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TO THE STARS



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Anastasiya Polishchuk, Foreign Policy Council "Ukrainian Prism"

UKRAINE – JAPAN: THROUGH HARDSHIPS TO THE STARS

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# Ukraine – Japan: Through Hardships to the Stars

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## Summary

*The evolution of Japan-Ukraine relations from 1991 to the present reflects a journey from cautious diplomacy to a robust and strategic partnership. Over the years, Japan's role has been pivotal in supporting Ukraine's democratic transitions, economic reforms, and territorial integrity, particularly in the face of external aggression.*

*This paper explores the dynamic and evolving relationship between Japan and Ukraine, a partnership that has gained strategic significance amidst a rapidly deteriorating global environment marked by Russia's continued military aggression against Ukraine. As the international landscape becomes increasingly volatile, Tokyo and Kyiv have not only strengthened their ties but have also aligned their efforts to address shared challenges, aiming to achieve mutual goals of regional stability, economic growth, and the preservation of a rules-based international order.*

*Japan's position as a global economic power, technological leader, and staunch advocate for international norms has made its partnership with Ukraine particularly important. The deepening of Japan-Ukraine relations has been observed across multiple dimensions, including political collaboration, economic integration, and cultural exchange. This paper examines Japan's motivations, emphasising its commitment to upholding international law, deterring regional and global threats, and reinforcing its economic and diplomatic interests.*

*Japan's support for Ukraine, while somewhat constrained by its constitution and pragmatic economic considerations, has been unprecedented in scale and scope. Tokyo has provided substantial financial aid, non-lethal defence equipment, and humanitarian assistance, while also engaging in Ukraine's post-war reconstruction planning. These actions reflect Japan's broader strategy of bolstering its global influence by contributing to international stability and demonstrating solidarity with nations upholding international norms.*

*The paper analyses the geopolitical context of the Ukraine-Japan strengthened partnership. It also examines the economic dimensions of the relationship, assessing current trade patterns, investment flows, and emerging areas for collaboration.*

*The study concludes with targeted policy recommendations for Ukraine regarding further consolidation of its partnership with Japan. These include, among others, expanding legally permissible defence cooperation, initiating joint economic projects that leverage Japan's technological expertise, and advancing cultural and educational exchanges to build stronger people-to-people connections.*

*As Japan and Ukraine navigate these tumultuous times, this report provides an in-depth analysis of their partnership's strategic value. It underscores the vital role the Japan-Ukraine rapprochement plays in shaping a more peaceful and prosperous future, not only for both nations but for their respective regions and, likely, the broader international community.*

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# INTRODUCTION: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JAPAN-UKRAINE RELATIONS

## 1.1 What is Japan's Role Globally?

Assessing the Japan-Ukraine partnership requires a close examination of Japan's global role and an evaluation of the potential benefits of their cooperation.

*Economic Power.* Japan has not become an economic superpower undermining Pax Americana, as some predicted in the 1980s. Although its growth rate has been relatively low, and it slightly yielded its position to Germany in 2023<sup>1</sup>, moving to the fourth place in terms of national GDP, Tokyo has firmly established itself as an economic powerhouse.

Table 1. 2023 GDP (current US dollars) Ranking

Country	GDP (current US dollars, mln)
United States	27,360,935.00
China	17,794,781.99
Germany	4,456,081.02
Japan	4,212,945.16
India	3,549,918.92

Japan's economic influence stems from its key position in cutting-edge industries such as technology, automotive, and electronics. It is a top manufacturer of industrial robots, delivering 45% of the global supply<sup>2</sup>, and the fourth-largest automotive market after China, the United States, and India<sup>3</sup>. Japan also produces around one-third of the world's electronic components<sup>4</sup>. Its economic power extends to international trade, with Japan being a resolute proponent of free trade agreements like the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP).

In addition to its industrial might, Japan is a major aid donor and a significant source of global capital and credit. Its Official Development Assistance (ODA) programs have

<sup>1</sup> World Bank, "GDP (Current US\$)," World Bank Data, 16.08.2024, [https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?most\\_recent\\_value\\_desc=true](https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?most_recent_value_desc=true).

<sup>2</sup> International Federation of Robotics, "Japan Is World's Number One Robot Maker," IFR, September 2023, <https://ifr.org/news/japan-is-worlds-number-one-robot-maker/>.

<sup>3</sup> Nikkei Asia, "India Tops Japan Again as World's No. 3 Auto Market," 31.08.2024, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Business/Automobiles/India-tops-Japan-again-as-world-s-No.-3-auto-market>.

<sup>4</sup> Japan Electronics and Information Technology Industries Association (JEITA), "日本の電子部品産業の強み" [Nihon Denshi Buhin Sangyō no Tsuyomi], JEITA, 30.08.2024, <https://home.jeita.or.jp/ecb/about/industry.html>.

been instrumental in fostering goodwill and expanding its influence worldwide. In 2021, Japan provided approximately 17.63 billion dollars in ODA, marking an 8.4% increase from the previous year<sup>5</sup>. Under the grant equivalent system, Japan ranked third among the member states of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC), following the United States and Germany<sup>6</sup>.

*Technological Innovator.* Japan is a global leader in technological advancements, particularly in robotics, AI, and renewable energy. In 2021, Japan was ranked seventh in terms of its R&D spending to GDP ratio<sup>7</sup>. Other key areas of technological development include biotechnology and quantum technology. Given its scarcity of natural resources and the constant threat of natural disasters, Japan has historically relied on trade and high tech to secure its position in international society. The recent demographic crisis, characterised by a declining workforce and an ageing population requiring advanced healthcare, has further driven Japan to do even more, especially in autonomous technologies. For example, Japan's recently introduced Society 5.0 initiative<sup>8</sup> aims to address these challenges by integrating cyberspace and physical space in a way that fosters both economic development and the resolution of social issues.

*Diplomatic Influencer.* As one of the few states with a peace clause in its Constitution, post-World War II Japan has gained a reputation as a peacemaker and peace broker. It also positions itself as a bridge between developing and developed nations. Unlike many great powers, Japan entered the global competition relatively late, in the late 19th century, and lacks a long history as an occupying or colonial state in the modern era. Despite the difficult period of the WWII occupation, in many countries, it is perceived as a temporary war-time problem but not a legacy. Additionally, as one of the first non-Western nations to develop an advanced industrial structure similar to the West, and with deep historical, cultural, and philosophical ties to many Asian and African countries, Japan has served as a vital link between East and West, as well as between developed and developing economies.

As the only nation to have experienced nuclear attacks, Japan has also been a strong advocate for non-proliferation policy.

While still aspiring to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council, Japan

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<sup>5</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Japan's Efforts in Response to the Situation in Ukraine," in White Paper on Development Cooperation 2022, 12, 21.08.2024, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100600882.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> World Bank, "Research and Development Expenditure (% of GDP)," World Bank Data, 16.08.2024, [https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/GB.XPD.RSDV.GD.ZS?most\\_recent\\_value\\_desc=true](https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/GB.XPD.RSDV.GD.ZS?most_recent_value_desc=true).

<sup>8</sup> Cabinet Office, Government of Japan, "Society 5.0," 16.08.2024, [https://www8.cao.go.jp/cstp/english/society5\\_0/index.html](https://www8.cao.go.jp/cstp/english/society5_0/index.html).

wields significant influence in international organisations such as the United Nations, World Bank, IMF and OECD, and on international platforms like ASEAN+3, G7, and G20. Japan is the third-largest contributor to the UN budget<sup>9</sup> and, as of 2023, was the top contributor to the International Criminal Court (ICC) budget<sup>10</sup>. Furthermore, Japan was the second-largest supplier of capital to the World Bank as of 2020 and remains a key partner in various development initiatives<sup>11</sup>.

*International Order Protector and Major US Ally.* Over the decades, Japan has steadily strengthened its alliance with the United States, solidifying its position as a key US ally in the region. In addition to this alliance, Japan has engaged in various geopolitical initiatives, most notably the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy introduced by former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. The FOIP vision promotes a rules-based international order and respect for the UN Charter and international law, contributing to Japan's image as a protector of global stability and peace. This commitment has led Japan to take a more active role in regional affairs, including its membership in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD - Australia, India, Japan, and the United States) and the cultivation of closer ties with countries like the Philippines and Vietnam.

In recent years, Japan has also expanded its military capabilities with a 16% increase in defence spending for the 2024 fiscal year, bringing it to 1.6% of Japan's GDP<sup>12</sup>. Tokyo also revised its security policies, reinterpreting its Constitution to allow for collective self-defence. Japan's more proactive stance in regional security is largely spurred by concerns over perceived threats from North Korea and China's growing assertiveness in the region, as well as Russia, in the last two years.

*Cultural Soft Power.* Through globalisation, Japan has emerged as a cultural soft power, spreading its anime, manga, and traditional arts across the world, and creating new subcultures and communities. Although other nations have joined the soft power race, Japan has maintained its leading position. In 2021, Japan's content industry market and content revenue ranked third globally, with games and anime being the

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<sup>9</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Section 1: Efforts for Peace and Stability of Japan and the International Community," in Diplomatic Bluebook 2023, Chapter 3: Japan's Foreign Policy to Promote National and Global Interests, 17.08.2024, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/2023/en\\_html/chapter3/c030101.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/2023/en_html/chapter3/c030101.html).

<sup>10</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Section 6: The Rule of Law in the International Community," in Diplomatic Bluebook 2023, Chapter 3: Japan's Foreign Policy to Promote National and Global Interests, 17.08.2024, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/2023/en\\_html/chapter3/c030106.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/2023/en_html/chapter3/c030106.html).

<sup>11</sup> World Bank, "World Bank and Japan," 21.08.2024, <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/595061520318916471-0090022020/original/worldbankandjapanEN.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> Takahashi Kosuke, "Japan Approves 16.5% Increase in defence Spending for FY2024," The Diplomat, 22.12.2023, accessed August 29, 2024, <https://thediplomat.com/2023/12/japan-approves-16-5-increase-in-defence-spending-for-fy2024/>.



most prominent products<sup>13</sup>. Food has also gained its position in the world as an instrument of the soft power of Japan.

Japan's tourism industry, bolstered by events like the 2020 Tokyo Olympics (held in 2021), has further enhanced its global appeal. Japan's sports diplomacy, particularly in judo and baseball, has also contributed to its soft power.

## 1.2 Importance of Japan-Ukraine Partnership

The significance of the Japan-Ukraine partnership can be summarised through several key aspects:

*Commitment to International Law.* The Japan-Ukraine partnership strongly emphasises upholding international law and maintaining a rules-based order. Both nations have faced challenges to their territorial integrity and sovereignty, albeit in different forms. Ukraine is dealing with direct military aggression from Russia, while Japan contends with territorial disputes, particularly with Russia over the Northern Territories and with China regarding the Senkaku Islands.

Japan views its support for Ukraine as part of its broader commitment to international law. This pro-Ukrainian stance aligns with Japan's post-war identity as a peace-loving nation, reinforcing its position as a responsible global actor dedicated to upholding the UN Charter and international norms. Both countries stress the importance of respecting internationally recognised borders and adhering to the principle of non-aggression. Tokyo and Kyiv agree that any unilateral attempts to alter the status quo by force are unacceptable, whether in Europe or the Indo-Pacific region.

*Geopolitical Alignment.* The Japan-Ukraine partnership amplifies global opposition to Russian expansionism and violations of the rules-based order. While Ukraine faces the immediate and devastating effects of Russian aggression, Japan, although not currently under imminent military threat, is navigating an increasingly precarious security environment. North Korea's advancing missile and nuclear programs, China's assertive claims in the South China Sea, and rising tensions around Taiwan all contribute to regional instability.

In this context, Japan's support for Ukraine is not just an act of solidarity: It is a

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<sup>13</sup> Cabinet Secretariat of Japan, 基礎資料(10月25日の第23回新しい資本主義実現会議の基礎資料の再編・改訂・追加版)令和6年4月17日 [Kiso Shiryō (10-gatsu 25-nichi no Dai 23-kai Atarashii Shihonshugi Jitsugen Kaigi no Kiso Shiryō no Saihen, Kaitei, Tsuikaban) Reiwa Rokunen Shigatsu Jū-nana-nichi], 17.04.2024, [https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/seisaku/atarashii\\_sihonsyugi/kaigi/dai26/shiryou1.pdf](https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/seisaku/atarashii_sihonsyugi/kaigi/dai26/shiryou1.pdf).

strategic effort to reinforce the principle that invasions and aggression cannot succeed. Highlighting the interconnectedness of European and Indo-Pacific security, Japan is increasingly concerned about Russia's support for North Korea, as well as the alignment between Moscow and Beijing, which appears aimed at undermining the existing international order. This convergence of security and political interests further solidifies the Japan-Ukraine partnership.

*Nuclear Safety and Non-Proliferation.* Japan's involvement in addressing the aftermath of the Chernobyl catastrophe has been a linchpin of its relationship with Ukraine since Ukraine gained independence. As the only country to have endured atomic bombings, Japan has a deep, unwavering commitment to nuclear safety and security, a commitment further reinforced by the 2011 Fukushima disaster. This shared experience with nuclear tragedies has forged a strong bond between Japan and Ukraine, leading to collaboration in areas such as environmental remediation, public health, and cross-cultural exchanges.

Additionally, Ukraine's decision to voluntarily relinquish its nuclear arsenal in the 1990s serves as a powerful example of nuclear disarmament championed by Japanese leaders. Besides, both Tokyo and Kyiv oppose nuclear terrorism, a concern that has grown following Russia's capture of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant. The partnership between Japan and Ukraine underscores their mutual dedication to preventing the spread of nuclear weapons and safeguarding the integrity of nuclear facilities worldwide.

*Potential for economic and technological cooperation.* Given the complementary strengths of their economies, the partnership between Japan and Ukraine holds strategic potential, which could be leveraged to yield economic benefits for both nations. Key areas of collaboration are already emerging, including post-war reconstruction, infrastructure development, agricultural technology, IT, cybersecurity, and renewable energy. For Ukraine, this partnership provides access to advanced expertise and essential investments for post-war recovery and modernisation, helping to accelerate its integration with Western economic structures. For Japan, the collaboration offers multiple strategic advantages, including economic expansion, stronger geopolitical positioning as a global leader in international development and security, and enhanced soft power through the demonstration of Japanese prowess and technology. Moreover, engaging with Ukraine's challenges could engender innovation within Japanese industries and help Japan diversify its resource imports, particularly in agriculture and potentially in rare earth elements.

*Diplomatic Support and International Solidarity.* Strengthening bilateral relations between Ukraine and Japan enhances the diplomatic standing of both countries in the international arena. Russia's aggression against Ukraine has prompted Japan to use its diplomacy to bridge divides between developed nations and the often-overlooked so-called Global South. Through Japan's extensive diplomatic network, Kyiv has amplified its voice on the global stage, reaching out to nations that have largely refrained from taking sides in the Russo-Ukrainian war.

Additionally, the collaboration between Ukraine and Japan accelerates their shared ambition to develop closer ties with Euro-Atlantic institutions. By supporting Ukraine's reforms, Tokyo cements its links with NATO, while Ukraine gains a supportive ally in its efforts to implement domestic reforms and deepen integration with the Euro-Atlantic community. The alignment between Ukraine and Japan also benefits both countries in international platforms and organisations such as the United Nations, G7, and G20.

# JAPAN'S FOREIGN POLICY LANDSCAPE

## *2.1 Historical Context and Evolution of Japanese Foreign Policy*

Japan's foreign policy is deeply rooted in the principles established after World War II, with continuous updates reflecting changing global dynamics.

**Yoshida Doctrine.** Central to Japan's post-war foreign policy is the Yoshida Doctrine, named after Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida (1946-1947 and 1948-1954). This doctrine prioritised:

- economic development as the primary national objective,
- minimal military spending with modest Self-defence Forces (SDF), and
- reliance on the United States for security guarantees.

The Yoshida Doctrine allowed Japan to concentrate on industrial recovery and economic growth. During the Cold War, adherence to this doctrine fueled Japan's rapid economic expansion, transforming it into an economic superpower. Economic diplomacy, especially through Official Development Assistance (ODA), became Japan's main tool for advancing national interests, showcasing its commitment to peaceful development.

However, the 1990s brought challenges that prompted a reassessment of this strategy. The burst of Japan's economic bubble ended the era of rapid growth, while the collapse of the bipolar international order raised concerns about the stability of Japan's alliance with Washington. These changes necessitated a more proactive diplomatic stance, which Tokyo gradually assumed. Nevertheless, the legacy of the Yoshida Doctrine remains influential, though with adjustments to address modern geopolitical realities.

**Article 9 Restraints.** Japan's military capabilities, as well as its foreign policy, have been heavily determined by Article 9 of its constitution (1947), which renounces war and prohibits maintaining traditional military forces as "war potential"<sup>14</sup>. In response to the US pressure and the geopolitical challenges of the time, such as the Korean War and the spread of communism, Japan eventually established the Self-defence Forces (SDF) with limited capabilities for individual self-defence. However, Tokyo refrained

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<sup>14</sup> Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, "The Constitution of Japan," accessed August 21, 2024, [https://japan.kantei.go.jp/constitution\\_and\\_government\\_of\\_japan/constitution\\_e.html](https://japan.kantei.go.jp/constitution_and_government_of_japan/constitution_e.html).

from claiming the right to exercise collective self-defence, steering clear of UN peacekeeping operations until the 1990s and avoiding entanglement in superpower conflicts.

These constitutional constraints have reinforced Japan's anti-militarist reputation and its commitment to the Yoshida Doctrine. Although the 2015 Legislation for Peace and Security, pushed by Prime Minister Abe, provided some leeway for Japan to exercise the right of self-defence, the extent of this right is frequently debated. Overcoming or reinterpreting these constraints requires strong justification, creative thinking, and determined political leadership.

**Anti-militarism.** Japan's post-World War II foreign policy has balanced anti-militarist ideals with the demands of a changing security landscape. The "exclusively defensive self-defence" (*senshu boei*) policy, shaped by the scars of war, has guided Tokyo's foreign policy for decades. Until the 1990s, Japan's strategy, steered by bureaucrats prioritising economic growth, maintained a low profile in national security. However, the 1991 Gulf War marked a turning point. Japanese faced criticism for their "chequebook diplomacy" and reluctance "to shed sweat<sup>15</sup>" in international conflicts. This experience highlighted the limitations of relying solely on economic power for global influence. As a result, Japan began to recalibrate its foreign policy by:

- participating in UN Peacekeeping Operations (PKOs) under strict conditions,
- supporting the United States in Iraq through post-war reconstruction efforts, and
- gradually easing self-imposed restrictions on collective self-defence.

Despite these adjustments, anti-militarism remains deeply ingrained in Japan's policy-making. The Self-defence Forces (SDF) overseas missions have continued to prioritise disaster relief and post-war reconstruction, with peace as the central condition for and objective of any deployment.

**US-Japan Alliance.** The US-Japan security alliance, conceived in the wake of World War II, has been a fundamental pillar of Japan's foreign and security policy for over six decades. This framework enabled Japan to minimise defence expenditures and concentrate on economic progress under the US security umbrella.

However, by the 2000s, Japan faced several challenges that required a fresh look at

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<sup>15</sup> 勝股 秀通 (Katsumata Hidetoshi), "対テロ・イラク戦にみる対米協力 [Cooperation with the U.S. in the War on Terror and Iraq]," in 研究報告・新しい米欧関係と日本(欧州の自立と矜持) [Research Report: New U.S.-European Relations and Japan (Europe's Independence and Pride)], Tokyo: Japan Institute of International Affairs, 2004, 52, [https://www2.jiia.or.jp/pdf/russia\\_centre/h16\\_us-eu/05\\_katsumata.pdf](https://www2.jiia.or.jp/pdf/russia_centre/h16_us-eu/05_katsumata.pdf).

the alliance dynamics:

- North Korea's nuclear and missile advancements posed a direct threat to regional and national security.
- China's rapid military modernisation and increasingly assertive regional posture raised concerns about the Asia-Pacific status quo.
- The US, dealing with multiple global security issues, found its resources stretched thin.

These developments necessitated a re-evaluation of Japan's role within the alliance, leading to increased defence spending and capabilities. In 2015, Japan took a significant step by reinterpreting its constitution to allow for collective self-defence in specific situations, making it a more equal and valuable partner in the alliance.

***Domestic Politics.*** Japan's domestic political system has historically favoured a reactive approach to policy-making. Until the late 1990s, it leaned toward a decentralised decision-making process, with bureaucrats overshadowing elected officials. Although the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) has ruled almost continuously since 1955, it rarely implemented drastic reforms. The powerful administrative machine often slowed policymaking, limiting the scope of policy options.

However, the 1994 electoral reform and gradual consolidation of executive power led to subtle transformations in the 1990s and 2000s. These changes in the political landscape paved the way for Prime Minister Abe to expand executive authority and adopt a more assertive foreign policy during his second term. Despite this, Japan's political culture continues to value consensus-building, tempering the pace and extent of foreign policy changes.

## ***2.2. Key Factors Shaping Contemporary Japanese Foreign Policy***

In addition to historically shaped influences, Japan's contemporary foreign policy is moulded by a complex array of factors, which include:

1. ***Regional Security Environment.*** Japan faces significant challenges from China's military expansion, North Korea's persistent nuclear threats, and ongoing territorial disputes in the East and South China Seas. In response, Japan has reinforced its defence posture and boosted its strategic alliance with the United

States. Functioning as a deterrent against adversaries, the alliance likewise underscores Japan's commitment to a rules-based international order.

2. *Maritime Security and Resource Scarcity.* Japan's reliance on secure maritime trade routes is crucial, given its geographical location and limited natural resources. As an island nation, Japan heavily depends on sea lanes, particularly in the East and South China Seas, for importing energy supplies and raw materials. The nation's resource scarcity heightens its commitment to protecting the freedom of navigation and upholding international maritime law.
3. *Liberal Orientation.* Japan's foreign policy is fundamentally shaped by its liberal democratic orientation and its alliance with the United States. Japan's alignment with Western democratic values and its active participation in international institutions further solidify its role as a key player in the global order.
4. *Diplomatic Diversification and Global Engagement.* Despite its liberal orientation, Japan has increasingly diversified its diplomatic engagements to include the so-called Global South and other non-Western nations. This strategic diversification allows Japan to extend its influence beyond traditional Western allies. Japan's pragmatic engagement with often-criticised nations reflects a calculated effort to assert its role as a significant global actor capable of bridging divides between different geopolitical camps.
5. *Demographic Challenges.* Japan's demographic crisis, characterised by an ageing population and low birth rates, poses significant challenges that extend beyond domestic concerns into the realm of foreign policy. The shrinking workforce and increasing social security burdens threaten Japan's long-term economic vitality, influencing its foreign policy in terms of attracting foreign talent, investment, and technological innovation.
6. *Technological Leadership.* Technological innovation serves as both a source of economic strength and a tool for soft power. Japan's supremacy in areas such as robotics, environmental technology, and digital infrastructure not only shores up its domestic economy but also enhances its international influence. Through technological diplomacy, Japan, facing a labour shortage, sets global standards and fosters international partnerships that align with its strategic interests. This emphasis on innovation guarantees that Japan remains at the forefront of emerging global trends, using its technological prowess to project power on the international stage.

7. *Nuclear Disarmament and Strategic Ambiguity.* Japan consistently advocates for global nuclear disarmament while maintaining a “threshold” nuclear capability that could be rapidly developed into nuclear weapons if necessary. This strategic ambiguity permits Japan to promote non-proliferation while retaining a deterrent capability in a volatile security environment. This dual stance demonstrates Japan’s broader strategy of balancing moral leadership in global disarmament efforts with the pragmatic need to protect its national security.



# JAPAN-UKRAINE BILATERAL RELATIONS: A MULTIFACETED PARTNERSHIP

## *3.1 Political Cooperation and Diplomatic Ties*

Japan's recognition of Ukraine's independence in December 1991 marked the beginning of bilateral political relations between the two countries. However, despite this early diplomatic recognition, the initial years of Ukraine-Japan relations developed slowly and cautiously. The following periods<sup>16</sup> can be used to examine the bilateral relations between Japan and Ukraine.

*Phase 1: Establishment of Relations and Initial Cooperation (1991-1994).* In this period, Japan formally recognised Ukraine's independence in December 1991 and established official diplomatic relations in January 1992. The relationship was largely symbolic, with both nations cautiously engaging while focusing on their respective internal challenges. This period laid the groundwork for future cooperation but lacked significant depth.

*Phase 2: Expansion of Political Dialogue and Deepening of Bilateral Cooperation (1995-2005).* During the second phase, political dialogue expanded, and efforts to deepen bilateral cooperation began. Notable developments included President Leonid Kuchma's visit to Japan in 1995, which established the political foundations of the relationship. However, the infrequency of high-level visits and compartmentalised cooperation indicated that, while cordial, the relationship lacked sustained momentum. Parliamentary diplomacy played a significant role in maintaining dialogue, particularly in the absence of frequent high-level executive engagement.

*Phase 3: Democracy Promotion and Strategic Partnership (2006-2013).* The third phase saw a more structured partnership, with Japan actively supporting Ukraine's democratic transitions and economic reforms. The relationship, while more engaged, remained asymmetrical, with Japan taking the lead. High-level visits, such as Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko's visit to Japan in 2009 and President Viktor Yanukovich's visit in 2011, underscored the strategic importance of the partnership. During Yanukovich's visit, the declaration of a global partnership was first voiced. However,

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<sup>16</sup> Violetta Udovik, "Japan and Ukraine: Strengthening Friendship and Partnership Ties in the Era of Reiwa," in Proceedings of The Asian Conference on Asian Studies 2020, IAFOR, 5, [https://papers.iafor.org/wp-content/uploads/papers/acas2020/ACAS2020\\_57792.pdf](https://papers.iafor.org/wp-content/uploads/papers/acas2020/ACAS2020_57792.pdf).

practical mechanisms for implementing joint initiatives were often lacking, making Japan the primary driver of the relationship.

*Key Trends Across Phases 1-3:*

- **Cautious Engagement:** The early years were marked by cautious diplomacy, with Japan and Ukraine focusing on formalising ties without deep substantive engagement.
- **Incremental Growth:** Over time, the relationship expanded, particularly through parliamentary and economic cooperation, but remained compartmentalised.
- **Asymmetrical Partnership:** Japan's support for Ukraine's democratic and economic transitions highlighted an uneven partnership, with Japan leading most initiatives.

*Phase 4: Intensification of Relations (2014-Present).* The fourth phase, beginning in 2014, marked a significant intensification of the Japan-Ukraine relationship, driven by the geopolitical crisis following Russia's annexation of Crimea and the conflict in eastern Ukraine. Japan responded with strong diplomatic support for Ukraine's sovereignty, substantial financial aid, and increased high-level exchanges. Japan's unwavering support for Ukraine in the face of Russian aggression became a defining feature of this phase. This included condemning Russia's actions, providing financial and humanitarian aid, and reiterating Japan's commitment to a rules-based international order.

High-level visits increased significantly, with Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko's visit to Japan in 2016 focusing on economic cooperation and President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's visits in 2019 and 2023 highlighting the deepening political and security ties. Since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the leaders of Japan and Ukraine have held seven phone conversations, a drastic increase compared to previous periods.

In 2023, several unannounced visits by Japanese officials further underscored the deepening contacts. Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's visit to Ukraine in March 2023 signified a pivotal moment, elevating the relationship to a special global partnership once again. The declaration of this status accentuated the potential for collaboration on global issues, moving beyond rhetoric to a more action-oriented framework. Subsequent visits by Foreign Ministers Yoshimasa Hayashi in September 2023 and Yoko Kamikawa in January 2024 highlighted Japan's ongoing support for Ukraine, focusing on practical issues like energy security and bilateral security agreements.

#### *Key Trends and Patterns in Phase 4:*

- **Strategic Alignment:** The relationship has evolved into a strategic partnership, with Japan providing invaluable support to Ukraine in both diplomatic and financial terms. Ukraine's increasing initiative in the partnership has led to a more balanced and effective collaboration.
- **Enhanced Diplomatic Engagement:** The rise in high-level visits and exchanges highlights the deepening ties and mutual recognition of the relationship's strategic importance.
- **Sustained Partnership:** Japan's commitment to Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction efforts suggests that the partnership is likely to continue evolving, with both countries benefiting from cooperation in addressing global and regional challenges.

The evolution of Japan-Ukraine relations from 1991 to the present reflects a journey from cautious diplomacy to a robust and strategic partnership. Over the years, Japan's role has been pivotal in supporting Ukraine's democratic transitions, economic reforms, and territorial integrity, particularly in the face of external aggression. The relationship has grown in depth and complexity, particularly in the most recent phase, where Japan's strategic support for Ukraine has been unwavering.

### *3.2 Economic Relations: Trade Dynamics, Investments, and Development Assistance*

The economic relationship between Japan and Ukraine has evolved significantly since Ukraine's independence in 1991. As Ukraine transitioned to a market economy, it faced severe economic challenges, including the risk of default during a financial crisis. Japan, as a global economic powerhouse and key IMF member, played a decisive role in helping Ukraine avoid default, stabilising its economy, and laying the groundwork for future bilateral cooperation. Recognising Ukraine's potential as a trade partner, Japan was eager to develop economic ties, particularly in securing raw materials and investing in infrastructure. However, early cooperation encountered hurdles due to a lack of information about Ukraine within Japan's business community, the absence of prior economic ties, Ukraine's transitioning economy, and significant geographical distance, which led to hesitancy among Japanese investors.

As the relations unfolded, Japan and Ukraine took several steps to enhance economic connections. One such step was establishing the Coordinating Council on Economic Cooperation with Japan under the Ministry of Economy of Ukraine in 2002, and the Japan-Ukraine Business Cooperation Committee within Japan's Federation of Economic Organisations (Keidanren) in 2007 to foster closer business ties.

In 1997, Japan began extending Official Development Assistance to Ukraine, turning it into one of the key directions for cooperation. Japan's ODA has been central to its economic relationship with Ukraine, providing financial resources for projects aimed at stabilising and developing Ukraine's economy. By 2018, Japan's total assistance amounted to approximately 308.6 billion yen (USD 3.86 billion)<sup>17</sup>, reflecting Tokyo's strategic interest in Kyiv's success.

Japan's ODA spans loan aid, grant aid, technical cooperation, and contributions to international organisations, covering sectors from infrastructure and economic development to democratisation and humanitarian assistance. This comprehensive approach addresses Ukraine's diverse development needs.

Key ODA areas include:

- **Economic Assistance.** The majority of Japan's ODA to Ukraine (approximately 169 billion yen or USD 1.69 billion) focuses on economic assistance<sup>18</sup>. This includes loan aid for large-scale infrastructure projects like the Boryspil International Airport and Bortnychi Sewage Treatment Plant modernisation, demonstrating Japan's commitment to improving Ukraine's critical infrastructure. Japan also provided a development policy loan in cooperation with the World Bank, supporting Ukraine's macroeconomic stability during crises. Another aspect of economic assistance is the grant aid and technical assistance zeroing in on social infrastructure. Significant funds were allocated for medical equipment, educational facilities, and cultural institutions. Tokyo also supported small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), with funds directed towards SME recovery in the east of Ukraine.
- **Support for Democracy and National Integrity.** Japan's support for democratisation and national integrity reflects its commitment to Ukraine's political stability. Key contributions include support for election monitoring, judicial reforms, OSCE Special Monitoring Mission contributions, and initiatives promoting political dialogue and reducing regional tensions. This support

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<sup>17</sup> Embassy of Japan in Ukraine, "Japan's Assistance to Ukraine," February 2018, [https://www.ua.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr\\_uk/ua\\_oda.html](https://www.ua.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_uk/ua_oda.html).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

transcends traditional economic assistance, addressing fundamental issues of governance and national cohesion.

- Humanitarian and Social Development. Japan's attention to humanitarian and social development, particularly on Chernobyl-related issues, highlights its expertise in nuclear safety and disaster recovery. Key investments include contributions to the Chernobyl Shelter Fund, support for nuclear safety and non-proliferation, and continued medical assistance, especially in regions affected by the Russian aggression.

Before the war, Japan's ODA showed trends such as increasing amounts of grant aid, consistent advancement of technical cooperation, and sector-specific focus on business development and governance improvement. Such patterns reveal a strategic shift towards balancing long-term development goals with immediate needs.

*Trade Dynamics.* While neither country is a top trade partner for the other, Japan has been a leading trade partner for Ukraine in the Indo-Pacific region. Despite a consistent trade deficit for Ukraine, trade volumes saw a notable upturn in 2023, increasing by 25.7% to USD 943.3 million<sup>19</sup>. This positive trend continued into the first half of 2024, with a further 19.4% growth, bringing the total to USD 513.3 million<sup>20</sup>, indicating potential stabilisation and growth in bilateral trade. However, Ukraine's exports to Japan have yet to fully recover due to the ongoing war, while Japan's imports to Ukraine increased drastically in 2023<sup>21</sup>.

The trade composition reflects the countries' economic strengths: Ukraine's main exports to Japan are agricultural and raw materials, with corn and aluminium leading. Japan's exports to Ukraine are dominated by high-value manufactured goods, particularly automobiles. Services trade has also played a role, with growth in business, transport, and telecommunication services between the two countries in 2022<sup>22</sup>. Recent cooperation in high-tech sectors, including IT and aerospace, has further strengthened economic ties, with Japanese companies like Hitachi and Rakuten making significant investments in Ukrainian technology firms.

Japanese Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Ukraine has shown a slow but steady growth trajectory. As of 2023, Japanese Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Ukraine

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<sup>19</sup> State Customs Service of Ukraine, "Статистика та реєстри [Statistics and Registers]," 23.08.2024, <https://customs.gov.ua/statistika-ta-reiestri>.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> State Statistics Service of Ukraine, "Зовнішньоекономічна діяльність [Foreign Economic Activity]," 16.08. 2024, [https://ukrstat.gov.ua/operativ/menu/menu\\_u/zed\\_.htm](https://ukrstat.gov.ua/operativ/menu/menu_u/zed_.htm).

stood at USD 283.9 million<sup>23</sup>. 97% of Japanese FDI in Ukraine is concentrated in the wholesale and retail trade sector, particularly within the automotive industry<sup>24</sup>. This sectoral focus aligns with Japan's strategy of leveraging Ukraine's manufacturing capabilities to support its automotive supply chain in Europe. Companies like Yazaki and Fujikura are leading investors, producing electrical and electronic vehicle components primarily for the EU market. These investments not only create local jobs but also advance Ukraine's technological capabilities, further integrating its manufacturing sector into global supply chains. Another investor is Japan Tobacco Inc., with its Kremenchuk factory investments registered as Swiss through its subsidiary, Japan Tobacco Swiss Inc.

Recent years have seen several significant developments in the bilateral economic relationship. In 2021, Japan opened its market to Ukrainian dairy products, and in 2023, a joint working group on agricultural recovery strategy was initiated, expanding Kyiv's trade opportunities. The establishment of the Ukraine-Japan Financial Dialogue in 2023 marked a new chapter in financial cooperation.

A major breakthrough was achieved in February 2024 at the Ukraine-Japan Economic Development and Reconstruction Conference. Tokyo and Kyiv reaffirmed their commitment to the special global partnership, with a focus on Ukraine's post-war reconstruction. Significant agreements, including the Tax Convention and negotiations for a revised Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT), were initiated. The two countries have also agreed to open a Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) office in Ukraine to facilitate increased trade and investment flows.

### *3.3 Cultural and Scientific Collaboration*

The relations between Ukraine and Japan encompass a wide range of collaborative efforts across various domains, including culture, education, science, and humanitarian cooperation.

**Cultural Cooperation.** Initially sporadic, cultural cooperation between Ukraine and Japan has flourished in recent years. A pivotal moment was in 2017, when Kyiv declared the "Year of Japan in Ukraine" to celebrate the 25th anniversary of diplomatic ties. The festivities involved a nationwide sakura tree planting campaign, artistic exhibitions by Japanese artist Natsume featuring Ukrainian military personnel, and

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<sup>23</sup> National Bank of Ukraine, "Статистика зовнішнього сектору [External Economic Sector Statistics]," 31.08.2024, <https://bank.gov.ua/ua/statistic/sector-external#5>.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

Japanese art displays at Kyiv's artistic platform "Mystetskyi Arsenal."

In addition to government-led undertakings, interregional and cross-community exchanges have considerably contributed to the cultural ties between Ukraine and Japan. Key partnerships include:

1. Kyiv-Kyoto. The cities celebrated their 50th anniversary of sister-city relations in 2021 with ballet performances, commemorative stamp issuance, and a chestnut tree planting ceremony in Kyoto.
2. Odesa-Yokohama. The cities marked 55 years of sister-city ties in 2020 with a virtual photo exhibition and other cultural events.
3. Emerging Partnerships. Potential collaborations are being explored between Lviv and Kobe, Dnipro and Osaka, and Zhytomyr and Nagoya and Tokai.

The Ukrainian community in Japan, though relatively small, has been growing and becoming increasingly active in recent years, primarily in major cities like Tokyo, Osaka, and Nagoya. Its cultural promotion efforts include annual Vyshyvanka Parades (in Tokyo and Nagoya), Ukrainian weekend schools like "Dzhereltse" and "Khrobachok" in Tokyo and "Berehynia" in Nagoya, and the opening of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in 2004.

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia in 2022 heightened Japanese interest in Ukrainian culture, leading to:

- opening of Ukrainian restaurants in Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya, with more expected,
- successful tours by Ukrainian artists and ensembles (Kyiv Ballet, Virsky National Folk Dance Ensemble, bands like "Bez Obmezhen" and "Kazka" and others),
- exhibitions of Ukrainian art and photography,
- publication of books and manga about Ukraine,
- lectures, roundtables, and screenings of Ukrainian films at festivals, and
- presentations about Ukraine at local community centres.

Ukrainian musicians and artists, such as O. Stepaniuk, D. Vyshnia, K. Hudzii, T. Lavrova, and Y. Lavrova, have gained popularity with Japanese audiences.

**Educational Cooperation.** Educational ties between Ukraine and Japan have been consistently sturdy, characterised by:

1. financial assistance from the Japanese government for Ukrainian students and scholars,

2. support from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) for language programs and research internships, and
3. extension of internship opportunities by the Japan Foundation.

As in other domains, educational exchanges and assistance have been imbalanced, with Japan primarily offering, accepting, and financing the initiatives. Although Ukrainian academia and foreign policy institutions have become more proactive, a balance still needs to be achieved in the future.

As of June 2019, there were 104 Ukrainian students, 30 teachers, and 8 researchers in Japan. Post-2022, Japan welcomed nearly 400 Ukrainian students and researchers under scholarships at 80 universities. The recent agreement for exchange and cooperation included a student exchange agreement between Toyama University of International Studies and Odesa I. I. Mechnikov National University, and cooperation agreements signed between Toyo University and several Ukrainian institutions, including Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv and the National Aviation University.

As for university ties, several academic partnerships have been established between Ukrainian and Japanese institutions, including:

- Kyiv National University of Taras Shevchenko with Ritsumeikan University (Kyoto), Tenri University (Nara), Tsukuba University (Tsukuba), and Aoyama Gakuin University (Tokyo);
- Institute of Agroecology and Environmental Management of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine with Kobe Gakuin University;
- Kyiv National Linguistic University with Osaka University of Economics and Law;
- Lviv National University named after Ivan Franko with the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies.

Recent developments in educational cooperation include the introduction of Ukrainian language courses at the Embassy of Ukraine in Japan and several Japanese universities, including the University of Tokyo, Kyoto University, and Kobe Gakuin University. The Tokyo University of Foreign Studies (TUFS) also offers Ukrainian language courses through its Open Academy initiative, which is open to the public.

**Scientific and Technical Cooperation.** Scientific and technical cooperation between Ukraine and Japan has developed steadily over the years. The Ukrainian-Japanese Commission on Scientific and Technical Cooperation, established in 2006, was



designed to promote joint research in areas such as nanotechnology, biotechnology, and renewable energy. The third meeting of the commission, held in December 2013 in Kyiv, resulted in the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding and Scientific Cooperation between Ukraine's State Fund for Fundamental Research and the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS). This agreement launched a joint grant support program for bilateral research projects. During a visit to Japan in October 2018, Ukraine's Minister of Education and Science discussed signing agreements on scientific cooperation, diploma recognition, and reviving the Commission on Scientific and Technical Cooperation.

Nuclear safety and environmental remediation represent key areas of bilateral research, particularly in the context of the Fukushima-Chornobyl collaboration initiated in 2011. In September 2019, Fukushima University and the National Institute for Strategic Studies of Ukraine signed a memorandum aimed at improving radiation control in the Chornobyl exclusion zone.

The countries have also paid attention to the collaboration between academia and industry. For example, a 2017 Memorandum of Understanding between Kyiv Polytechnic Institute and Panasonic Ukraine Ltd. aims to foster innovative ecosystems, lead joint scientific projects, and establish pilot projects and demonstration zones. Japan has also invited Ukraine to participate in its "EIG CONCERT-Japan" program, which funds international projects, and to join the Ukrainian Science and Technology Center, further expanding their scientific collaboration.

In recent times, Japan and Ukraine have shown a strong interest in emerging areas such as hydrogen energy. In October 2020, Ukrainian officials and Japanese companies held an online meeting to discuss potential collaboration in this field. Additionally, both countries are exploring opportunities for cooperation in information technology, biotechnology, space research, and renewable energy.

**Sports collaboration.** The collaboration in sports between Ukraine and Japan has been a significant aspect of their bilateral relations. Japanese organisations have invited and funded Ukrainian athletes to train and compete in international competitions in sports such as karate, judo, badminton, tennis, sumo, wrestling, and football. This collaboration not only enhances the athletes' skills and international exposure but also strengthens the people-to-people ties between the two countries.

**Humanitarian Assistance.** Humanitarian assistance and healthcare collaboration have become increasingly important in light of the ongoing war in Ukraine. Tokyo has provided significant humanitarian aid to Kyiv, including medical supplies and financial

support. Moreover, Japan has unprecedentedly accepted refugees from Ukraine (often referred to as "evacuees" or "*hinanmin*" to differentiate from "refugees" or "*nanmin*," who receive their status under the 1951 Refugee Convention). Ukrainian soldiers injured in the war have received medical treatment in Japanese hospitals, demonstrating the groundbreaking level of humanitarian cooperation.

# THE RUSSO-UKRAINIAN WAR: A CATALYST FOR EVOLVING JAPAN-UKRAINE RELATIONS

## *4.1 Japan's Stance Before February 2022 on Russian Invasion of Ukraine*

Japan's foreign policy leading up to February 2022 was a strategic balancing act in response to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict since 2014. While pursuing its national interests, particularly in relation to territorial disputes with Russia and securing energy resources, Japan simultaneously upheld its commitment, in line with other G7 members, to support Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Following Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the onset of war in Donbas, Japan stepped up its ODA to Ukraine. This assistance targeted three main areas: improving Ukraine's economy, supporting democratic consolidation, and fostering national dialogue within Ukrainian society.

Japan's efforts extended beyond bilateral aid, involving collaboration with international organisations such as the OSCE, UNDP, UNICEF, and WHO. Through these partnerships, Japan supported projects striving to assist internally displaced persons (IDPs), promote democratisation, and restore social infrastructure in conflict-affected regions of Ukraine.

Yet, this did not mean that Japan turned against Moscow. Under Prime Minister Abe, Tokyo worked to strike a balance between its national interests and international responsibilities. While Japan imposed sanctions on Russia in line with its G7 partners, it also continued diplomatic engagements with Moscow, driven by the desire to resolve the Northern Territories dispute and secure energy resources. A key factor in Abe's continued engagement with Russia was the concern over the strengthening of Sino-Russian relations, which could disrupt the regional balance of power and complicate efforts to manage the North Korean nuclear threat. Moreover, to diversify Japan's energy supply, Abe's administration followed a so-called "new approach", which involved greater cooperation with Russia in economic and security fields. Overall, Abe and Putin held 27 meetings.

When Prime Minister Kishida took office in 2021, he largely inherited Abe's foreign policy framework. Although Kishida served as Foreign Minister from 2012 to 2017 and

played a key role in operationalising Abe's policies, he was less personally committed to improving relations with Russia. This allowed him to pivot away from engagements with the Kremlin, aligning more closely with the G7's firm support for Ukraine. Kishida's decision to distance Japan from Russia, despite some internal resistance from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and certain factions of the Liberal Democratic Party, reflected a pragmatic response to the changing geopolitical landscape and the need to uphold international norms.

The declining influence of pro-Russian political figures in Japan, coupled with public support for Ukraine and the lack of significant outcomes from Abe's "new approach" to Russia, further solidified Kishida's pro-Ukraine stance. This provided a broader context for Japan's actions, including the multifaceted assistance and unprecedented measures in support of Ukraine.

## *4.2 Japan's Response to the 2022 Invasion: Policy Shifts and Support Measures*

Japan's response to Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine marked a watershed moment in its foreign policy. Moving from cautious diplomacy to decisive action, Japan swiftly condemned the invasion, implemented comprehensive sanctions, and provided robust support, reinforcing its commitment to upholding international law and the global order.

*Condemnation and Financial Sanctions.* Japan's immediate and strong condemnation of Russian aggression represented a notable departure from its traditionally measured approach to international conflicts. Viewing the invasion as a direct threat to the international order, Japan aligned closely with G7 partners, imposing stringent financial sanctions on Russia. These included asset freezes on major Russian banks, restrictions on transactions with Russia's central bank, and participation in the global effort to exclude Russian banks from the SWIFT system. Japan also revoked Russia's "most-favoured-nation" status, imposed higher tariffs on Russian imports, banned key Russian goods, and prohibited the export of luxury items and critical technologies. Despite this, Japan maintained its involvement in certain Russian energy projects such as Sakhalin-1, Sakhalin-2, and Arctic LNG-2, reflecting a nuanced approach to its energy needs.

In a symbolic yet impactful move, Japan suspended visa issuance to designated Russian individuals, including key figures within the Russian government and military.

These sanctions were extended to Belarus and the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics, emphasising its broader condemnation of those complicit in the war.

*Provision of defence equipment and supplies.* While Japan's constitution imposes strict limitations on military involvement, Japan has nonetheless provided unprecedented non-lethal defence support to Ukraine. This includes drones, bulletproof vests, helmets, medical supplies, and civilian vehicles, all of which have been instrumental in enhancing Ukrainian forces' capabilities. Additionally, Japan indirectly helped Ukraine by transferring a certain number of Patriot anti-aircraft missiles to the United States to replenish American stockpiles following the deployment of new Patriot systems to Ukraine<sup>25</sup>.

*Financial and Humanitarian Assistance.* Japan has emerged as a crucial financial backer for Ukraine, with its assistance initiatives rapidly expanding in both scope and scale since February 2022. Japan's contributions have been pivotal in stabilising Ukraine's economy and addressing the humanitarian crisis precipitated by the invasion. Tokyo's financial support includes loans, grants, and debt relief measures, with notable contributions such as a 13-billion-yen loan in April 2022<sup>26</sup>, followed by a 65-billion-yen loan in June 2022<sup>27</sup>. In early 2023, Japan, as part of the Group of Creditors of Ukraine, agreed to further debt-relief measures. In February 2023, ahead of the G7 summit in Hiroshima, Japan committed guarantees for World Bank loans amounting to USD 5.5 billion and allocated 471 million dollars as a grant to the World Bank's Ukraine Relief, Recovery, Reconstruction, and Reform Trust Fund (URTF)<sup>28</sup>.

Japan's humanitarian support has tackled the immediate needs of the Ukrainian population and neighbouring countries affected by the refugee inflow from Ukraine. Tokyo provided emergency grants to international organisations, including UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, OCHA, and IOM, addressing issues related to water, sanitation, hygiene, and medical care. Japan also extended substantial aid for infrastructure and public service restoration, including de-mining operations and response efforts following the destruction of the Kakhovka hydroelectric power plant.

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<sup>25</sup> 読売新聞 (Yomiuri Shimbun), "アメリカ向け装備部品増産へ、日米首脳会談で連携強化調整...日本がウクライナ支援を下支え [Amerika-muke Sōbi Buhin Zōsan e, Nichibei Shunō Kaidan de Renkei Kyōka Chōsei: Nihon ga Ukuraina Shien o Shitasasae]," 10.03.2024, <https://www.yomiuri.co.jp/politics/20240309-OYT1T50255/>.

<sup>26</sup> Kyodo News, "Japan Inks 13 Bil. Yen Loan Deal to Rescue Ukraine Economy," 16.05.2022, <https://english.kyodonews.net/news/2022/05/edddd0feb2ff-japan-inks-13-bil-yen-loan-deal-to-rescue-ukraine-economy.html>.

<sup>27</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Additional Support for Emergency Economic Recovery to Ukraine," 7.06.2022, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press1e\\_000299.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press1e_000299.html).

<sup>28</sup> World Bank, "Japan Contributes \$471 Million to the World Bank in Support of Ukraine Relief Efforts," 21.04.2023, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2023/04/21/japan-contributes-us-471-million-to-the-world-bank-in-support-of-ukraine-relief-efforts>.

Tokyo has actively addressed the global food and energy crises exacerbated by the war, providing USD 250 million in aid for global food security<sup>29</sup> and supporting initiatives to reduce reliance on Russian energy. Japan's efforts include grants to support Ukraine's agricultural sector and stabilise global energy markets.

*Post-War Reconstruction Efforts.* As the war continues, Japan is pivoting towards recovery and reconstruction, areas where it has profound knowledge and experience. While multilateral platforms, like the Ukraine Recovery Conferences, have begun addressing reconstruction, Japan has encountered challenges in mobilising broader business sector participation. In response to those impediments, Tokyo conducted the Economic Reconstruction Conference in February 2024, zeroing in on investment opportunities for Japanese enterprises ranging from large corporations to startups<sup>30</sup>.

At the 2024 Japan-Ukraine Conference for the Promotion of Economic Growth and Reconstruction in Tokyo, Prime Minister Kishida pledged Japan's involvement under three guiding principles: inclusiveness, partnership, and the application of knowledge and technology. Kishida stressed that Japan's contributions will be based on best practices tailored to Ukraine's specific needs, ensuring that reconstruction efforts are not imposed from above but are collaborative.

Conforming to Kishida's dedication to harnessing Japan's collective resources, various agencies have spearheaded these initiatives. For instance, Japan's largest business federation, Keidanren, formed a special committee last year to facilitate information sharing and joined the government's mission to Kyiv. Alongside the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), which reopened its office in Kyiv in November 2023, the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) intends to set up an office in Ukraine's capital to offer support for Japanese businesses in Ukraine.

During the Tokyo conference, the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) announced a two-step loan for development projects through the Black Sea Trade and Development Bank, targeting sectors like transport, digital infrastructure, and manufacturing. Furthermore, the Nippon Export and Investment Insurance (NEXI) extended USD 1.2 billion dollars in credit lines to underwrite insurance policies for Japanese firms operating in conflict zones<sup>31</sup>. In total, the conference resulted in 56

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<sup>29</sup> Government of Japan, Japan Stands with Ukraine, 2, 19.10.2023, [https://japan.kantei.go.jp/ongoingtopics/pdf/jp\\_stands\\_with\\_ukraine\\_eng.pdf](https://japan.kantei.go.jp/ongoingtopics/pdf/jp_stands_with_ukraine_eng.pdf).

<sup>30</sup> Government of Ukraine, Ukraine and Japan sign 56 documents at the Conference for Promotion of Economic Growth and Reconstruction in Tokyo, 19.02.2024, <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/en/news/ukraina-ta-iaponiia-pidpysaly-56-dokumentiv-na-konferentsii-z-ekonomichnoho-rozvytku-ta-vidbudovy-v-tokio>

<sup>31</sup> Nippon Export and Investment Insurance (NEXI), "NEXI Sets Credit Lines (Overseas Investment Insurance & Export Credit Insurance) for Investments and Exports to Ukraine," February 19, 2024, accessed August 27, 2024, <https://www.nexi.go.jp/en/topics/newsrelease/202402150245.html>.

agreements between Japan and Ukraine<sup>32</sup>. These initiatives illustrate Japan's efforts to endorse public-private cooperation in the recovery and reconstruction phase.

*Cooperation through International Organisations.* Japan has vigorously participated in multilateral efforts to support Ukraine, including key events such as the High-Level International Donor's Conference for Ukraine in May 2022 and the Ukraine Recovery Conferences in 2022 and 2023. Tokyo has also worked closely with UN agencies, the World Bank, IMF, NATO, G7 and other organisations to coordinate global responses to the Russian aggression. Demonstrating its commitment to nuclear safety, Japan has provided financial aid and specialised equipment to assist International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) missions in Ukraine, including assessments of nuclear facilities like the occupied Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant.

*Public Support.* Public support for Ukraine in Japan remains consistently high, with recent surveys indicating strong public backing for Japan's policies toward Ukraine. A government survey in early 2024 revealed that 93% of Japanese citizens have a negative view of Russia, a significant increase from previous years<sup>33</sup>. A February 2023 survey by Nikkei<sup>34</sup>, a leading financial newspaper, showed that 66% of respondents believe Japan should continue supporting Ukraine, even if it negatively impacts their lives or jobs. Moreover, 71% support strengthening sanctions against Russia, even if it leads to increased burdens on daily life.

Usually rather inert, Japanese society also contributes through humanitarian donations, cultural exchanges, and public events in solidarity with Ukraine.

### 4.3 Japan's Motivations in Supporting Ukraine

Among key elements motivating Japan to stand with Ukraine are:

*Geopolitical and Security Considerations.* Japan's support for Ukraine originates from a combination of strategic considerations. At the core of Japan's actions is the desire to uphold the international order, particularly the principle that the status quo cannot be altered by force. This is not merely a declarative stance: Japan perceives Russia's

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<sup>32</sup> "日・ウクライナ経済復興推進会議で56件の協力文書が締結 [Nichi-Ukuraina Keizai Fukkō Suishin Kaigi de 56-ken no Kyōryoku Bunsho ga Teiketsu]," March 1, 2024, accessed August 27, 2024, <https://www.jetro.go.jp/biznews/2024/03/5488e4187adaed12.html>.

<sup>33</sup> National Institute for Research Advancement (NIRA), "第2回政治・経済・社会に関する意識調査 (NIRA基本調査) (速報) [Dai Nikai Seiji, Keizai, Shakai ni Kansuru Ishiki Chōsa (NIRA Kihon Chōsa) (Sokuhō)]," accessed August 29, 2024, <https://www.nira.or.jp/paper/research-report/2024/012404.html>.

<sup>34</sup> "ウクライナ支援『生活に悪影響生じても』7割 読者調査 [Ukuraina Shien 'Seikatsu ni Aku Eikyō Shōjitemo' Nanawari Dokusha Chōsa]," Nikkei, accessed August 29, 2024, <https://www.nikkei.com/article/DGXZQOCA151P40V10C23A2000000/>.

aggression against Ukraine as a direct threat not only to European security but also to global stability, including the Indo-Pacific region. Given China's growing assertiveness, the potential conflict over Taiwan, and North Korea's nuclear sabre-rattling, Japan seeks to deter any aggression that Russia's actions in Ukraine may inspire. Japan's leadership has explicitly linked its support for Ukraine with its broader strategy to maintain regional peace and stability, stating that "Europe today may be East Asia tomorrow<sup>35</sup>".

*Image of a More Responsible Global Actor.* Japan's response to the war in Ukraine marks a departure from its traditional foreign policy process. The swiftness and coordination of Japan's actions represent a noteworthy change in its approach to global crises, reflecting a maturation of its national strategy. Japan's actions in Ukraine are also intended to strengthen its ties with Europe, ensuring that it remains a key partner in the transatlantic community. This matters to Tokyo as it strives to build a coalition of like-minded nations to counterbalance the influence of authoritarian regimes such as Russia and China.

*Image of a Stronger Alliance Partner.* Japan's proactive support for Ukraine demonstrates its resolve to stand as a reliable ally to the United States. Pursuing this strategy, Japan has not only sought to strengthen its alliance with the U.S. but has also expanded partnerships with other key nations, including Australia, the United Kingdom, and other NATO members. Supporting Ukraine and building ties with it aligns with this approach, as many of Japan's new partners are also strong supporters of Ukraine.

*Economic and Diplomatic Influence.* Japan's involvement in the reconstruction of Ukraine and its role as a key financial supporter enhance its economic and diplomatic influence globally. By actively participating in Ukraine's recovery, Japan emerges as a central player in post-war reconstruction, potentially opening new avenues for economic cooperation beyond its bilateral ties with Ukraine. Japan's contributions to Ukraine's agricultural recovery, infrastructure development, and energy security demonstrate its interest in a partnership beyond immediate crisis management, paving the way for deeper, long-term relations.

*Cultural and Societal Impact.* The cultural and societal reasons for Japan's support for Ukraine are equally significant. Japan's acceptance of displaced Ukrainians and the growing interest in Ukrainian culture within Japan have inspired a deeper mutual understanding between the two nations. As Japanese society becomes more engaged

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<sup>35</sup> "岸田首相「欧州と安保不可分」 G7首脳とアジア情勢協議 [Kishida Shushō 'Ōshū to Anpo Fukabun' G7 Shunō to Ajia Jōsei Kyōgi]," Nikkei, 31.08.2024, <https://www.nikkei.com/article/DGXZQOUA14DYP0U4A610C2000000/>.



with the Ukrainian cause, these cultural exchanges and humanitarian efforts will continue to strengthen the bilateral relationship, creating a solid foundation for future cooperation in various fields. Additionally, Japan has the opportunity to further its culture and cultivate an even stronger pro-Japanese sentiment in Europe, thereby enhancing its soft power influence.

#### 4.4 Japan's Constraints in Supporting Ukraine

Despite Tokyo's wholehearted commitment to supporting Kyiv, Japan faces a few constraints that prevent it from fully committing all of its resources. These constraints primarily include:

*Pragmatic Interests.* Japan's support for Ukraine, while robust, is tempered by pragmatic considerations, particularly its limited natural resources. Japan is heavily dependent on imported energy, with approximately 9% of its LNG coming from Russia, particularly through the Sakhalin-2 project<sup>36</sup>. Despite its strong stance against Russia's aggression, Japan has not completely severed its economic ties with Russia, recognising the critical importance of maintaining a stable energy supply.

*Legal Constraints.* Japan's response to the Russo-Ukrainian War is also shaped by constitutional constraints. The country's constitution restricts its ability to engage in military operations abroad or provide lethal military aid. These legal limitations require Japan to adhere to its anti-militarist principles while still making a meaningful contribution to Ukraine's defence and recovery. This may sometimes present a dilemma: either finding legal ways to increase support for Kyiv's defence efforts or introducing intricate legislative alterations.

*Public Opinion Constraints.* Public opinion in Japan strongly backs the government's support for Ukraine. However, the Japanese government must remain mindful of the cultural constraints embedded in Japan's anti-militarist stance, which continues to shape public expectations and foreign policy. Japan's decision to focus on non-lethal aid and economic support resonates with its citizens, ensuring widespread approval. Yet, any shift toward providing lethal aid or departing from the anti-militarist approach could risk a public backlash, requiring careful navigation and significant political will from the government.

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<sup>36</sup> Yuka Obayashi and Katya Golubkova, "Mitsubishi Sees Russia's Sakhalin LNG as Key Energy Source for Japan," Reuters, 6.02.2024, <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/mitsubishi-sees-russias-sakhalin-lng-key-energy-source-japan-2024-02-06/>

## Policy Recommendations For Ukraine to Enhance the Strategic Partnership

1. **Develop a Comprehensive Japan Strategy:** Ukraine should draft a well-coordinated strategy for enhancing relations with Japan, with clear objectives and a roadmap for bilateral cooperation. This strategy should identify key areas for collaboration, set measurable goals, and outline specific initiatives to deepen ties with Japan. Whole-of-government coordination and transparent communication are essential for the strategy's success.
2. **Expand Defence Cooperation Within Legal Boundaries:** While Japan's constitution imposes certain constraints, Ukraine should seek to expand defence cooperation in legally permissible areas. This could include joint exercises focused on disaster response, cybersecurity, or peacekeeping operations. In addition, Ukraine should pursue technological and intelligence-sharing initiatives with Japan to strengthen its defence capabilities, leveraging its experience in field-testing new technologies. Joint military R&D or production, including drones (air and sea), surveillance and reconnaissance equipment, etc., can be considered.
3. **Offer Joint Economic Initiatives:** Ukraine should proactively offer joint economic projects that align with Japan's strategic interests, such as technology innovation, digital transformation, and green energy. Promising areas of collaboration include semiconductors, where Ukraine has ample raw materials, human talent, and a strategic position to partner with Japan. Given Asia's dominance in semiconductor production and consumption, and the importance of this sector to critical infrastructure and defence, the Japan-Ukraine collaboration holds great potential.
4. **Facilitate Japanese Investment:** Ukraine should continue to improve its legal and regulatory environment to attract Japanese investors. This could involve reforms to ensure greater transparency, protect intellectual property, and streamline the process of establishing businesses in Ukraine.
5. **Expand Cooperation within the Ukraine-Europe-Japan Framework:** Ukraine should actively position its relations with Japan within the broader European framework. This involves participating in joint projects, conferences, and forums, as well as supporting initiatives that strengthen ties between Europe and Asia.
6. **Enhance Cultural and Academic Cooperation:** Ukraine should initiate more cultural diplomacy projects in Japan, including establishing Ukrainian cultural centres in major Japanese cities, promoting Ukrainian language courses at Japanese universities, and organising cultural events. Engaging more with the diaspora and coordinating efforts would also be highly beneficial.



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