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Australia's Defence Transformation Strategy 2020

Japanese Grant to Maldives Coast Guard

UAE-Greece Defence Cooperation Agreement

China to Boost Funding for UNPK Mission in West Africa

Australia's Defence Transformation Strategy 2020

On 27 November, the Australian Minister for Defence released “Lead the Way: Defence Transformation Strategy” to provide guidance to the Department of Defence (DoD) on achieving the strategic objectives laid out in the “2020 Defence Strategic Update” and the “2020 Force Structure Plan”.

Noting that Australia's strategic environment has deteriorated due to increased China-US competition, rapid pace of technological change, emergence of new threats and use of grey-zone tactics, the Strategic Update, released in July, had concluded that the country no longer enjoyed the luxury of assuming a 10-year strategic warning time for appropriate defence planning.



In the light of that assessment, “Lead the Way” requires the Australian Defence Force (ADF) to increase its self-reliant ability to deploy and deliver combat power, thus becoming less dependent on partners for critical capability.

With a view to realising the defence capability objectives, the Australian government intends to increase the defence budget from around A\$42 billion at present to \$74 billion by 2030, with 40 per cent of the increase catering for new acquisitions. It also envisages investments close to A\$270 billion for building critical capacities in the land, air, naval, space, cyber and information domains. For instance, in the maritime domain, at least 70 naval ships are expected to be built within the country over the next two to three decades.

The Australian government has also committed to spend A\$3 billion on defence innovation, science and technology by 2030. It intends to release a ‘Defence Capability Innovation Strategy’ next year. And with a view to becoming a more ‘data-informed’ organization, the Australian DoD is working on a ‘Defence Data Strategy’ document to guide it in the management of data.

These efforts are cumulatively geared towards better preparing the Australian defence enterprise, termed ‘One Defence’ — a unified, adaptive organisation, to ‘shape’ the country’s strategic environment, ‘deter’ actions against its interests and ‘respond’ to threats with credible military force, if required.

Japanese Grant to Maldives Coast Guard

In an Exchange of Notes signed by the Foreign Minister of Maldives and Japan's Ambassador to Male on 22 November 2020, Japan has undertaken to provide a grant-in-aid of USD 7.6 million to strengthen the capabilities of the Maldivian Coast Guard and the Maritime Rescue and Coordination Centre. The Maldivian Coast Guard would be utilising the grant to procure communications equipment and professional search and rescue diving equipment.



*Maldivian Foreign Minister and Japanese Ambassador.
Source: timesofaddu.com*

During the Exchange of Notes, Foreign Minister Abdulla Shahid highlighted the importance of coordinated action to combat piracy, counter violent extremism and narco-trafficking, and ensure a free and open Indian Ocean so as to promote peace and prosperity in the region.

Tokyo's engagement of Male has been driven by the strategic location of Maldives in the Indian Ocean. Male

International airport has served as a stopping point for the transport aircraft of Japan's Self-Defence Forces engaged in Peace Keeping Operations in the Golan Heights, Reconstruction for Iraq, and anti-piracy operations off the coast of Somalia. Maldives is also important for Japan's energy security given that the bulk of Japanese oil imports originates or transits through the Indian Ocean.

These interests have impelled Japan to initiate bilateral cooperation with the Maldives in the sphere of maritime safety and security as part of its Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy. Accordingly, Japan donated 45 fire engines to the Maldives as part of its non-project grant aid in 2018, provided a grant of USD 4.5 million for procuring a fireboat and a landing craft in 2019, and granted maritime domain awareness and oil spill response equipment in August 2020. Japan also conducts training programmes for officers of the Maldivian National Defence Force including the Coast Guard. Japanese assistance to, and cooperation with, Maldives also extends to other areas including counter-terrorism, environmental protection, sustainable fisheries, communication, infrastructure development, etc. Japan is also mindful of the importance of deepening collaboration with the Maldives in coordination with India and the United States.

UAE-Greece Defence Cooperation Agreement

The United Arab Emirates and Greece signed a Joint Statement on a Strategic Partnership and an Agreement on Joint Foreign Policy and Defence Cooperation during the visit of Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis on 18 November.

The defence cooperation agreement states that in case either country were to be threatened or attacked, then both would contribute to the defence of the other and ensure the other's sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence. The agreement intends to facilitate exchange of classified information, stationing and relocation of military forces and the use of relevant infrastructure. Joint committees would monitor the agreement's implementation.

Greek-Emirati defence cooperation is a tactical step to counter Turkey's aggressive policy of recent years. Both UAE and Greece are opposed to Turkey's assertive behaviour and expansionism in the region. During Mitsotakis' meeting



Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi with Greek Prime Minister on 18 November 2020.

Source: neweurope.eu

with Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the two sides condemned Turkey's violations of Greek sovereignty and aggressive conduct in the Middle East, Southeast Mediterranean and South Caucasus.

From the Emirati perspective, support for Greece is intended to act as check to Turkey's aggressive approach, particularly in the Eastern Mediterranean. Diplomatic relations between UAE and Turkey

are at an all-time low with both supporting the opposite sides in Egypt, in the Qatar crisis, Yemen conflict and establishment of diplomatic ties with Israel. For its part, Greece views the UAE as an important ally in balancing Turkey which has continually violated Greek territorial waters and airspace.

China to Boost Funding for UNPK Mission in West Africa

China has announced its intention to enhance contributions of funds and troops to United Nations (UN) peacekeeping missions in the Sahel region of West Africa. The Chinese Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN informed the Security Council that his country plans to allocate Yuan 300 million (USD 45.7 million) to the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel, which is a security and counter-terrorism initiative covering Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger. As on date, China is the second largest contributor to the UN peacekeeping budget with a total contribution of about USD 6 billion.



*Chinese peacekeepers interacting with South Sudan natives.
Source: China.org.cn*

China has steadily expanded its participation in UN peacekeeping operations over the last 20 years, viewing it as an important tool in its military diplomacy kit. Africa has been the principal destination for China's peacekeeping troops for the obvious reason that the continent has continued to be wracked by a series of inter-state conflicts, civil wars, and even regime collapse. But what has driven the Chinese interest in UN peacekeeping operations in Africa

is the continent's role as an abundant source of oil and essential raw materials. A particular example that stands out in this regard is China's keen participation in the peacekeeping mission in oil-rich South Sudan.

China's increasing participation in UN peacekeeping operations is also driven by the objective guiding its military diplomacy; namely, the propagation of China's image as a responsible state that is rising peacefully and contributing to the construction of a harmonious world order.