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Japan's Abe: 'We Need Putin for Global Peace'

By The Moscow Times

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Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has called for a thaw in relations with Russia, urging dialogue in order to resolve flaring violence in the Middle East.

"We need the constructive engagement of Russia," Abe said in an interview with the Financial Times newspaper published Sunday, pointing to the war in Syria, tense relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran and the threat posed by radical Islamism.

Japan this year chairs the Group of Seven advanced economies group and is set to host a G7 summit in May. Abe told the Financial Times he was considering going to Moscow or inviting Russian President Vladimir Putin to Tokyo in his function as G7 chair.

"As chair of the G7, I need to seek solutions regarding the stability of the region as well as the whole world," he was cited as saying.

The elite group, formerly known as the G8, in March 2014 ousted Russia over its annexation of Crimea and role in the Ukraine crisis. Japan at the time joined economic sanctions against Russia, with which it is engaged in a decades-long territorial standoff over a chain of Pacific islands known in Russia as the Kuril Islands.

Russia seized the islands at the end of World War II, in a move unrecognized by Japan.

While denouncing China for "unilaterally [attempting] to change the status quo" in the South China Sea, Abe called for engagement with Russia.

"I believe appropriate dialogue with Russia, appropriate dialogue with president Putin is very important," he said.

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