

Ex-PMs Call on Japan to ‘Eradicate’ Nuclear Power

'We have solar, water, wind - it's not necessary to look at nuclear,' said one former prime minister

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A bipartisan duo of former prime ministers is beating the drums for Japan to totally “eradicate” nuclear energy in the country and rely instead on renewables.

During an appearance before foreign correspondents in Tokyo on Monday, when reminded in a question from Asia Times that US **President Joe Biden** [has included new and prospectively safe nuclear power technology](#) in his multi-trillion-dollar prescription to combat climate change and fix the American economy, the Liberal Democratic Party's **Junichiro Koizumi** insisted that pushing any form of nuclear power in Japan is “incomprehensible.”

Following a triple earthquake-tsunami-meltdown disaster at Fukushima a decade ago this month, there was a considerable period when all 54 of Japan's nuclear power reactors were shut down. During that period, Koizumi said, the country experienced “not a single blackout.”

Thus, “whether it's fission or the other kind [fusion], I don't see that there is any need to rely on that sort of technology.”

Naoto Kan of the Democratic Party of Japan, who was prime minister at the time of the Fukushima disaster, exhibited a bit more flexibility, to the extent he admitted to having spoken several years ago with **Bill Gates**, a leading prophet of new nuclear power technology.



Signs from an anti-nuclear protest against the Japanese government in Tokyo. Photo: iStock

“Even hearing his explanation,” Kan said, he was not convinced. “We have solar, water, wind – it’s not necessary to look at nuclear.”

Kan was only slightly less adamant than Koizumi. He acknowledged that “there is research on fusion that may lead to something that might be useful in the future.” He did not go further and suggest that Japan’s government emulate Biden in proposing to earmark additional funding for such research.

Renewable policies

Instead, an innovation he said he favored would be to turn Japan’s aging farmers into harvesters of solar energy on some of their farmland.

The views of the two jibe with public opinion – Koizumi, who held the job from 2001 to 2006, remains one of the most popular ex-prime ministers. They illustrate the difficulties ahead for the US and other countries when it comes to a fight over the issue against [“green” purists who want to focus solely on renewable energy technologies.](#)

Kan indicated that current **Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga** has not yet gone along with the zero-nuclear option. Suga’s LDP government “has spoken of moving to ‘carbon neutral’ without specifying the means of change. Some others use carbon neutral as an excuse to go back to nuclear power. At the moment I think they plan for 20-22% of the power supply to come from nuclear. I hope Mr Suga will realize soon why nuclear shouldn’t have a role.”

In response to a question from a Turkish journalist, Kan said he felt “ashamed” that during his term as prime minister – before the Fukushima disaster – he had visited Turkey and urged the country to make contracts with Japanese suppliers of nuclear technology.

Although Koizumi showed no interest in advanced nuclear research, he noted that he is a trendsetter regarding another energy source: "I am using a hydrogen car. There are only three places in Tokyo where I can fill it up. Gas stations should do it but putting in the equipment is costly. It's a nice car. Developing new technology is good."

The two speakers expressed the most concern about what to do with radioactive waste produced by today's fission-based powerplants.

Kan said he had visited Finland and seen that country's solution: storage spaces drilled 400 meters down in a type of rock that is viewed as capable of securely holding nuclear waste for tens of thousands of years. He found no answer there for his own country, which, he noted, occupies some of the planet's least solid real estate, subject to frequent earthquakes and tsunamis.

"For Japan," he said, "the first thing is not to produce more waste."

In fact, as the science writer Jonathan Tennenbaum has reported on multiple occasions for Asia Times, radioactive waste is a problem that some designers of new-generation nuclear technology claim to have figured out how to avoid in whole or in large part - either by not producing such waste or by consuming it in the reactor process.

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