



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on January 23, 2023

US Official: Japan to Reveal Plans to Support Ukraine at “Appropriate Time”

SINGAPORE — Japan is involved immensely in matters in Ukraine and is poised to reveal plans at the “appropriate time” to back Kyiv against Russian actions in Ukraine, according to White House Indo-Pacific coordinator Kurt Campbell.

At a Center for Strategic and International Studies event, Campbell said that Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida “has a game plan and is already engaged deeply on issues in Ukraine.”

U.S. President Joe Biden and Kishida met last week when Kishida was in Washington on a tour of the Group of 7 (G-7) industrial nations.

“I fully expect that at an appropriate time Japan will be rolling out specific plans to support Ukraine in a variety of ways. They are active in many of the contact group discussions about support for Ukraine and they are just a key member,” Campbell said, elaborating that Japan was “stepping up.”

Kishida emphasized the necessity of standing up to Russia’s actions, justifying that if Japan did not do so, Russian actions in Ukraine could be repeated in Asia, seemingly alluding to China’s pledge to reunite with self-ruled Taiwan, by force if necessary.

Kishida also said the upcoming G-7 summit in Hiroshima in May should display a strong resolution to maintain international order and rule of law. Japan will host the annual G-7 summit this year, when Ukraine is slated to be a major issue for discussion. The other G-7 countries are the United States, Canada, Germany, Britain, France, and Italy.

Earlier in January, Kishida also admitted he had told Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in a phone call that he might visit Kyiv, pending “various circumstances.” Japanese government sources mentioned that Kishida could pay the visit as early as February to conduct talks with Zelensky, the *Yomiuri* newspaper said.

Kyiv and its Western backers deem Russia’s actions in Ukraine an unprovoked land grab, although Russia regards its actions as a “special military operation” to eradicate security risks in Ukraine.

As chair of the G-7 leading economies this year, Japan hopes to showcase support for Ukraine and publish a statement with Kyiv denouncing Russia’s actions, *Yomiuri* added.

Kishida will make the ultimate decision about whether to proceed with the visit depending upon the state of the war in Ukraine at the time, *Yomiuri* said, quoting various unnamed government sources.

On a television program, Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Seiji Kihara stated that the idea was something Japan must consider as chair of G-7 this year. “But nothing has been decided at this stage,” he said when questioned about whether Kishida would visit Kyiv.



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Notably, while Japan has joined the other G-7 members to condemn Russian actions in Ukraine by enforcing sanctions and agreeing on an oil price cap, it nevertheless has not addressed Moscow's Sakhalin energy projects, Sakhalin-1 and Sakhalin-2 in Russia's far east.

Such a policy has been regarded as contradictory by Japanese officials and some analysts, who feel it is inevitable for a country that is thus far the least energy-self-reliant in the G-7. However, others caution that such a policy is a "vulnerability" for Tokyo that "undermines" its diplomacy.

Last year, Japan vowed to reduce Russian coal imports and eventually reduce its energy reliance on Moscow. Government data depict that oil imports from Russia dropped around 56 percent and coal imports decreased by 41 percent in 2022, although imports of Russian liquefied natural gas (LNG) were up more than four percent for the year.

Sakhalin-1 produces oil, while Sakhalin-2 produces both crude and LNG, and analysts contend that Russian gas availability is what Japan is most anxious to ensure. Last year, 9.5 percent of Japan's total LNG imports hailed from Russia, up from 8.8 percent in 2021, with the majority of it from Sakhalin-2. When Japan participated in a price cap on Russian oil in 2022 with its G-7 allies, the European Union, and Australia, it obtained an exemption for Sakhalin-2.

Notwithstanding U.S. and British firms ExxonMobil and Shell withdrawing their stakes from Sakhalin-1 and Sakhalin-2 respectively, Tokyo has remained, even adhering to new Russian rules. It is a purely pragmatic stance, said Hiroshi Hashimoto, head of the gas group at the Institute of Energy Economics. "They are geographically so close to the country and have significant energy resources," he told AFP. "The projects were developed to diversify energy sources."

The oil shock of the 1970s and energy security threats "are ingrained in the mindset of the Japanese government," said James Brown, a political science professor at Temple University's Japan campus, and the country's energy supplies would be especially vulnerable "in the case of a crisis in the Middle East or in the South China Sea, through which much of Japan's energy is shipped."

Nonetheless, Japan obtained only 1.46 percent of its oil imports from Russia in 2022, and not all originated from Sakhalin. Its primary goal is guaranteeing access to Sakhalin-2's LNG, opined Yuriy Humber, founder of Japan NRG, a platform analyzing energy and electricity markets in Japan. "If you put an embargo on the oil, but the project is still producing both oil and gas ... you make it very difficult on an engineering and economic basis to keep the project going," he told AFP.

Prices and competition for alternatives to Russian LNG have risen due to the Ukraine crisis, so with Japan's limited storage capacity, Sakhalin's proximity is key to addressing Japan's energy needs. "The alternatives aren't really very easy and they are very expensive," Humber noted, with long-term contracts recently inked with the U.S. and Oman unlikely to materialize for years.

Although Japanese officials maintain that the continued use of Sakhalin is an energy security necessity and caution that backing out could result in China entering the projects, Brown thinks the projects are a "vulnerability" that make Japan susceptible to retaliation from Moscow. "The Russian government has been very clear that they view Japan as an 'unfriendly state,'" he said. "There is every reason to think that they could also manipulate exports from the Sakhalin projects to retaliate against Japan."

However, Japan NRG's Humber thinks Japan has limited alternatives. "You can only afford to be moral when you have a pragmatic solution."



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