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US supports Japanese bid to host ITER as France urges Europe to go it alone

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The US Secretary of State for Energy, Spencer Abraham, has declared the strong support of his country for the Japanese bid to host the international thermonuclear site (ITER).



Governments involved in the ITER initiative are being asked to choose between the European Union's candidate to host the site, Cadarache in France, and the Japanese site at Rokkasho-Mura. Mr Abraham told an audience of Japanese business leaders in Tokyo on 9 January: 'I am proud to say the United States strongly supports building ITER in Japan. From a technical standpoint you have offered the superior site.'

With the next intergovernmental meeting on ITER due to take place in mid February, two blocs are emerging in support of the two rival sites. The EU, Russia and China are said to support the French candidate, while the US, Japan and South Korea are believed to be backing the Japanese application to host the site.

Indeed, French Prime Minister Jean Pierre Raffarin, raised the stakes this week by suggesting that Europe should build its own thermonuclear site if the French candidate is not selected for the international project. However, a spokesperson for EU Research Commissioner Philippe Busquin said that while this might be feasible, it was undesirable and did not fit with Europe's approach to the issue to date. It would be matter for the Council of Ministers to decide, he added.

In the context of the US support for Japan, Secretary of State Abraham also called on other countries to remain committed to the ITER initiative: 'We sincerely hope that when the process ends the other countries will join us in support of Japan's site.'

Elaborating publicly for the first time on the US support for Japan's bid to host ITER, Mr Abraham said: 'The location of Rokkasho is superbly situated to receive the large materials needed for ITER. You have outstanding scientific talent to contribute to the international team of scientists that would live and work in the area, and your technical and engineering skill are known and admired in every corner of the world.'

Predicting that the demand for energy will more than triple by the end of the century, Mr Abraham added: 'If fusion power proves practical, it will kick in at the right time. It will be there to meet the increasing need for large scale sources of clean energy around the world [...], Japan and the United States are united in this vision and this hope.'

The European Commission, however, drew attention to the fact that the US intervention comes just at the time when technical evaluations are being carried out at the French and Japanese candidate sites. The spokesperson for Mr Busquin told Le Monde: 'It is inappropriate and inopportune to make such declarations at a time when the evaluation procedure is ongoing. This could disrupt the exercise.'

To read Mr Abraham's full speech, please [click here](#)

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