

Japan's Abe Urges Putin to Ensure Shaky Ukraine Cease-Fire Holds

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Russia's President Vladimir Putin (R) shakes hands with Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe before their meeting at the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Beijing, Nov. 9, 2014.

BEIJING — Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has pressed Russian President Vladimir Putin to play a constructive role in ensuring that a shaky cease-fire in Ukraine holds.

In bilateral talks held Sunday on the sidelines of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) leaders summit, Abe expressed concern that actions by pro-Russian separatists were complicating the situation in Ukraine, according to Japan's Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Katsunobu Kato.

Abe "strongly urged" Putin to play a constructive role so that both sides abide by the cease-fire agreement, he told reporters, adding that Putin responded by explaining Russia's position on the issue.

A two-month-old cease-fire in Ukraine appears shakier than ever. Ukraine's military accused Russia on Friday of sending a column of 32 tanks and truckloads of troops into the country's

east to support pro-Russian separatists.

Putin and Abe, who are said to be on first-name terms, last held bilateral talks in February in Sochi, where Abe travelled to attend the opening ceremony of the Winter Olympics.

The two leaders have now agreed to begin preparations for Putin to visit Japan next year, Kato said.

Putin had planned a return visit to Tokyo in November but ties were strained after Japan, as part of a coordinated G7 move, imposed sanctions on Moscow for its annexation of the Crimea peninsula in March and its involvement in a pro-Russian rebellion in eastern Ukraine.

Moscow denies sending troops and arms to the area.

Tokyo's measures against Russia have been lighter than those of the United States or the European Union, and Abe has continued to try to court Moscow despite ties already being strained by a long-running territorial dispute.

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