of 1905 Japan simply “recovered” its sovereignty over Southern Sakhalin. Yoshida argued that Habomai and Shikotan Islands are not part of the Kuril Islands, but are a constituting part of Hokkaido [Yoshida 1951].

Anyway, Japan was deprived of South Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands by the Peace Treaty. There were not many opportunities for the Japanese leadership to defend its position. Tokyo emphasized that Habomai and Shikotan Islands had never been “a part of the Kuril Islands”. At the hearings in the Japanese Parliament on the ratification of the Peace Treaty, and later in his memoirs, Yoshida confirmed his thesis that Kunashir and Iturup are part of the Kuril Islands that have been renounced by Japan, but the Japanese claims on the Southern Kurils are sufficiently justified by the provisions of the 1855 Treaty of Shimoda and the 1875 Treaty of St. Petersburg [Yoshida 1962, p. 256].

Subsequently, the Japanese side began to argue that the term *Kurils* in the 1875 Treaty of St. Petersburg includes 18 Islands from Shumshu in the North to Urup in the South, and that neither Iturup nor Kunashir, like the Islands of Shikotan and Habomai, are included in the geographic

name of the Kuril Islands. This argument is easy to parry. Article 2 of the St. Petersburg Treaty refers to the cession of not all the Kuril Islands, but only “the group of Kuril Islands that he (the Emperor of Russia) currently owns”. And it is well known that, according to the 1855 Treaty of Shimoda, Japan acquired ownership over the Islands of Kunashir, Iturup, Habomai and Shikotan.

When the U.S. Senate ratified the San Francisco Peace Treaty in April 1952, it was stated that the Yalta agreements do not provide a legal basis for the Soviet occupation of Southern Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands.

The United States were mostly concerned about two things. First, how to deprive the Soviet Union of its sovereign rights on Southern Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands in international legal terms. The US position was that “the sovereignty of the Kuril Islands and Southern Sakhalin can only be determined by a future international agreement”. At the same time, a special importance was attached to ensuring that Japan, in case of its restoring diplomatic and other relations with the Soviet Union, should not do anything that could be interpreted as its recognition of Moscow’s sovereignty over the Kuril Islands and Southern Sakhalin. To prevent such development, articles 25 and 26 were introduced in the Peace Treaty. In other words, if Japan recognized the Soviet Union’s full sovereignty over the Kuril Islands, the United States could claim its full sovereignty over the Ryukyu and Bonin Islands. At the same time, the U.S. assumed it could not argue that Japan had not renounced the Kuril Islands, since such statement could be interpreted as its intention to support Japan’s claims to other territories mentioned in the Peace Treaty. The U.S. Secretary of State Dulles, speaking at a meeting of the National Security Council on April 7, 1955, warned against mentioning of the illegality of the Soviet occupation of the Kuril Islands and Southern Sakhalin on the grounds that the Soviet claim to these territories “was substantially the same as our claim to be in the Ryukyus and the Bonin Islands” [FRUS 1955-1957, p. 43].

There are well-founded questions: why did the Soviet Union refuse to sign the San Francisco Peace Treaty with Japan, and how would events have developed if it had joined it? The first question seems easy

to answer – the Soviet argument was presented in the speech delivered at the Peace Conference by the head of the Soviet delegation Andrey Gromyko. However, did the Soviet leadership calculate the pros and cons of such decision when analyzing the consequences of non-adherence to the Treaty? It seems that at that time the Soviet leadership, and first of all Joseph Stalin himself, did not attach any serious importance to Japan. Its arguments on the Japanese issue, apparently, were as follows.

The Americans have taken Japan into their own hands firmly and consistently, so in the foreseeable future they will not let it out of their control. This is an obvious disadvantage for the Soviet positions in the Far East. But this disadvantage is not so serious. After the defeat, Japan is decisively weakened, first of all, economically, and it will not be able to play any significantly independent role in the balance of power in the region. And the American military bases on its territory will have to be accepted as an inevitable evil. As for the territorial issue, that is, the issue of Southern Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands, they are in Soviet possession, with or without a peace treaty, and it is impossible to deny this fact, no matter what the Americans and the Japanese say. In addition, the Peace Treaty clearly states that Japan renounces these territories, and all their Japanese residents have already been moved by the Soviet authorities to Hokkaido.

The main thing is the victory of the Communist party in China. The Soviet-Chinese alliance can more than compensate for any disadvantages from the lack of fair relations between Moscow and Tokyo.

It was not accidental that on August 12, 1951, the Soviet Ambassador to Beijing N.V. Roshchin received a telegram from Moscow with the request to inform the Premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China Zhou Enlai that the Soviet delegation would participate in the San Francisco conference and raise the issue of the mandatory invitation of the PRC. A Peace Treaty with Japan should not be concluded without the participation of the PRC [Panov 2010, p. 55].

The directive instructions to the Soviet delegation at the San Francisco conference, approved by the CPSU Central Committee on August 20, 1951, emphasized the following: “The Delegation should

focus its main attention on the issue of inviting People's Republic of China to the conference" [Slavinsky 1996, p. 174]. This position leads to the following conclusion: Moscow would not have signed the Treaty in the absence of China even if the Peace Treaty had confirmed that Southern Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands belong to the Soviet Union.

Khrushchev emotionally criticized the Soviet position at the San Francisco conference in his memoirs, written at the time when he was already retired: "If we had previously given a correct assessment of the situation after the defeat of Japanese militarism and had signed the Peace Treaty drafted by the American side without our participation, but with due respect to our interests (apparently, Khrushchev referred to the "territorial" provisions of article 2 of the Treaty – *A.P.*), we would have immediately opened a representative office in Tokyo, and would have an Embassy there". Khrushchev laid the blame for the absence of peace treaty with Japan on Stalin, who "never asked anybody's advice, and always decided what to do by himself" [Khrushchev 1999, p. 94-95].

Later some Japanese political analysts concluded that Moscow's refusal to sign the Peace Treaty with Japan only reinforced the belief of most Japanese that the world was indeed divided into two camps, and that the Japanese government had taken the right choice in seeking Japan's independence on the basis of an alliance with the United States.

Officially, the Russian side would give a positive assessment of the San Francisco Peace Treaty only five decades after its signing. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a relevant statement on 4 September 2001 [V svyazi s 50-letiyem 2001].

So, let's sum up. First, after the signing and ratifying the San Francisco Peace Treaty Japan fully restored its sovereignty and entered the sphere of international relations as an independent state.

The Soviet Union did not establish diplomatic relations with Japan and did not maintain any official contacts with it. Since the occupation period there has been a Soviet representation in Tokyo, where the acting Trade representative A. I. Domnitsky, the Second Secretary of the USSR Foreign Ministry A. S. Chasovnikov, and four technical workers have been staying without any official recognition from the Japanese side. After

September 1951, they remained permanently in the pre-war building of the former Soviet Embassy, because if they left for the Soviet Union even for a short time, they would be denied the re-entry to Japan. The Soviet representatives, even though they were not recognized by the Japanese authorities, nevertheless had certain contacts with the Japanese and sent information to Moscow about the situation in Japan. This information for obvious reasons could hardly be detailed and sufficient enough to shape comprehensive and deep understanding of the domestic political processes in Japan.

Secondly, by not signing the Peace Treaty with Japan, the Soviet Union failed to join the international treaty, i.e. the highest form of international legal practice, which provided for Japan's renunciation of Southern Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands. This Treaty is undoubtedly much more significant than the Crimean agreement. This was the starting point for the territorial problem in Soviet-Japanese and then Russian-Japanese relations, which has not been resolved yet.

Start of Negotiations on the Normalization of Soviet-Japanese Relations First Round

On October 18, 1954, the USSR and China issued a statement of their readiness to normalize relations with Japan. It should be noted that it did not mention the "revision of Japan's relations with the U.S." (in 1951 Tokyo and Washington concluded a military alliance) as a precondition for starting negotiations.

In December 1954, Hatoyama Ichirō replaced Yoshida as Prime Minister, and on December 11, Foreign Minister Shigemitsu Mamoru signaled Tokyo's desire to start negotiations with Moscow. On December 16, the Soviet Foreign Minister V. M. Molotov also confirmed Moscow's readiness for negotiations. Compared to Yoshida, who considered normalization of relations with the Soviet Union not only unnecessary, but harmful, Hatoyama sought to provide Japan with a

more independent diplomatic course than the one simply following the position of the United States. Hatoyama's position was supported by his closest ally, Kōno Ichirō (together with Hatoyama he had founded the Democratic party, which was in power at that time, and in the new government he took the post of Minister of Agriculture and Forestry).

However, Yoshida remained to be a fairly influential politician, controlling many high-ranking employees of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Shigemitsu Mamoru (who served as Foreign Minister in Hatoyama's Cabinet) shared Yoshida's views on relations with the USSR.

In the Soviet leadership there was also no unanimity on the "Japanese question". N. Khrushchev, N. Bulganin, G. Malenkov, and A. Mikoyan were in favor of concluding a Peace Treaty with Japan as soon as possible, but V. Molotov was still committed to the "Stalinist anti-Japanese line" and believed that there could not be any peace treaty with Japan as long as Tokyo maintains the Security Treaty with Washington.

In December 1954 – January 1955, the parties repeatedly exchanged statements about their readiness to launch the normalization process. However, neither Moscow nor Tokyo sent each other any official invitation for the talks. It seemed that the parties were looking for an acceptable form of invitation to negotiations in the absence of diplomatic relations.

The Soviet side took the initiative, and this was done in quite an unusual way. In January 1955, Acting Trade Representative of the USSR Domnitsky repeatedly tried to contact the Minister of Foreign Affairs Shigemitsu for extending him a letter with the offer to start negotiations in Moscow or Tokyo and to appoint representatives to the talks. Yet Shigemitsu refused to accept a letter without a date or a signature and from the Soviet representative whom the Japanese government did not officially recognize. This was a convenient excuse for Shigemitsu not to hurry with the negotiations.

Since the Japanese Foreign Minister had not accepted the letter, Domnitsky, acting through Hatoyama's closest friends who were in favor of normalizing relations with the Soviet Union, delivered the letter to the Japanese Prime Minister at his private residence. The meeting of the Soviet representative with Hatoyama was organized in a curiously

detective style. As Hatoyama writes in his memoirs, he asked Domnitsky to proceed to the house through the kitchen, so that the Japanese journalists could not follow his arrival and raise a fuss [Hatoyama 1957, p. 64]. The meeting took place, and the Japanese Prime Minister accepted the letter. Domnitsky confirmed that the letter was of official nature and was issued by the Soviet government [Panov 2010, p. 62].

On February 4, 1955, the Japanese government decided to start negotiations with the Soviet Union on normalizing interstate relations. To head the Japanese delegation at the negotiations, the government appointed Matsumoto Shun'ichi, a former diplomat who had held several high positions in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including the Ambassador to Britain, and who was a Member of Parliament elected from the Democratic Party in February 1955. He supported Hatoyama's policy and advocated the conclusion of the peace treaty with the Soviet Union as soon as possible.

The Soviet delegation was headed by the Soviet Ambassador in London Y. Malik. He was an experienced diplomat familiar with Japan – in the late years of the war, in 1942-1945, he served as the Soviet Ambassador to Tokyo. The instructions issued by the Japanese government to the delegation led by Matsumoto at the London talks included the following main points:

- to obtain the consent of the Soviet Union for Japan's admission to the UN (until that, the USSR had been vetoing Japan's admission);
- to ensure the return of all Japanese citizens detained in Soviet camps (at the start of the talks, there remained 1,016 prisoners of war and 357 civilians serving sentences for war crimes and crimes committed while in detention);
- to reach an agreement on the resumption of trade relations;
- to obtain the consent of the Soviet side for Japan's fishing of salmon that spawned in rivers on the territory of the Soviet Union.

Anticipating hard clashes on the territorial issue, the Japanese side developed a three-stage strategy for conducting talks. At the first stage, the Japanese delegation was to demand the transfer of Southern Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands, including Habomai and Shikotan Islands.

If the Soviet side refused to meet such a clearly assertive position, which could be hardly called realistic even by the Japanese themselves, it was prescribed to limit the territorial claims to Southern Kurils, which implied the Islands of Habomai, Shikotan, Kunashir and Iturup. And, finally, if this requirement was not accepted, to limit the claims to the Islands of Habomai and Shikotan. Thus, according to these directives, the “return” of these Islands was considered sufficient for the conclusion of the Peace Treaty [Hasegawa 1998 p. 108-109; Hara 1998, p. 65-66].

The directives (and this is confirmed by numerous publications of Japanese participants in the London negotiations, including Matsumoto, as well as diplomats, authors of the directives and political analysts) were drawn up in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and therefore not true are all subsequent statements by the Japanese side according to which the Japanese principled position from the very beginning was to seek the reversion of the Islands of Habomai, Shikotan, Kunashir and Iturup. Moreover, Japanese negotiators believed that it would be extremely difficult to obtain even the Islands of Habomai and Shikotan. Yoshida and his supporters, including diplomats, insisting that directives should include the demand for the “return” of the Habomai and Shikotan Islands, based their position on the assumption that the Soviet Union would not agree and, consequently, the Peace Treaty would not be concluded, which was in their interests.

The Soviet-Japanese Peace Treaty talks started in London on June 3, 1955. At the second meeting of the heads of delegations on June 7, Matsumoto handed Malik a Memorandum, which the Japanese side proposed to take as a basis for further negotiations. It introduced the following items as the main conditions for the normalization of relations:

- transfer of Southern Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands to Japan;
- return to Japan of the Japanese prisoners of war detained in the Soviet Union;
- positive resolution of issues, related to the Japanese salmon fishery in the Soviet waters;
- the support by the Soviet Union’s for Japan’s admission to the UN.

At the following, third meeting, the head of the Soviet delegation presented for consideration the Soviet project of the Peace Treaty with Japan. It contained, in addition to provisions on ending the state of war between the two countries and restoring official relations, and Japan's recognition of the Soviet Union's sovereignty over Southern Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands, two other items that were clearly unrealistic.

First, it was proposed to fix that Japan would not enter into alliances directed against the Soviet Union. This meant that Japan would have to abandon the Security Treaty with the United States. Second, Japan was to commit itself to allowing free passage of military vessels through the Japanese Straits only states to bordering the Sea of Japan, which meant that the Soviet military vessels could use the Straits, while the American ones could not. The authorship of this item can be traced back to Molotov's hand. The Soviet promotion of these provisions gave the Japanese delegation an excuse for not discussing other articles of the draft unless the Soviet side ceased to put forward proposals aimed at revising the Japan-U.S. alliance. Third, it was proposed that the problem of Japanese prisoners of war would be resolved only after the conclusion of the Peace Treaty.

Having analyzed various documents, materials, and memoirs of the negotiators, the Japanese researcher Hasegawa concluded that Matsumoto, realizing the flexibility of the Soviet position, made it clear to Malik that it was possible to solve the territorial problem on the basis of the return of Habomai and Shikotan Islands to Japan. This option was provided as the minimum territorial requirement in the instructions he received [Hasegawa 1998, p. 110].

The negotiations were interrupted because in July Malik went to Moscow for consultations and new instructions. On August 9, 1955, when negotiations were resumed, Malik informs Matsumoto that the Soviet government is ready to meet the "wish" of the Japanese side for the transfer of the Habomai and Shikotan Islands to Japan, on the condition that the territorial issue between the two countries would be finally settled when the Peace Treaty is signed. He also said that the Soviet side did not treat as a precondition for normalizing relations and concluding

the Peace Treaty Japan's renunciation of obligations arising from the existing international treaties (obviously this was the indication of the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan. Subsequently, the two above-mentioned "Molotov points" were removed) [Tikhvinsky 1996, pp. 53-54].

The territorial concession announced by the Soviet side was more generous than the Japanese side could have expected. Matsumoto would later write in his memoirs that when he heard about it from Malik, he "could hardly believe his ears". He immediately reported the conversation to Tokyo [Matsumoto 1966, p. 44].

However, Matsumoto's telegram prompted the opponents of normalizing relations with Moscow to take countermeasures against the early conclusion of the negotiations. Shigemitsu and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs classified this telegram so strongly that even Prime Minister Hatoyama did not know about it. Shigemitsu sent Matsumoto the instruction to adhere to the position that the reversion of only Habomai and Shikotan is not enough, that Kunashir and Iturup Islands have been the Japanese territory since ancient times and are not part of the Kuril Islands renounced by Japan under the San Francisco Treaty, and that the matter of sovereignty of Southern Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands should be decided at the international conference.

This position was presented by the Japanese side at the meeting on August 30. Some participants of the meeting recall that after receiving the Japanese reply, Malik turned white and strongly condemned the Japanese side for the lack of good will to reach an agreement. Repeating the proposal concerning the Habomai and Shikotan Islands, he stressed that the Soviet government would never agree to an international conference on the territorial issue and would never change its position on the Kunashir and Iturup Islands.

Thus, it was for the first time that Japan combined the Habomai and Shikotan Islands together with the Kunashir and Iturup Islands as a minimum requirement, and for the first time that Japan separated these Islands from the geographical name the *Kuril Islands*.

In connection with the events described above, two main questions arise: why did Malik announce the territorial concession at a fairly early stage of negotiations and why did the Japanese side not accept it. According to the testimony of Sergey Tikhvinsky, who was a member of the Soviet delegation at the talks and served at that time as Councilor at the Soviet Embassy in London, the Soviet delegation had a reserve position on the territorial issue approved by the Politburo of the CPSU Central Committee, which was released by Malik to the head of the Japanese delegation [Tikhvinsky 1996, p. 53-54].

But what made him do it so hastily? There is an opinion that, while staying in Moscow in July 1955 at the Plenum of the Central Committee of the CPSU, Malik could have met with Khrushchev and received appropriate instructions from him. It is well known that Khrushchev was dissatisfied with the slow progress of the London talks and repeatedly spoke about this. Indeed, it is hard to imagine that such an experienced diplomat as Malik could have used this position, which was essentially a basic one, on his own initiative, without consulting with Moscow.

It is also obvious that after receiving such an important concession from the Soviet side, without giving anything in return, the Japanese side came to the conclusion that, since it had already regained the Habomai and Shikotan Islands, why not try to return of the Kunashir and Iturup Islands as well.

The new instructions received by the Japanese delegation from Tokyo, of course, led to a delay in the negotiations. To what extent the Prime Minister Hatoyama, who was in favor of concluding a peace treaty with the Soviet Union as quickly as possible, was aware of them? The first explanation, which seems quite reasonable, is that the head of the Japanese government did not receive any detailed information about the progress of the London negotiations. Shigemitsu and his Ministry were constraining his interference in the process. In his memoirs Hatoyama wrote: "I suggest that the details of the negotiations were reported to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but it did not pass this information to me, although I often asked them to do it. What I received were nothing more than general telegrams..." [Hatoyama 1957, p. 177].

It's hard to believe it, but this was the real situation. Hatoyama was practically removed by the Foreign Ministry from the London negotiations, and Shigemitsu took a particularly hard line in it. In August, he publicly stated that "if the negotiations do not lead to agreements acceptable to Japan, we should even be ready to break them". Speaking at the National press club in Washington at the end of August, he assured the American leadership that "the Japanese-Soviet negotiations do not mean Japan's desire to establish friendly relations with the Soviet Union, and the main goal is to technically end the state of war between the two countries" [Hara 1998, p. 68].

The second explanation for the Japanese side's refusal to accept the Soviet territorial concession and for Japan's tightening its position on the territorial issue addresses Japan's domestic politics. In the summer of 1955 negotiations were held about merging the Democratic Party and the Liberal Party. Hatoyama had to negotiate with Yoshida, whose tough position towards the Soviet Union was very well known. Problems of normalization of relations with the Soviet Union were discussed by the leaders of both parties, since the unified party was to develop a consolidated position. Many Japanese researchers come to the conclusion that Hatoyama, seeking the establishment of a unified party, the LDP, compromised and went along with hardliners on the issue of Peace Treaty talks with the USSR. This version is also supported by the fact that after the creation of the LDP on November 15, 1955, the Japanese position in the negotiations became tougher.

On November 12, the leaders of the Democratic and Liberal parties approved a political document titled *Rational changes in the position in the Japanese-Soviet negotiations*, according to which the purpose of the negotiations was the return of the Southern Kurils (Kunashir and Iturup Islands) and the Habomai and Shikotan Islands, while the fate of other territories was to be decided by the international conference.

London talks reached a dead end and were interrupted on September 23.

Second Round

The second round of the Soviet-Japanese negotiations started on January 17, 1956, and continued until March 20. The delegations agreed on a number of articles of the Peace Treaty that were not so crucial. Yet differences remained on major issues, including the territorial one. The head of the Soviet delegation presented proposals confirming the promise to transfer the Habomai and Shikotan Islands to Japan with clear understanding that there would be no more territorial concessions. In response, Matsumoto put forward a Japanese counter-proposal. Since the Japanese side considered the issue of Habomai and Shikotan Islands resolved, it was about the Islands of Kunashir and Iturup.

It was assumed that until Japan returned these Islands, Tokyo would be recognized its “potential sovereignty” over them, which would allow the Soviet residents of these Islands to remain on them for this period, and Soviet military and commercial vessels would have the right of free passage through the Straits between these Islands, which would be demilitarized [Hasegawa 1998, p. 121].

Malik rejected these proposals, and the negotiations were interrupted. On the day after the end of the second round of the London talks, i.e. on March 21, 1956, the resolution of the Council of Ministers of the USSR *About the Protection of Resources and Regulation of Salmon Fishing in the Open Seas and Areas Adjacent to the Territorial Waters of the USSR in the Far East* was published. According to the resolution, salmon fishing was restricted in the Sea of Okhotsk and the Western part of the Bering Sea, for both Soviet and foreign organizations and citizens. Fishing was allowed only under special permits, and each vessel was set a fishing quota.

The resolution caused shock not only among Japanese fishing circles, but also in the general Japanese public. At the time when the consequences of the devastating war had not yet been overcome, salmon was more than essential for the food supply of the Japanese people. In a number of Japanese studies of Japanese-Soviet relations it is believed

that the Soviet government, through this decree, tried to put pressure on the Japanese side to make it more flexible at the Peace Treaty talks.

But the Soviet press had warned of the possibility of adopting such a resolution as early as February 11, i.e. before the failure of the second round of London talks, and subsequent events have shown that those were the Japanese politicians advocating the speedy normalization of relations with Moscow who took advantage of the “fishing crisis” for overcoming the resistance of the opponents of the agreement with the Soviet Union.

The Japanese side offered to hold negotiations on fishing issues separately from the Peace Treaty talks. Such negotiations were held in Moscow from April 29 to May 14. The Japanese delegation was headed by the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry Kōno. As Kōno later recalls in his memoirs, when sending him to the Soviet capital, Prime Minister Hatoyama admonished him with the following words: “Anticommunism and the restoration of interstate relations are two different things. Is there any other state today that continues to be at war with another state just because it doesn’t like it? Having settled our relations with the Soviet Union, we can achieve the release of the Japanese who are still in captivity in the USSR, and then, when the Soviet Union withdraws its objections, Japan can become a member of the U.N. ... Of course, fish is an important matter, but it’s time to resolve the main issue, the issue of normalizing relations between the two countries. Therefore, I will also probably have to go to Moscow. That is why I would like you to go now to the Soviet Union and find out the Soviet position and all the circumstances on the spot” [Kōno 1965, p. 26].

Fishing talks were proceeding with difficulties. Shigemitsu even tried to sabotage their start. Hatoyama had to intervene directly to make them go ahead. As a result of the negotiations, the *Soviet-Japanese Convention on Fishing in Open Seas in the North-Western Pacific* was signed on May 14, 1956, the day before the start of the season of salmon fishing, and the salmon quota for the Japanese fishing vessels was determined. During the negotiations, on May 9, Kōno requested a meeting with the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, Nikolai Bulganin,

to which he came without any escort, including the Japanese interpreter who was a career diplomat in the Japanese delegation. Thus, he showed that he did not share the position of the Japanese Foreign Ministry in the Peace Treaty talks and did not trust its employees. Kōno proposed that when signing the fishing convention, the parties should make a joint statement that it would enter into force on the condition that the normalization talks would be resumed no later than 31 July, 1956. At the same time, he asked to make it look like the Soviet initiative.

Thus, the Japanese Minister sought to put pressure on the forces in Japan that were trying to delay the London talks. Kōno and Mikoyan signed a corresponding communique about the resumption of talks between the two countries by the end of July. This agreement on the restart of negotiations was sharply criticized by the Japanese Foreign Ministry. Kōno was even accused of allegedly making some concessions on the territorial issue at a meeting with Bulganin. However, the territorial issue was not discussed at that meeting. But the head of the Soviet government suggested that the Japanese side should consider using the *Adenauer formula* in the Peace Treaty negotiations [Tikhvinsky 1996, pp. 93-95]. On September 13, 1953, the Soviet Union and West Germany reached an agreement to restore diplomatic relations without resolving territorial problems between the two countries, the settlement of which was postponed until signing a peace treaty. The formula of German Chancellor Karl Adenauer in relation to the Soviet-Japanese negotiations implied the normalization of relations without signing a peace treaty with the provision on territorial delimitation.

After Bulganin's proposal, Hatoyama began to think of accepting this formula, given that he had previously considered this option [Hasegawa 1998, p. 122]. As for Shigemitsu, he was the adversary of the *Adenauer formula*. He believed that after the official termination of the state of war with the Soviet Union, Japan could lose all prospects of the return of not only the Southern Kurils, but also of the Habomai and Shikotan Islands.

Third Round

The third round of the Peace Treaty talks was held not in London, but, by the suggestion of the Soviet side, in Moscow, and lasted from July 31 to August 14. It should be noted that the domestic political struggle in Japan on the issues related to these talks was very acute on the eve of their resumption and did not always develop in favor of those who advocated the early normalization of relations with the Soviet Union, especially Hatoyama and Kōno. After signing the fishery convention, Sergey Tikhvinsky arrived in Tokyo as the head of the Soviet Union's Mission for the Implementation of the Agreement on Fishing and Rescue Operations in the North-Western Pacific Ocean, with the rank of the USSR's Envoy Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary. In fact, the Japanese government recognized the post-war Representation of the USSR in Tokyo, although under a different name. According to Tikhvinsky, the Japanese opponents of normalizing relations with the Soviet Union began to act more actively, in a coordinated manner, and to warm up the anti-Soviet sentiment in broad circles of the public. A leading role was played by Yoshida and his faction in LDP, as well as acting and retired diplomats.

The public was being intimidated by the “communist threat”, which would allegedly appear after the arrival of Soviet Embassy staff in Japan and undermine the internal security of Japan [Tikhvinsky 1996, pp. 96-97].

Opponents of normalizing relations with Moscow have succeeded in appointing “their person”, the Foreign Minister Shigemitsu, as head of the Japanese delegation to the Peace Treaty negotiations. He himself sought to lead the delegation, believing that his firmness and assertiveness would allow him to get additional concessions from the Soviet side. He did not even object to holding the third round of talks in Moscow, hoping to get direct access to the Soviet leaders and convince them of the correctness of the Japanese position. Still Hatoyama managed to send his supporter to Moscow. Matsumoto was the plenipotentiary representative under the head of the delegation.

At the talks with Foreign Minister Dmitry Shepilov, the Japanese delegation removed the issue of holding an international conference for determining the ownership of Southern Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands, but continued to insist on the transfer of the Habomai, Shikotan, Kunashir and Iturup Islands to Japan [Hasegawa 1998, p. 123].

Negotiations have again reached an impasse. Shigemitsu's hard line did not work, and the Soviet leaders did not accept it. Then Shigemitsu comes to a conclusion that no one expected from him. He informs the members of the Japanese delegation that it expedient to sign a Peace Treaty on the Soviet terms – the transfer of only the Habomai and Shikotan Islands, without including a provision for passing the border between Kunashir and Hokkaido. The course of the negotiations and the Soviet position on them, he argued, indicate that otherwise Japan may not get even these islands.

On August 12, Shigemitsu Mamoru announced his “radical” proposal to Tokyo. Moreover, he is voicing his position in the press [Hara 1998, p. 71]¹. But the situation in the Japanese ruling circles, including the one created by Shigemitsu's own previous efforts, was not in favor of its adoption. The head of the Japanese delegation receives instructions from Tokyo to continue insisting on the same position as before. Moscow talks are interrupted.

The U.S. Position on the Japanese-Soviet Negotiations

Hatoyama's intention to achieve full normalization of relations with the Soviet Union was perceived in Washington with jealousy or, speaking more precisely, with great concern. In addition to its reluctance to give their junior partner more freedom of hands in diplomatic affairs, the Americans also had specific selfish calculations. In Washington's perspective, if a rapprochement between Tokyo and Moscow took place,

¹ See also Asahi Shimbun 1956, August 13.

Japanese nationalism could be turned against the United States, since the Japanese would demand the reversion of the Ryukyu and Bonin archipelagos. The U.S. State Department predicted that the Soviet Union could use the Kuril Islands issue as a “bargaining chip” and create tensions between Japan and the United States [Hara 1998, p. 43]. Besides, the Americans feared that after the normalization of relations with the USSR Japan might start negotiations with the PRC to establish diplomatic relations.

On February 26, 1955, Dulles sent an instruction to the U.S. Ambassador in Tokyo J.J. Allison to inform the Japanese side on the position of Washington in connection with the Soviet-Japanese Peace Treaty negotiations. Speaking in detail, Tokyo’s agreements with Moscow should not undermine the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty and should correspond to the San Francisco Peace Treaty (in this regard, American support for the Japanese position that the Habomai and Shikotan Islands are not part of the Kuril Islands was confirmed) [FRUS 1955-1957, p. 20-22]. At that time Washington believed that Japan’s claim to Habomai and Shikotan Islands would be enough to disrupt the Soviet-Japanese Peace Treaty talks.

The Soviet proposal to hand over the Habomai and Shikotan Islands to Japan was perceived in Washington as creating an opportunity for concluding the Soviet-Japanese Peace Treaty. In this regard, the United States changed its position. Now support was provided for Japan’s claims not only to the Islands of Habomai and Shikotan, but also to Kunashir and Iturup. The United States began encouraging Japan to demand the “return of Kunashir and Iturup Islands” as territories not included in the name of Kuril Islands, regarding this as an additional obstacle for the conclusion of the Soviet-Japanese Treaty [Hasegawa 1998, p. 120].

On August 19, 1956, Shigemitsu met with Dulles in London and informed him about the progress in negotiations with the Soviet Union. Along the way, he noted that Moscow wants to draw the border line north of the Habomai and Shikotan Islands, and asked the Secretary of State’s position on the legitimacy of such a border from the standpoint of the San Francisco Peace Treaty. Dulles spoke out quite definitely.

According to the records of the conversation made by the American side, he stressed that “the Kuriles and Ryukyus were handled in the same manner under the surrender terms” and that “while the United States had by the peace treaty agreed that residual sovereignty to the Ryukyus might remain with Japan, we had also stipulated by Article 26 that if Japan gave better terms to Russia we could demand the same terms for ourselves. That would mean that if Japan recognized that the Soviet Union was entitled to full sovereignty over the Kuriles we would assume that we were equally entitled to full sovereignty over the Ryukyus” [FRUS 1955-1957, p. 202].

The State Secretary suggested Japan might tell the Soviet Union of the tough line of the United States – that if the USSR were to take all the Kuriles, the United States might remain forever in Okinawa, and no Japanese Government could survive [FRUS 1955-1957, p. 203]. In almost all studies of Japanese, American, Soviet, and at present Russian historians and political scientists, these statements of Dulles are interpreted as *Dulles' threat* (*Daresu no dokatsu*), which ultimately impeded signing the Soviet-Japanese Peace Treaty. Linking the Kuril Islands to the Ryukyus and Bonin Islands rendered a shock effect on the Japanese public. Although the Dulles' statements only implied that Japan should not recognize the Soviet Union's sovereignty over the Kuril Islands, they were perceived as a threat not to return the Ryukyu and Bonin Islands to Japan otherwise. At the same time, virtually unnoticed was the fact that Japan's refusal to claim the reversion of Kunashir and Iturup was in no way connected with the issue of its recognition or non-recognition of the Soviet sovereignty over them.

In order to reassure the Japanese public, on September 7 the U.S. State Department sent an aide-memoire to the Japanese government explaining the American position. It stated that the Government of United States believes that the state of war between Japan and the Soviet Union should be terminated, that the Yalta agreements still do not provide a legal effect in transferring territories, that the San Francisco Peace Treaty did not determine the sovereignty of the territories renounced by Japan, and that Japan does not have the right to transfer

sovereignty over the territories renounced by it therein. It was noted that “after careful examination of the historical facts”, the United States concluded that the Islands of Etorofu and Kunashiri, along with the Habomai Islands and Shikotan, have always been part of Japan proper and should in justice be acknowledged as under Japanese sovereignty [FRUS 1955-57, p. 226]. It is not difficult to find contradictions in this statement. On the one hand, Kunashir and Iturup are recognized as part of the Kuril Islands, which have been renounced by Japan, and on the other, Japan’s position that they have always been an integral part of Japanese territory is supported.

In any case, the United States voiced its position of unequivocal support of the Japanese demands to the Soviet Union for the “return of the four Islands”, which had been stated by Dulles to Shigemitsu at their last meeting on August 24, 1955.

Moscow High-level Talks

The situation around the Soviet-Japanese negotiations was becoming more and more alarming. They were at the brink of a total failure. For Hatoyama and his supporters who adhered to Japan’s independent foreign policy, it became increasingly clear that it would not be possible to find a way out of the current impasse without a direct interference of the head of the Japanese government.

On August 19, the Japanese government publishes a statement about the Prime Minister’s possible trip to Moscow. That was a courageous decision of Hatoyama, who was facing strong opposition from within the ruling party, the rightist and nationalistic organizations, and even a number of business structures focused on the American market. Washington also did not stay away. Hatoyama was coming to the conclusion that since it was not possible to conclude the Peace Treaty together with the solution of the territorial problem, it was necessary to reach at least an agreement on the restoration of diplomatic relations.

According to recently declassified documents from the Politburo archives of the CPSU Central Committee, the Presidium of the CPSU Central Committee sent a coded telegram to the head of the Soviet mission in Japan, Tikhvinsky, stating that they were ready to receive Japanese Prime Minister Hatoyama and Minister Kōno in Moscow in the second half of October. The purpose of the visit was to “establish personal contact and to exchange views on the prospects of the Soviet-Japanese relations”.

It makes sense to present this document in full in view of its great significance, since it sets out Moscow’s principled position on the normalization of bilateral relations. The Soviet government “intends to sign the Peace Treaty with the territorial article envisaging the transfer of the Habomai and Shikotan Islands to Japan, as it is set out in the Soviet project of the Peace Treaty. The position of the Soviet Government on the territorial question is final and cannot be changed. If the Japanese government is not ready to sign the Peace Treaty, the Soviet government gives its consent for the restoration of diplomatic relations without the Peace Treaty with subsequent exchange of ambassadors and the declaration of the end of the state of war, while leaving the territorial status-quo unchanged.

This position of the Soviet government, as is known, has already been stated during the meeting of N. Bulganin and N. Khrushchev with the Japanese parliamentary delegation on September 21, 1955, as well as in the conversation of N. Bulganin with I. Kono on May 9, 1956. This position of the Soviet government remains unchanged at present. One should pay attention to the fact that Bulganin in his conversation with Mr. Kono on May 9 spoke in the same sense, but not as it is stated by Kono, who claims that Mr. Bulganin spoke in favor of signing the Peace Treaty without a territorial provision.

If the Japanese side agrees to any of these options for normalizing Soviet-Japanese relations, the Soviet government is ready receive Mr. Hatoyama, Mr. Kono and their accompanying persons in Moscow in the second half of October this year” [Maksimov 2019].

On September 11, Hatoyama sent a message to the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR Bulganin, expressing his readiness to

start negotiations on normalizing relations between the two countries, if the Soviet Union agreed to the following provisions:

- end of the state of war between the two countries;
- exchange of embassies;
- immediate repatriation of Japanese citizens detained in Soviet camps;
- entry into force of the Fishery Convention;
- the Soviet Union's support for Japan's admission to the UN.

It was also proposed to approve at the upcoming negotiations the items that had already been agreed upon at the previous talks in Moscow and London. As for the territorial issue, it was noted that the Japanese side would be satisfied with the promise of the Soviet side to continue discussing it in future.

Positive response from the Soviet side followed immediately. On September 13, Bulganin sent a message to Hatoyama where he expressed his consent with the Japanese position over the agenda the talks to be held in Moscow and his readiness to immediately resume the talks on the normalization of relations without concluding a peace treaty.

Thus, at that moment the parties did not plan to conclude a peace treaty. The Japanese side only proposed that the consent of the Soviet government to continue negotiations on the conclusion of the peace treaty, including the territorial issue, after the restoration of diplomatic relations, should be made in written form. On September 29, the First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the USSR Gromyko and Matsumoto exchanged relevant letters.

However, opponents of normalizing relations with the Soviet Union did not let up. On September 20, the LDP held an extraordinary general meeting to approve the party platform for the upcoming talks in Moscow. The Japanese negotiators were required to insist on the immediate return of the Islands of Shikotan and Habomai, on continuing negotiations on the Islands of Kunashir and Iturup after the conclusion of the peace treaty, and on following the spirit of the San Francisco Treaty with respect to other territories.

The LDP decision contradicted to the agreement already reached between the parties to postpone negotiations on the territorial issue. Of course, it tied Hatoyama's hands in the negotiations and led to their complication.

The high-level talks in Moscow began on October 13. On October 15, the head of the Soviet delegation Bulganin and Hatoyama confirmed at their meeting what they had agreed in their letters – normalization of relations together along with postponing negotiations on the territorial issue. Hatoyama repeated the position set out in his letter from September 11 to Bulganin.

But Bulganin made an important addition. He suggested signing a Joint Declaration, subject to ratification by both sides, rather than a joint communique or a memorandum, as the final result of the negotiations. Hatoyama agreed. After the meeting, the Soviet side submitted a ten-point project of Joint Declaration. The tenth paragraph stated that the parties “will continue negotiations on the conclusion of a peace treaty, including the territorial issue, after the normalization of relations” [Maksimenkov 2019].

Everything was seemingly clear and predictable. After some technical work, the parties could sign the document whose provisions had already been agreed upon. But an unexpected thing happened. Kōno, who was a member of the Japanese delegation, requested a meeting with the First Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee Nikita Khrushchev, and received an audience with him on October 16. Why did Kōno do this instead of Hatoyama, who was the head of delegation?

A possible explanation is that Hatoyama (he was 73) at the time was already seriously ill, having arrived in Moscow in a wheelchair – because of the effects of a stroke he was not able to conduct lengthy, complex discussions. Another version is that Hatoyama wanted to quickly complete the negotiations without fulfilling the party's instructions from September, 20. He had already announced his intention to step down as the head of Cabinet and to retire from big politics after normalizing relations with Moscow. As for Kōno, he was contemplating about his political future and got Hatoyama's consent to put forward the territorial

issue before the Soviet leadership, but not at the negotiations, but directly to the “chief person in the USSR”.

One more interpretation refers us to the traditional Japanese negotiating tactic, according to which the head of delegation does not go into details, while one of its members is a master of behind-scenes deals and actually conducts real negotiations. This tactic is called among Japanese negotiators *haragei* (hidden game). Of course, Kōno coordinated with Hatoyama all his meetings with Khrushchev.

Kōno began the conversation with the Soviet leader by describing in detail harsh activities of the Japanese opponents of the normalization of Soviet-Japanese relations. He argued that in this situation, in order to neutralize them, it is extremely important for the Japanese delegation to return to Japan with the Islands of Habomai and Shikotan. Khrushchev reacts to this irritably, recalling quite reasonably that the Soviet government has twice offered to transfer these Islands to the Japanese side, but Tokyo has twice rejected this offer.

“The Soviet government,” he continues, “wants to come to an agreement with Japan as soon as possible and does not use the territorial issue for bargaining. But I must again state very clearly and categorically that we do not accept and should not accept any territorial claims from Japan other than the Habomai and Shikotan Islands, and refuse to discuss any proposals on this issue”. [Soglashayetsya na peredachu 1996, p. 118].

At the same time, the Soviet leader sets two conditions under which these territories can be transferred to Japan. The first condition is that the Peace Treaty must be concluded before their return, and that along with the transfer of the Islands the territorial issue must be considered to be resolved completely and definitively. The second condition is that these Islands will be transferred only after the U.S. return to Japan Okinawa and all other Japanese territories that they currently possess.

For the first time Khrushchev linked the problem of the Habomai and Shikotan Islands to the problem of the Ryukyu and Bonin archipelagos. In doing so, he tried to play the territorial card in the anti-American game just as the Americans played it in the anti-Soviet one. After Khrushchev’s

presentation of this position, Kōno continuously and persistently tried to refocus attention on the territorial problem.

At the same time, he tried to “challenge” Khrushchev’s thesis about the analogy between the issues of Habomai and Shikotan Islands and Okinawa. In his reply, the Soviet leader, increasingly irritated by Kōno’s insistence, said the following: “We do not want to have inequality with the United States on this issue. Why can one demand that we extend to Japan territories that belong to us, while the United States hold Japanese territories in their hands and build there military bases which are directed against us? This is not fair. We protest against such discrimination”. [Soglashayetsya na peredachu 1996, p.119-120].

Kōno continued trying to raise the territorial question even in hypothetical terms. He asked Khrushchev, whether he thought that the U.S. would ever return Okinawa to Japan. The latter replied that it would happen one day. Then Kōno embarks on a clearly provocative question – when the U.S. revert back Okinawa, will the Soviet Union be ready to return Kunashir and Iturup. Clearly tired of the Japanese “interrogation”, the Soviet leader notes: “I did not know that the Japanese are so persistent. They hit the same point all the time”. [Soglashayetsya na peredachu 1996, p. 120]. Khrushchev decisively rejected the possibility of transferring Kunashir and Iturup, although, according to his assessment, these Islands do not have any economic value. On the contrary, they bring complete loss and are a huge financial burden for the Soviet government. But, he stressed, “the crucial thing is the country’s prestige, as well as the strategic side of the problem”. [Soglashayetsya na peredachu 1996, p. 120].

After the meeting Khrushchev sent a note to the members of the Presidium of the CPSU Central Committee with the text for including in the Joint Declaration, which stated that the Soviet Union, desiring to meet the wishes of Japan and taking into consideration the interests of the Japanese State, agrees to transfer to Japan the Habomai Islands and the island of Shikotan. The actual transfer of these islands to Japan will take place after the conclusion of a Peace Treaty between the USSR and Japan and after Okinawa and other Islands currently under U.S.

administration are returned to Japan [Soglashayetsya na peredachu 1996, p.121].

Late in the evening, this text was delivered to Kōno. But the meetings between Kōno and Khrushchev did not end there. One should know the Japanese negotiators – they tend to squeeze the maximum possible concessions out of any situation. At a meeting on October 17, Khrushchev explained to Kōno that the Soviet Union's willingness to extend Habomai and Shikotan to Japan was primarily motivated by its desire to help Japan get back Okinawa. But if Japan does not want mentioning Okinawa in the text of the declaration, then it is possible to make an oral statement on this issue or not to link the transfer of Habomai and Shikotan Islands to the return of Okinawa and other territories [Soglashayetsya na peredachu 1996, p. 123].

At the third meeting on October 18, Kōno resorted, borrowing the words of a famous Japanese historian Hasegawa Tsuyoshi, to a “snake attack”. The Japanese delegation asked the consent of the Soviet side to publish, after signing the Joint Declaration, the letters that Gromyko and Matsumoto had exchanged on September 29, before the start of high-level negotiations, i.e. when the issue of signing a Peace Treaty or a Joint Declaration with the territorial article had not been on the agenda. The aim of the trick was to create an impression that the Joint Declaration and the exchange letters were integral parts of one and the same thing, and that the Soviet Union had allegedly agreed to discuss in future the problem of the Kunashir and Iturup Islands when negotiating the Peace Treaty.

Of course, this trick could not convince the Soviet side of what it had not promised, but it helped Hatoyama and Kōno to present the matter upon their return home as if they had fulfilled the “party mandate” and had defended Japan's position on the Islands of Kunashir and Iturup. Subsequently, Japanese politicians, diplomats, and political scientists interpreted the publication of the Gromyko-Matsumoto letters in this way. Moreover, from the very beginning the exchange letters were not binding the Soviet government, and all the more, they did not contain any specific mentioning of the territorial problem.

Khrushchev, when he was already removed from power, was reproached for promising to hand over the Habomai and Shikotan Islands to Japan. Let's try to grasp the reasons for his decision. First, and this has already been mentioned, he wanted to normalize relations with Japan as soon as possible, especially since differences of views on fundamental issues with the Chinese leaders were already taking shape.

Second, Khrushchev was convinced that these Islands were a small loss to the Soviet Union. In his conversation with Kōno, he even said that these Islands do not matter economically, on the contrary, they are a huge financial burden for the Soviet government. In his memoirs, Khrushchev notes: "At that time, we had a long discussion in the Soviet leadership and came to the conclusion that we should meet the wishes of the Japanese and agree to the transfer of these Islands (I do not remember their names now), but on the condition that Japan signs a Peace Treaty with the USSR and American troops are withdrawn from the Japanese Islands... We considered that such concession was not so great for the USSR. These are deserted Islands that have been used only by fishermen and the military... But friendship that we wanted to win from the Japanese people, our mutual friendship would be of tremendous importance. Therefore, territorial concessions would be excessively compensated with the new relations that would have developed between the peoples of the Soviet Union and Japan" [Khrushchev 1999, p. 644].

Third, he probably assumed that the Japanese side would eventually be satisfied with the cession of the Habomai and Shikotan Islands, and against the background of the refusal of the United States to return the Ryukyu and Bonin archipelagos to Japan, it would be possible to try to push Japan away from the Americans and even towards proclaiming neutrality – something like the Austrian version. One can consider such approach as utopian. However, in the late 1950s, when receiving Japanese delegations to the Kremlin, the Soviet leader, being asked when would the USSR hand over the Islands to Japan, invariably answered – only after the United States return Okinawa back to Japan.

Finally, on October 19, 1956, after more than a year and a half of negotiations, the parties signed a Joint Declaration, the main provisions of which were as follows:

The state of war between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and Japan shall cease on the date on which this Declaration enters into force;
Diplomatic and consular relations shall be restored;

All Japanese citizens convicted in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics shall be released and repatriated to Japan;

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics renounces all reparations claims against Japan;

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics will support Japan's application for membership in the United Nations.

Article 9, which dealt with the issue of the Peace Treaty, stated: "The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and Japan agree to continue, after the restoration of normal diplomatic relations between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and Japan, negotiations for the conclusion of a Peace Treaty. In this connection, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, desiring to meet the wishes of Japan and taking into consideration the interests of the Japanese State, agrees to transfer to Japan the Habomai Islands and the Island of Shikotan, the actual transfer of these islands to Japan to take place after the conclusion of a Peace Treaty between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and Japan" [Joint Declaration 1956].

On the Soviet side, the Joint Declaration was signed by Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR Nikolai Bulganin and Foreign Minister Dmitry Shepilov (Khrushchev was not present at the signing ceremony), on the Japanese side – by Prime Minister Hatoyama Ichirō, Minister of Agriculture and Forestry Kōno Ichirō and Member of Parliament Matsumoto Shun'ichi.

On November 27, 1956, the House of Representatives of the Japanese Parliament ratified the Declaration (70 members of the Yoshida faction boycotted the vote), and on December 5, the House of Councilors of the Parliament followed suit. The Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR ratified the Declaration on December 8, 1956. The exchange of instruments of ratification was made in Tokyo on 12 December 1956.

As we know, in Japan there were many opponents of normalizing relations with the Soviet Union, but the number of supporters of establishing normal relations with the great neighboring state was growing. According to the memoirs of Tikhvinsky, upon their return on November 1, 1956, Prime Minister Hatoyama and members of the Japanese delegation were met by an enthusiastic crowd in Tokyo – over 14 thousand people. In general, the Japanese press also gave a positive assessment of the results of Moscow talks. But there were still threats, including that of physical violence against Hatoyama, from ultra-right groups. Statements were heard in the Parliament demanding the resignation of the Prime Minister [Tikhvinsky 1996, pp. 118-119].

Yet, Hatoyama has achieved the goal. Despite the resistance from within the ruling elite, and the overcoming pressure from Washington, he committed an act of historical significance – the postwar settlement of Japan's relations with the Soviet Union, which allowed Japan to solve a range of problems that were important for its national interests.

Nakasone Yasuhiro, one of the prominent figures of the LDP who is considered to be nationalistic, many years later assessed signing the Joint Declaration in his book *“Politics and life. My memoir”* in the following way: “We were successful at the talks in Moscow. Japan joined the U.N., the prisoners returned home, the sphere of diplomatic activities was expanded, which laid the cornerstone of further development” [Nakasone 1994, pp. 178-179].

Although the two countries failed to sign a peace treaty, the Joint Declaration of 1956 eventually resolved all the issues which are resolved by a peace treaty, with the exception of the problem of territorial demarcation. The fact that in the present-day Russian-Japanese relations the problem of territorial demarcation has not been resolved yet, confirms its extreme complexity.

As Hatoyama had promised, in 1957 he resigned as head of the Cabinet. But he did not lose interest to the relations with the Soviet Union. On June 29, 1957, he was elected the first Chairman of the Japan-USSR Society at its founding Congress. The society launched energetic activities to establish diverse friendly relations between the public of the two countries.

Soviet-Japanese Relations after the Joint Declaration of 1956

The differences between the Soviet Union and Japan, and now Russia and Japan, on the issue of the Peace Treaty are rooted largely in the fundamentally different perception of the outcome of the Soviet-Japanese war at the final stage of WWII. The Soviet policy towards postwar Japan was determined by the victorious defeat of the Japanese armed forces and the undisputed territorial gains in compliance with the Yalta agreements of the Allied Powers. This motivation is still valid at present. Japan was ready to accept its defeat in the Pacific war, but viewed the war declared by the USSR against a state with which it had the Neutrality Pact, as an “unjust action” taken at a time when Japan’s defeat was already predetermined. Therefore, the main task for the Japanese, both in the past and in the present, is not to recognize the results of the “unjust war”, especially in terms of the loss of territories.

The Joint Declaration, which is essentially a Peace Treaty, because this document settled all post-war problems, except for the territorial ones, contributed to an active development of Soviet-Japanese relations. Trade has been rapidly growing, cultural contacts and political consultations were initiated.

But the Soviet leadership’s assessment, that the promise of territorial concessions and the support of left-wing Japanese opposition movements opposed to the conclusion of a new Japan-U.S. military alliance in the late 1950s could drive a wedge into Tokyo’s relations with Washington, was wrong. The more obvious was the failure of attempts to encourage Japan to take the path of neutrality, something similar to the Austrian one, and this idea was massively broadcast to the Japanese public by the Soviet propaganda machine, the tougher became Moscow’s position towards Tokyo. It culminated in a series of political memorandums, as well as one diplomatic note and one declaration issued by the Soviet Government in early 1960 in the last desperately-irritated attempt to prevent the ratification of the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty signed in January 1960.

The first memo was sent to the Japanese government on January 27, a week after signing of the Treaty. It argued that the conclusion of the new treaty actually deprives Japan of independence and provides for stationing foreign troops on the Japanese territory, which makes it impossible for the Soviet Government to extend the islands of Habomai and Shikotan to Japan. It stated also that since the new military treaty signed by the Japanese Government is directed against the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China, the islands of Habomai and Shikotan will be handed over to Japan only if all foreign troops are withdrawn from Japan and a Soviet-Japanese peace treaty is signed.

It is noteworthy that the Soviet side did not refuse to fulfil article 9 of the Declaration, but put forward an additional condition for its implementation – the withdrawal of all foreign troops from the Japanese territory. It's worth reminding that at the early stage of negotiations on normalization of relations, this condition was mentioned as one of the points of the Soviet position, but then it was removed.

The Japanese government responded on February 5 with its Memorandum, which noted that it is the right of any sovereign state to determine its security policy and stressed that the revised Security Treaty does not pose a threat to third countries. It was further stated that Japan-U.S. Security Treaty which is valid indefinitely already existed and foreign troops were present in Japan when the Joint Declaration by Japan and Soviet Union was signed, and that the Soviet side has no right to unilaterally change the contents of an international document which has been ratified by the highest organs of both countries [Sovmestnyj sbornik 1992, p. 46-47]

In the Memorandum, Japan went further than simply requiring the Soviet Union to comply with the Joint Declaration and demanded the reversion not only of the islands of Habomai and Shikotan but also of the “other islands which are inherent parts of Japanese territory”. The Soviet government responded to this document on February 26 by accusing Japan of “revanchism”, and on April 22 declared that it considered itself free from the obligation to transfer Habomai and Shikotan and considered the territorial problem solved. Thus, as a result

of the exchange of these statements, it became obvious that the Soviet Union had actually renounced article 9 of the Joint Declaration. This position was maintained by the Soviet Union and then Russia until the election of Vladimir Putin as President of Russia.

But it should be noted that in 1972 the Soviet leadership made it quite clear to the Japanese government that it was ready to return to the implementation of article 9 of the Declaration. This was announced by Foreign Minister Gromyko during his visit to Tokyo in January 1972 to Prime Minister Satō Eisaku and Foreign Minister Fukuda Takeo. There are evidences of participants in those negotiations, both from the Soviet and Japanese sides [Trojanovsky 1997, pp. 287-288]. Thus, it was already at that time that the Soviet side has effectively disavowed its position as set out in the memoranda and notes of the Soviet government in 1960.

Moreover, in the era of Perestroika under Mikhail Gorbachev, the Soviet side actually recognized the existence of a territorial problem in Soviet-Japanese relations. Thus, it renounced the 1960 Memorandum of the Soviet Government declaring that there was no territorial problem in bilateral relations. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian leadership confirmed the position that in the relations between Moscow and Tokyo there remains a territorial problem.

However, even while acknowledging the existence of the territorial problem in bilateral relations, neither the Soviet leaders, including Gorbachev, nor President Yeltsin believed that article 9 of the Joint Declaration “is still valid”. They proceeded from the fact that “it’s time had passed”.

It was only Vladimir Putin, after being elected President of Russia, who for the first time began to argue during his first visit to Japan in September 2000 that the Joint Declaration is the only document in bilateral relations ratified by the legislative bodies of the two countries and therefore legally obliges the Russian side to follow its implementation in its entirety. However, he explained that article 9 does not mention the terms of the transfer of Habomai and Shikotan to Japan, as well as the content of the Peace Treaty, and therefore appropriate negotiations were to be held. Whereas before that the Japanese side had persistently

sought recognition from the Soviet and then Russian sides of the validity of Article 9 of the Declaration, after the mentioned Putin's statements it insisted that Japan's "principled position" was to seek the return not only of the islands of Habomai and Shikotan, but also of the islands of Kunashir and Iturup, and simultaneously. In view of this position, the Russian side did not find it possible to seek an agreement. Although in the first and the early second decades of the 21st century both sides held discussions and even conducted consultations and negotiations on the peace treaty, it did not lead to any progress in resolving the territorial problem.

The situation changed radically when Prime Minister Abe, reacting to Vladimir Putin's proposals at the Vladivostok Economic Forum in September 2018, declared at a meeting with him in Singapore on November 14, 2018 his readiness to negotiate a Peace Treaty between Japan and Russia on the "basis of the territorial provisions" of the Soviet–Japanese Joint Declaration of 1956. This statement, in fact, meant that the Japanese side for the first time in more than 60 years does not set the task of demanding "the return of the Islands of Kunashir, Iturup, Habomai and Shikotan", and is ready to "limit itself to the return of the last two".

As a result, in January 2019 negotiations on a peace treaty between Russia and Japan were started. However, even at the early stage of the negotiation process there appeared serious difficulties, apparently related to the parties' different views on the content of the treaty. Whereas the Japanese side assumed that the main thing is to fix the matter of sovereignty of the Islands and draw an agreed border line, the Russian side implied that the Treaty would be filled with a diverse content, solving a number of problems important for Moscow – Japan's recognition of the legality of Russian ownership of the Kuril Islands, guarantees of non-targeting of the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty against Russian interests, broad development of bilateral ties, and confidence-building measures in the military sphere. Therefore, it was assumed that the peace treaty, in accordance with its name, should lay a foundation for the radically renewed Russian-Japanese relations.

Moreover, even before the start of negotiations, in Japan, and to a greater extent in Russia, there had developed a fairly broad public movement against the resolution of the territorial problem on the basis of the 1956 Declaration. Initially forecasts were made about the possibility of concluding a Peace Treaty as early as 2019. Yet, they are not currently considered realistic. Apparently, we have a lengthy and intense negotiation marathon ahead.

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