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G7 in Hiroshima — A critical Juncture

Japan's Outlook on G7

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In light of Russia's war in Ukraine and an increasingly tense international environment, Japan and its fellow G7 nations hope to characterize this year's summit in the name of peace. Hiroshima, Prime Minister Kishida's constituency, being the target of the first offensive nuclear weapon on August 6, 1945, in history, serves to remind all G7 nations of their commitment to peace and unity in times of international uncertainties. This year's meeting is characterized by a more inclusive approach by inviting seven non-member countries as observers in addition to shifting the G7's gaze toward the Global South to formulate a more comprehensive political and economic approach that includes developing and middle-income nations in future policy drafts. Despite the united stance of G7 member states, each nation brings forward a specific focus of interest to the discussion. For Japan, topics of nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation as well as energy security and strengthening the Indo-Pacific are of primary importance, whereas Germany's emphasis lies on the global impact of the Russo-Ukrainian war and the continuous support of the global community for Ukraine.

Japan's G7 agenda

Following the G7 foreign minister's meetings in Karuizawa and the Climate, Energy, and Environment summit in Sapporo, Japan has formulated the key talking points for the upcoming Hiroshima summit. The Japanese Foreign Ministry cites eight main topics of discussion: regional situations such as Ukraine and the Indo-Pacific (1), nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation (2), economic security (3), climate change (4), food (5), public health (6), development as well as gender (7), human rights and digitalization (8).

Regional situations in Ukraine & Indo-Pacific

Japan has stated that the Russian aggression against Ukraine has shaken the very foundation of the international order and has placed the world at an inflection point. Japan continues its stance and expects the G7 member states to continue sanctioning Russia and support Ukraine in any way possible.

Japan has specified the importance of connecting and viewing the Russo-Ukrainian War not as a geopolitical conflict isolated in Eastern Europe, but one that stands in cohesion with the growing political imbalance in the Indo-Pacific and must be addressed as a whole. Prime Minister Kishida's famous statement, "Ukraine today could be East Asia tomorrow" reflects the urgency of bringing attention to the Indo-Pacific.

Japan remains vocal that the Indo-Pacific must remain "free, open, and prosperous", citing political and economic repercussions of unknown dimensions in the event of an escalation of the conflict in the Taiwan Strait.

The topic of Taiwan is of high significance in this year's summit and can be seen as a success for Japan's cause, being placed on the agenda.

Furthermore, Japan condemns China's increasing infringements on international law through its actions in the East and South China Sea, citing not only territorial disputes through the creation of artificial islands, but also increasing tensions in maritime disputes and cases of trespassing.

Japan is a strong defender of the status quo and seeks to maintain the current power balance in the Indo-Pacific region. As such, Japan supports a different notion of the conflicts and disagrees with America and Biden's stance of "democracies vs. autocracies" as the support of non-democratic nations in Southeast Asia is integral towards maintaining order in the Indo-Pacific. Approaching and including flawed and non-democratic nations in the discourse is thus crucial for the success of Japan's stance.

With South Korea's status as an observer for this year's G7 summit, there is also the possibility of trilateral talks between South Korea, the United States, and Japan. Especially with the past month's rapprochement between Korea and Japan, both nations can effectively bring the North Korea issue back onto America's agenda for the Indo-Pacific discussions. As discussed by experts, while Trump's administration was actively involved in the North Korean issue, Biden's administration has yet to prioritize the issue—which hopefully will change in light of the summit. With North Korea's continuous missile launches and development of a nuclear program in the shadow of the world's attention at the Taiwan Strait, the necessity to address the North Korea issue has the potential to drive South Korea and Japan together and it can have an overall positive effect on the regional stability following the summit.

Nuclear Disarmament

Japan's efforts, and second talking point, regarding nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation not only stand in conjunction with North Korea's concurrent nuclear weapon production but is also a topic of historical significance to the Japanese nation. Being the first and to date only nation targeted with nuclear weapons, Japan is renowned for its commitment and activism to abolish nuclear weapons. Hiroshima, being the target of the first nuclear bombing 77 years ago, serves as a reminder of the commitment to banish nuclear weapons once and for all. It is estimated that in Hiroshima alone, anywhere between 70,000 and 140,000 people perished as a result, leaving 80,000 injured in the aftermath. Just three days later, Nagasaki became the second target, killing an estimated 40,000 to 70,000 people and injuring 60,000 more. The pain and suffering felt by the victims and the entire nation is engraved into Japan's national consciousness. Due to this, a visit to the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum is likely, where leaders of G7 can view the tragic effect and aftermath as well as mourn the victims of the bombing. Prime Minister Kishida hopes to lead a discourse on "realistic and practical" nuclear disarmament.

Economic Security

Japan's discussion of economic security is at the confluence of multiple themes. The primary concern is the preservation of the status quo in East Asia, highlighting the negative effects of a military escalation of the Taiwan conflict on the global economy, including Japan. Economic security is also to be equated with energy security. Especially in the aftermath of the Russo-Ukrainian war, energy supply chains and prices are a topic of top priority. Japan, in line with G7-member states, moves to diversify its energy supplies and sees Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) in combination with carbon capture technology as a lucrative option to secure energy supply, reduce energy prices, and foster economic growth. Japan anticipates working closely with G7 partners, such as the United States, to diversify its energy imports.

Japan currently receives 10% of its LNG imports from Russia but has stated to not reduce this amount in light of Russian sanctions and has also stated that other G7 nations understand Japan's need to secure energy supplies for the time being. In addition to talks with the United States, Japan has undergone talks with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman.

Supply-chain management is also of large importance for this year's G7 talks. Japan is one of the many leading economies strongly impacted by global supply chain disruptions, firstly felt through the Covid-19 pandemic, and only exacerbated by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. These critical junctures effectively proved that reliance on semiconductor production, primarily in China and Taiwan, is a risk that needs to be addressed. As a result, large-scale subsidies for domestic production and the reshoring of key industries have taken place throughout G7 countries. High-profile meetings between government officials and key manufacturing companies throughout the past few days highlight the continuous efforts of G7 to cover demands and close supply chain gaps—an issue that will no doubt be discussed in detail in Hiroshima.

Climate Change

Tackling the effects of climate change is another crucial topic of this year's G7 summit. Japan has proclaimed its commitment to carbon neutrality but has equally stated this goal can only be achieved through economic growth and energy resilience. As such, Japan seeks to develop carbon capture technologies with fellow G7 partners to further reduce Japan's carbon footprint.

Equally, Japan seeks to become a regional leader by supporting fellow Asian countries in the areas of finance, technology, and human resources and actively promoting change through membership in regional networks.

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Food, Public Health & Development

As food security, public health, and development primarily concern lower and middle-income nations, Japan seeks to create a platform for multilateral talks with countries in South and Southeast Asia. Japan thus sees itself as a growing regional power that takes the initiative in approaching these countries. Additionally, Japan views G7 countries as global leaders whose policies directly impact and influence many developing countries. As such, G7 countries should stand in direct dialogue with the aforementioned countries.

This policy recommendation comes at a time when Japan sees the need for a multilateral strategy to contain growing Chinese influence over countries in South and Southeast Asia. China's role as a significant monetary investor and infrastructure developer is increasingly viewed critically and Japan seeks to counteract these developments in line with fellow G7 countries.

In line with these developments, India, the presidency of G20, has been invited as an observer to join the summit and bridge the gap between the leading economies and the emerging economies that are increasingly caught between China, Russia, and the West.

Human Rights & Digitalization

With the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology, Japan has also expressed interest in reaching an agreement to introduce a framework for an international technical standard to provide internationally aligned standards. Japan sees AI as an opportunity that should be utilized and has the potential to positively change the economy and society alike.

Simultaneously, AI technology must be understood, and its risks assessed. Since every country to date has its own rules and regulations regarding the implementation of AI technology, Japan hopes to establish an overarching agreement in which G7 member states can reach a comprehensive and aligned policy towards AI. Japan seeks to reach a cross-country agreement that would provide economies access to benefits through AI technology whilst simultaneously protecting human interests and rights in the process.

Conclusions for Japan

Whilst all eight points cover an array of topics, it becomes clear that this year's G7 summit will unfold largely in the wake of Russia's war in Ukraine and China's growing domination in the Indo-Pacific. Japan hopes to gain the support and confidence of its fellow G7 member states to secure the status quo and the rule of law and order in East Asia and the Indo-Pacific. Only through such stability can economic security, peace and prosperity be secured. Apart from the active condemnation of China's aggressive policy in resolving territorial and maritime disputes in the South and East China Sea, much of this year's G7 economic and cooperative outreach strategy is built along the model of containing China's political and economic influence in South and Southeast Asia. Japan's plea for a "free, open, and prosperous" Indo-Pacific comes at a time when supply chain disruptions have exposed the vulnerability and dependence of the global economy on China. Furthermore, China's high-level involvement in South and Southeast Asian countries through soft-power initiatives ranging from economic development aid and infrastructure investment to media presence has proven the need for a solid counter approach, which Japan hopes to achieve through this year's G7 summit. What can be seen as a first implementation of a China-critical policy of G7 is the exclusion of South Africa from this year's talks and the invitation of Comoros as a representative of the African Union as an observer.

Outlook for G7

This year's G7 summit can be characterized as a reactionary summit of G7 member states challenged by the growing divergence between countries that support and defend the status quo of the international world order and those that wish to change it in favor of their own interests. With Russia actively engaging in warfare to enforce its agenda, China's increasingly aggressive policies worry the international community that it might follow suit.

Whilst all G7 member states wish to preserve and maintain today's world of law and order, it is becoming increasingly evident that this cannot be achieved by member states alone.

To maintain economic growth and create crisis-resistant and resilient societies, the G7 must cooperate closely with partners across the globe. For the leading economies, this also means addressing issues of developing and emerging countries, proving to them that they are an invested and reliable partner over China and Russia.

Member states have assessed the severity of global supply chain gaps and the necessity of energy resilience which is reflected in this year's effort to continue reshoring semiconductor production sites, seeking energy alternatives from countries other than Russia.

This year's G7 summit marks a turning point and will prove how resilient G7 states have become in tackling the global challenges faced considering the second year of Russia's war in Ukraine and rising tensions over the status of the Indo-Pacific.

G7 is also faced with structural questions of moving forward. This year, as in previous years, G7 invited multiple observing members. With nations such as Brazil, India, South Korea, and Australia participating in the talks, G7 has unofficially expanded and must reconsider granting certain members permanent membership.

With Brazil and India participating, it includes the leading economies of G20 which are set to become crucial nations in containing and counteracting Chinese and Russian dominance. Having understood the importance of support from other countries, G7 must effectively approach and secure the trust of these nations by helping them solve their problems in cooperation. The outcome of this year's G7 summit will show if the developed world can convince emerging and developing countries that they are a reliable ally, and thus foster cooperation in maintaining the current international order of law and justice. If the G7 fail to provide a platform for an inclusive and resilient future, there will be more at stake for the world than this year's summit.

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