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Kremlin Abandons Plans to Hand Islands to Japan – Reports

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Sergei Krasnoukhov / TASS

The Kremlin has reversed course in its negotiations to cede control of the disputed Kuril Islands to Japan, the RBC news website reported, citing unnamed sources.

The row over the islands, which Soviet troops seized at the end of World War II, has prevented Moscow and Tokyo from formally signing a peace treaty to the war. Japan claims sovereignty over the island chain that it calls the Northern Territories, while Kuril residents and Russians nationwide fiercely oppose the prospect of ceding it to Japan.

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"There are no such plans" to transfer the Kurils to Japan, an unnamed source close to the Russian presidential administration told RBC and a source close to the Foreign Ministry confirmed on Tuesday.

Russia does not refuse the handover to Japan outright "for reasons of diplomacy," the Foreign Ministry source added. According to the same source, the Kremlin believes Japan will not agree to the conditions that it recognize Russia's sovereignty over the islands and provide ironclad guarantees that the United States will not station troops there.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the talks with Japan could go on "for years," the state-run RIA Novosti news agency reported.

Russia is trying to drive a wedge between closely allied Japan and the U.S., said Alexei Makarkin, deputy head of the Moscow-based Center for Political Technologies think tank.

"If Japan insists on not deploying American military facilities to the Kurils, it will lead to issues in bilateral relations," he told RBC.

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