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Japanese Officials 'Regret' Russia's Tit-for-Tat Sanctions

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Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe listens during a media conference following the Caribbean Community (Caricom)/Japan summit, in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad and Tobago.

Japanese diplomats have expressed disappointment with Russia's decision to blacklist officials in retaliation for Tokyo's sanctions against Russia, RIA Novosti reported Monday.

"This decision will have a negative effect on Japanese-Russian relations. It evokes great regret," Kyodo News cited the government's press secretary, Yoshihide Suga, as saying.

Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Monday a scheduled visit to Japan by President Vladimir Putin's would go ahead as planned, however.

" We don't associate our relationship with Japan with the conflict in Ukraine or the change in climate," Lavrov was cited as saying during Monday's press conference by Interfax news agency.

" W e have the feeling that our relationship (with Japan) is autonomous," he said.

Japan's Ambassador to Russia Chikahito Harada was presented with a list of sanctioned Japanese officials on Aug. 22, RIA Novosti reported, but Suga declined to disclose the names on the list.

"Russia did not disclose such information, so the Japanese side would also like to refrain from publishing it," Suga told Kyodo News.

Russia's relations with Japan are just the latest to take a nosedive amid the ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine, which the West has accused Russia of provoking. Russia has denied the accusation.

Both the U.S. and the European Union have hit Russia with several rounds of sanctions over Russia's annexation of Crimea in March and the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, and Russia has responded in kind by banning food imports from countries that have imposed sanctions.

The political climate has also reignited a decades-old conflict between the two countries over a chain of islands in the Pacific, known as the Southern Kurils in Russia and the Northern Territories in Japan.

Russia earlier this month conducted military exercises on the disputed islands, involving more than 1,000 troops, five Mi-8AMTSh attack helicopters and 100 other pieces of military hardware — a move Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe called "totally unacceptable."

Japan first blacklisted Russian officials over the Ukraine conflict in late April, when it announced that 23 Russian individuals had been blacklisted.

On Aug. 5, Japan's Foreign Ministry published a list of an additional 40 Russian individuals and two Russian organizations to face sanctions over the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.

The list included Crimean officials and representatives of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic, as well as Crimean energy firm Chernomorneftegaz and the company Feodosiya.

See also:

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