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The San Francisco 1951 Peace Treaty in Japanese Historiography

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Abstract. The article examines the issue of the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty interpretation by Japanese historiography (the treaty put an end to the state of war between the Allied states and Japan and returned sovereignty to the latter). The author expounds his point of view on the results of the San Francisco peace process on the basis of a comprehensive analysis of a multitude of documents and assesses arguments of Japan's academic community representatives.

Keywords: Russian-Japanese relations, territorial problems, peace treaty, historiography, San Franscisco Peace Treaty, Kurile Islands, South Sakhalin.

On March 12, 2013 the Japan's cabinet of ministers decided to hold, for the first time, a solemn ceremony with the participation of the Emperor on the occasion of the restoration of Japan's sovereignty after its defeat in World War II.¹ The date of the ceremony was timed to the day of the entry into force of the San Francisco Peace Treaty, that is, April 28, 1952. The treaty officially put an end to the state of war between Japan and the Allied states which signed the treaty, and also recognized the sovereignty of the Japanese people over Japan and its territorial waters.

The Soviet Union did not sign the San Francisco Peace Treaty due to a number of forcible reasons. First, it was not invited to take part in the elaboration of the treaty. Second, the treaty did not include the amendments submitted by our country. Third, the People's Republic of China's (PRC) representatives were not invited to the conference, and, finally, the text of the treaty did not confirm China's territorial rights to Taiwan, Pescadores and Paracel islands, and also the U.S.S.R.'s sovereignty over the southern part of Sakhalin Island and Kurile Islands.²

According to Article 2c of the San Francisco Peace Treaty, Japan renounced all rights and claims to Kurile Islands and the southern part of Sakhalin Island with

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adjacent islands, the sovereignty over which was granted Japan by the Portsmouth Treaty of September 5, 1905.³ The absolute renunciation from the said territories also meant Japan's voluntary refusal from the right to discuss the issue of territorial affiliation of Kurile Islands and the southern part of Sakhalin Island.

During the entire postwar period political figures and representatives of the Japan's academic community have been trying to contest and present their own interpretation of the meaning and significance of the territorial articles of the San Francisco Peace Treaty, insisting on solution of the "territorial problem" with the U.S.S.R. and Russia, which is its legal successor. The Japanese side interprets the "territorial problem" as its "uncertainty" with regard to South Kurile Islands, namely Iturup, Kunashir, Shikotan and Habomai group.

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The war on the Korean Peninsula, which began on June 25, 1950 emphasized the strategic importance of the Japanese islands and confirmed the idea of the U.S. Administration that Japan should be a "springboard" of the United States in the struggle against "the spreading of communism in Asia." The war in Korea, in the view of the U.S. leadership, had a greater political importance than the victory of the communist forces in China in October 1949, because it reaffirmed the earlier trend to "forcible onslaught of the communist world" in the various regions of the planet. American and Japanese politicians agreed on the need to sign a peace treaty with Japan as quickly as possible and make the latter a voluntary ally of the United States in the Far East. Washington believed that the voluntary inclusion of independent Japan in the U.S. orbit would make the American-Japanese alliance more effective than the actual participation of occupied Japan in it.⁴

From that time on, the issue of a peace treaty entered a stage of concrete elaboration, which was headed by John Foster Dulles, a notable figure of the U.S. Republican Party and advisor of the Department of State.

During the discussion of the peace treaty the problem of the status of Kurile Islands cropped up. On the one hand, the United States was bound by the Yalta and other Allied agreements and should have taken part in punishing Japan for aggression, and on the other, it should have signed such a peace treaty with Japan which would not have infringed on its rights.

Besides, the American side should have taken into account the Britain's view which was outlined in the memorandum handed to J.F. Dulles by the British Ambassador in Washington on March 12, 1950. It said that Japan should have ceded South Sakhalin and Kurile Islands to the Soviet Union, as it had been written in the Yalta Agreement of February 11, 1945.⁵

While preparing the peace treaty J.F. Dulles preferred to interpret the Yalta Agreement only as a "statement of common aims." That meant that in order to

receive sovereignty over Kurile Islands the U.S.S.R. should have signed a peace treaty with Japan. In case of not doing so, the U.S.S.R. would not have the right of sovereignty over Kurile Islands. J.F. Dulles was, therefore, striving to create conditions under which the problem of Kurile Islands would have remained open which would have put up an obstacle for normalizing relations between the U.S.S.R. and Japan.

On July 20, 1951 the U.S. Ambassador Alan G. Kirk and the British Ambassador Sir David Kelly in Moscow visited the U.S.S.R. Ministry of Foreign Affairs and handed A. Gromyko, then deputy Foreign Minister, a joint note inviting the Soviet government to a conference for signing a peace treaty with Japan scheduled for September 4, 1951 in San Francisco. After that the U.S. Ambassador made a statement to the effect that the two governments had been preparing the treaty for ten months, and that was why the conference was convened not for elaborating the treaty, but only for signing the American-British draft of August 13.⁶

The peace conference took place in San Francisco from September 4 to 8, with 52 countries taking part. The United States unilaterally determined the composition of participants in it, having excluded most Asian countries, among them the PRC, the DPRK, the MPR and the DRV. In protest against ignoring the interests of Asian countries in postwar regulation, particularly on the problem of paying reparations by Japan, such big Asian states as India and Burma, which had been victims of the Japanese aggression, refused to send their representatives to the San Francisco conference. However, quite a few non-Asian countries, notably European states, such as Greece, Luxemburg and others, were invited. An absurd situation was, therefore, created in which most states that had taken part in the war against Japan, found themselves outside the process of peaceful settlement with Japan.

Contrary to expectations the Soviet Union also took part in the conference. Its presence could be explained by the desire to demonstrate the interest of the U.S.S.R. in normalizing relations with Japan. Apart from that, it was an attempt to achieve the adoption of the Soviet Union's amendments to the treaty, and also invitation of the PRC, without which, in the view of the U.S.S.R., the peace treaty with Japan should not have been signed.

As is known, the Soviet delegation, above all in the person of A. Gromyko, its head, repeatedly made amendments on procedural questions, but inasmuch as not a single one of these amendments had been adopted, the U.S.S.R. refused to sign the treaty. Of the 52 countries taking part in the conference there were only two, Poland and Czechoslovakia, which supported the Soviet position.

At the same time it should be noted that despite its bellicose anti-Soviet sentiments, the U.S. Administration did not dare openly to renounce the premises of the Yalta Agreement signed by Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1945. This was why the San Francisco Peace Treaty included the conditions of Japan's renunciation from the territories which, according to the Yalta Agreement, should have "unequivocally" been transferred to the Soviet Union after victory over Japan.⁷

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On September 8, 1951 the Peace Treaty with Japan was signed in San Francisco. In accordance with Article 2c, Japan renounced all rights and claims to Kurile Islands and the part of Sakhalin Island and adjacent islands, sovereignty over which Japan had received under the Portsmouth Treaty of September 5, 1905.⁸ In essence, this renunciation meant that Japan not only had no right to claim, but even conduct any negotiations on the subject of the affiliation of Kurile Islands.

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However, present-day Japanese historians and politicians have chosen the tactic of revising some premises contained in the text of the San Francisco Peace Treaty, namely, Japan's renunciation from the southern part of Sakhalin Island and Southern Kurile Islands. Their most radical representatives demand the abrogation of Article 2c of the treaty and return of all Kurile Islands, right up to Kamchatka. For example, the Communist Party of Japan included in its official program, apart from Southern Kuriles, the claim to Northern Kuriles.⁹ The logic of Japanese communists is based on the fact that inasmuch as Japan had received the Kurile Islands by peaceful means in exchange to Sakhalin Island by 1875 St. Petersburg Treaty, their transfer to the U.S.S.R. as a political condition of the U.S.S.R.'s entry in the war against Japan stated by the 1945 Yalta Declaration, contradicted the "principle of renouncing territorial gains" proclaimed by the Allied states in the 1941 Atlantic Charter and the 1943 Cairo Declaration. Consequently, the Yalta Declaration, which envisaged transfer of the said islands to the Soviet Union, was nothing but "Stalin's arbitrariness" and a "definite blunder of Roosevelt."¹⁰

In actual fact, President Roosevelt knew full well the historical aspects of the status of these islands.¹¹ The point is that back in 1940 he was informed of the U.S.S.R.'s interest in the Kurile Islands.¹² Further on, this question was elaborated by the group on territorial issues of the Consultative Council on postwar development under the U.S. President. Wishing to use this problem for "the promotion of the security interests of the United States in East Asia during the postwar period" President Roosevelt "had been working out his own position" in 1943-1945, right up to the Yalta Conference."¹³

Already from 1940, President Roosevelt had the "Kurile question" always in mind. His statement that he regarded quite reasonable the wish of the Soviet Ally to return what had been taken away from it was well known.¹⁴

President Roosevelt's position was formulated in 1943-1945 and outlined in the basic documents of the Allies, including the Yalta Agreement. The taking out of South Kurile Islands from Japan's jurisdiction as punishment for aggression and their transfer to the Soviet Union was included in President Roosevelt's plans from the very beginning. It was termed "transfer," but not "return" of Kuril Islands to the Soviet Union and was conditioned by the foreign-policy course of the United States aimed at postwar cooperation with our country. All the more so since the Soviet Union justly claimed Kurile Islands, including Iturup, Kunashir, Shikotan and the Habomai group, inasmuch as after the signing of the Portsmouth Peace Treaty in 1905, the border in the region of Kurile Islands had

not been properly established, although these islands had remained under actual Japanese sovereignty.

Tokyo's principal position was, and continues to be, that despite Japan's renunciation of the southern part of Sakhalin Island and Kurile Islands under the San Francisco Peace Treaty, the affiliation of these territories has not been confirmed by a corresponding international agreement. Consequently, "these territories should not belong to any state." As to the islands of Iturup, Kunashir, Shikotan and Habomai group, they are not part of the geographical name "Kurile Islands" and are "native Japanese territories."¹⁵ For example, the Japanese historian Taidzo Yamagata asserts that "Kuriles" is the Soviet term and means the islands to the north of Uturup, which form only part of Chishima Islands. This correct interpretation should be confirmed and used both inside our country and outside it."¹⁶

However, this assertion does not hold water. A whole number of prewar maps and pilot charts approved by the Ministry of Education present Kurile Islands, including the southernmost ones, as a geographical single whole under the name of "Chishima."¹⁷ On the maps in Volume 10 of the 1930 Japanese Geographical Encyclopedia and the 1936 Geographical Atlas of Japan all islands of the Habomai group and Shikotan Island are shown as parts of Kurile Islands. The 1928 pilot charts of Hokkaido and South Sakhalin islands (No. 20) and 1937 South Sakhalin and Kurile Islands confirm the fact that Japan included, both legally and geographically, all islands of the Greater and Smaller Kurile Ridge, including the islands of Iturup, Kunashir, Shikotan and Habomai, in Kurile Islands right up to the end of World War II. The interpretation of the concept of "Kurile Islands" by Japanese representatives, the right to which was renounced by Japan under the San Francisco Peace Treaty as not including the southern part of Kurile Islands, enters, therefore, into contradiction with evident facts confirmed by Japanese geographical maps of the prewar period.

The interpretation of the four southern islands of the Kurile Ridge as not included in the geographical concept of "Kurile Islands" does not have legal grounds, also because it is based on the politicized position of Japan with regard to the fact that prior to 1945 these territories did not belong to the Soviet Union. The Japanese side asserts that from 1855, in accordance with the Treaty of Shimoda, these islands were recognized as part of Japanese territory and were always under Japanese sovereignty.¹⁸ Indeed, this is an indisputable fact, but it does not give Japanese historians and politicians the right to regard these territories as those, which are not included in the geographical concept of "Kurile Islands."

For the first time the subjective interpretation of the geographical notion of "South Kurile Islands" was given by Japan's prime minister Shigeru Yoshida in his statement at the San Francisco Conference on September 7, 1951. Trying to disprove the arguments of the Soviet representative A. Gromyko' on Kurile Islands as part of the Soviet Union, Shigeru Yoshida stated that "from the time of opening the country (1854-1855) Japan's jurisdiction over the two islands of the southern part of Chishima retto (Kurile Islands), namely, the islands of Itu-

rup and Kunashir had never been called in question by the czarist government.¹⁹ However, by this statement Shigeru Yoshida only confirmed the fact that the islands of Kunashir and Iturup were part of Kurile Islands, but not "original Japanese territories."

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Later, in his memoirs published in 1957, Shigeru Yoshida asserted that "he demanded from J.F. Dalles that the text of the peace treaty should indicate that Minami Chishima (Iturup and Kunashir) were not included in the Chishima retto." J.F. Dulles refused to comply, allegedly having offered Yoshida the opportunity to use the rostrum of the San Francisco Peace Conference for stating the Japanese position.²⁰

Commenting on this episode, Professor Emeritus Haruki Wada of Tokyo University emphasized that at the moment "Yoshida was in no position to insist on the fact that Iturup and Kunashir were not part of Kurile Islands. Had Yoshida talked with J.F. Dulles on the subject, he would have never called Iturup and Kunashir "the southern part of Kurile Islands." This comment vividly shows that the abovementioned interpretation of the concept of "Kurile Islands" by Yoshida was a falsification of historical and geographical realities.²¹ This falsification was necessary in order to build a new system of arguments of the Japanese side with a view to justifying its territorial claims not to two, but to four islands of Southern Kuriles.

As to the Habomai group and Shikotan Island, Shigeru Yoshida stated that these islands "were part of Hokkaido Island and were seized by the Soviet Union after the war because of the presence of Japanese troops there."²² It is indicative that Yoshida made this statement two days after J.F. Dulles' speech at the conference, who said that in the view of the United States the "Habomai Islands" were not included in the "geographical concept of 'Kurile Islands' mentioned in Article 2c."²³ In other words, J.F. Dulles contributed to creating a precedent to discuss the question of the affiliation of Habomai Islands as not being part of Kurile Islands. Shigeru Yoshida increased the number of "not included islands," by including Shikotan Island.

In connection with the ratification of the San Francisco Peace Treaty stormy debates unfolded in Japanese parliament concerning Article 2c. For example, on October 19, 1951, during the debates at the lower house of Japanese parliament the director of the Treaty Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Kumao Nishimura, answering the question of deputy Sadasuke Takakura about the borders of Kurile Islands, noted that the San Francisco Treaty mentioned both Northern Chishima and Southern Chishima. As to Habomai and Shikotan islands, they were not part of Kurile Islands, as the U.S. Department of State admitted.²⁴

Disproving S. Takakura's assertion that "Kurile Islands and Chishima retto are different notions,"²⁵ K. Nishimura emphasized that "the peace treaty was signed in September 1951. This is why in defining the boundaries of Chishima we should proceed from the real state of affairs by this moment. As I have said, it is possible to speak now of the fact that the notion of 'Kurile Islands' includes

both Northern and Southern Chishima."²⁶ K. Nishimura unequivocally said, therefore, that the notion of "Kurile Islands," which Japan renounced under the San Francisco Treaty, includes the islands of Iturup and Kunashir. This statement confirms that the Japanese side's interpretation of the four southern islands as not being geographical part of the Kurile Ridge is unsubstantiated and far-fetched.

On November 6, 1951 during the parliamentary debates in the upper house of Japanese parliament, answering a question of deputy Yoshio Kusumi from the Ryokufukai faction about the boundaries of Kurile Islands, the deputy foreign minister and adviser of the prime minister Yoshida at the San Francisco Peace Conference Ryuen Kusaba stated that "Iturup and Kunashir islands should be regarded as a component part of Kurile islands."²⁷ During the ratification of the San Francisco Peace Treaty in Japanese parliament the official view of the Japanese government was expressed that Iturup and Kunashir islands were part of Kurile Islands.

Certain Japanese historians recognize the unfounded nature of Tokyo's official position insisting that Kurile Islands consisted of 18 islands to the north of Urup Island, that is, the islands which had been given to Russia under the Treaty of Shimoda of 1855.²⁸ For example, the Japanese researcher Kodji Sugimori notes that "the Japan's position that Kunashir and Iturup islands are not part of Kurile Islands, which Japan renounced under the San Francisco Peace Treaty, and are originally Japanese territories was illogical from the very beginning. This follows from the very fact of inclusion of these islands in the notion of 'Kurile Islands' determined by the San Francisco Peace Treaty, which was repeatedly noted during the debates on the treaty ratification in Japanese parliament."²⁹

In view of the fact that Article 2 of the San Francisco Peace Treaty did not say anything about the country Kurile Islands would belong to, just as other territories, another important subject of discussion in parliament was the question whether Japan would have "the right to free speech" with regard to Kurile Islands.

On November 6, 1951 answering questions of deputies to the upper house of Japanese parliament, K.Nishimura noted that "inasmuch as Japan was forced to renounce sovereignty over Kurile Islands, it had lost "the right to free speech" concerning their affiliation. As Japan agreed to renounce sovereignty over these territories, this question can be considered solved to a degree as it bears on it."³⁰ Having signed the San Francisco Peace Treaty Japan, therefore, was deprived not only of sovereignty over Kurile Islands, but also of "the right to free speech" concerning their affiliation.

Certain representatives of the Japanese academic community consider illegal the use by the Russian side of K. Nishimura's statement that South Kurile Islands are geographically included in the concept of "Kurile Islands." For example, Professor Emeritus Hiroshi Kimura of Hokkaido University asserts that K. Nishimura's statement "is not an official statement addressed to the Soviet government, but is only a private view of an expert expressed during political discussion in the country." This statement was meant for "use in Japan," and it cannot be used by the Soviet Union/Russia for substantiating its position.³¹

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On the other hand, H. Kimura uses statements by official persons in Japanese parliament for bolstering up his own position, namely, that four islands should not be an element of the notion of "Kurile Islands."³²

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K. Nishimura's statement should definitely be regarded the official position of Tokyo, inasmuch as the Japanese government has recognized validity of this statement, calling it one of the sources dealing with the issue of the limits of Kurile Islands in a foreword to the "Joint Collection of Documents of the Foreign Ministry of Japan and the Foreign Ministry of the Russian Federation on the History of Territorial Demarcation between Japan and Russia" published in September 1992.³³

Moreover, on October 21, 2006 the Japanese government reaffirmed its position, emphasizing the fact that the abovementioned collection "was prepared jointly by the ministries of foreign affairs of the two countries with a view to correctly understanding the territorial problem by the peoples of Japan and the Russian Federation, and it is an important source of relevant material."³⁴

As to the southern part of Sakhalin Island and Kurile Islands whose affiliation was not determined by the San Francisco Peace Treaty, Japan not only renounced the right to claim them according to the said treaty, but actually recognized Russia's sovereignty over these territories. On January 29, 2001, the General Consulate of Japan was opened in Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, which is situated in the south of Sakhalin Island. In this connection Muneo Sudzuki, deputy to Japanese parliament, made the following official inquiry on October 28, 2005: "Inasmuch as the opening of a Japanese diplomatic mission in Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, which is in the southern part of Sakhalin Island automatically leads to recognition by Japan of the Russian sovereignty over the southern part of Sakhalin Island, does this mean that the Japanese government recognizes Russia's sovereignty over the southern part of Sakhalin Island and Kurile Islands?"³⁵

On November 4, 2005, there was an official reply to M. Sudzuki's inquiry, which said, among other things, that "after Japan had renounced all rights and claims to the said territories according to the San Francisco Peace Treaty, the Soviet Union and its successor Russia de facto ruled these territories. Taking into consideration the fact that no other state except Russia has claimed these territories, Japan has decided to open a diplomatic mission in Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk."³⁶

Japanese historiography traditionally asserts that inasmuch as the U.S.S.R. did not sign the San Francisco Peace Treaty, it "has no right to draw benefits for itself from this treaty."³⁷ Such interpretation is utterly untenable and irrational. Suffice it to recall that Japanese historians do not challenge the PRC's right to Taiwan and Pescadores Islands, which Japan renounced in accordance with the San Francisco Peace Treaty, also without mentioning the country which now possesses them.

The Soviet Union's refusal to sign the San Francisco's Peace Treaty does not in any way influence Japan's renunciation of the southern part of Sakhalin Island and Kurile Islands. Weak substantiation of its own position forces Japanese historiography to give its own interpretation to historical documents. Not being a

signatory to such anti-Japanese documents as the Atlantic Charter and the Cairo Declaration, the Japanese side tries to draw benefit from one-sided interpretation of these documents.

It is important to note that in accordance with Article 8a of the San Francisco Peace Treaty, Japan recognized the "validity of all treaties signed by the Allied states at present or in the future for discontinuing the state of war, which began on September 1, 1939 and also any other agreements of the Allied states signed for the restoration of peace or in connection with this restoration."³⁸

After signing the San Francisco Peace Treaty Japan has renounced all rights and claims to the southern part of Sakhalin Island and Kurile Islands and recognized the "full force of all treaties signed by the Allied states," including the Yalta Declaration according to which the Allied states decided to transfer the abovementioned territories to the Soviet Union after victory over Japan.

The process of the legal arrangement of the transfer of the said territories to the sovereignty of the U.S.S.R. had several stages. At first, in accordance with the Memorandum of the Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Forces to the Japanese Imperial Government No. 677 (SCAPIN-677) of January 29, 1946 the islands were taken from the state and administrative power of Japan.³⁹ Then, on February 2, 1946 by the Presidium of the U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet Decree the sovereignty of the Soviet Union was established over the islands and they became state possession of the U.S.S.R., that is, a weal of the entire people."⁴⁰

As a result of Japan's renunciation of all rights and claims to Kurile Islands under the San Francisco Peace Treaty it could not objectively claim Kurile Islands. This was why in order to substantiate territorial claims to the islands of Kunashir, Iturup, Shikotan and Habomai group Japan began to divide Kurile Islands into Kuriles proper to the north of Urup Island and "four northern islands," which, according to the 1855 Treaty of Shimoda had been transferred to Japan. Subsequently, these four islands were called "Northern territories."⁴¹ The division of Kurile Islands into southern and northern has been taken out of circulation in order not to violate the logical theory of "native Japanese territories."

Despite the fact that Japan has lost all legal, international-legal and moral rights to claiming Kurile Islands, Japanese historiography has, therefore, artificially created its own interpretation of international legal documents. This interpretation was laid as the foundation of the Tokyo's official position, which demands "the return of four islands" as a condition for signing a peace treaty.

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^{2.} Pravda, September 7, 1951.

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16. Taidzo Yamagata, *Nadze hopporyodo ka* [Why Northern Territories?], Tokyo, 1993, p. 170.

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