

US signs Defence Agreement with Maldives

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India and the US are committed to a free and open Indo-Pacific that promotes the security and prosperity of all nations in the region. The increased presence of China in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is a cause of concern. In this context, the significance of this new agreement needs to be understood.

In news: US recently signed a Defence Agreement with Maldives.

Placing it in syllabus: Foreign relations

Dimensions

1. Provisions of the agreement
2. Importance of the agreement
3. Why is India supporting it?

Content:

Provisions of the agreement:

- The United States and the Indian Ocean island of the Maldives have concluded a defense agreement.
- The “**Framework for U.S. Department of Defense-Maldives Ministry of Defence and Security Relationship**” signifies an “*intent to deepen engagement and cooperation in support of maintaining peace and security in the Indian Ocean*”.
- It marks an important **step forward in the defense partnership**.
- Framework agreement involves **basic cooperation between the U.S. and Maldivian navies**, and mandates that the two sides schedule their first Defence and Security Dialogue mechanism talks.

Importance of the agreement:

- Both India and the U.S. have long watched the Maldives being drawn towards China with growing alarm recently due to China's BRI initiative.
- It is significant that the **Maldives has taken a strategic position, and signed this agreement with the U.S.** and not with China.
- It is reiterated that **India's role as a "net security provider" in the Indian Ocean remains intact** and is actually "complementary" to India's plans for the Indo-Pacific.



- Under the present government of President Ibrahim Solih, ties between New Delhi and Male have been extremely close.
- There is a confidence that the pact with the U.S. would in no way harm India's position in the islands.
- In 2019, the Maldives government had scrapped an agreement with China that had been signed by the previous government, to develop a "Joint Ocean Observation Station" on its western-most island of Makunudhoo.
- Now this move gives a boost to India's idea of **networked Indo-Pacific architecture.**

Why is India supporting it?

- With the election of Ibrahim Mohamed Solih as president in September 2018, India-Maldives relations have grown considerably warmer, as the **Maldives has reiterated its “India First policy” both in word and action.**
- Narendra Modi’s first visit after his 2nd time becoming PM was to the Maldives, where he inaugurated a coastal surveillance radar system designed to enhance India’s maritime domain awareness.
- India has long expressed discomfort with the idea of extra-regional powers meddling in its backyard.
- But this time, the US’ decision to deepen military ties with the Maldives was taken in consultation with India.
- New Delhi has considerably warmed up to partnering with others in the Indian Ocean, including powers like France.
- India’s stance is a result of **China’s push into the Indian Ocean.**

Mould your thought:

1. How the defence agreement between the Maldives and US is an initial step in countering the presence of China in the IOR?

Approach to the answer:

- Explain the provisions of the agreement
- Importance of the agreement (keep China factor in mind)
- Write the implications for India
- Conclusion