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France Renames Air Force as Air and Space Force

On 11 September, the French Air Force (*Armée de l'Air*) was renamed as the French Air and Space Force (*Armée de l'Air & de l'Espace*). This completes the process initiated by President Emmanuel Macron in July 2019 when he had announced the creation of a Space Command (*Commandement de l'Espace*) within the Air Force. Established in September 2019, the Space Command continues to implement France's military space strategy unveiled in 2019. The Space command has been tasked with framing and implementing military space policy, weapons programmes, and the coordination of military space capabilities used by various units under separate chains of command.



France had identified space as a major factor of power and strategic independence in the 1960s, especially for the development of its nuclear deterrent. French armed forces have been using space for strategic intelligence purposes and to support land, air and sea operations. France is carefully watching some states investing in counter-space capabilities like anti-satellite tests, proximity operations, cyber-

attacks and electromagnetic jamming. It regards such threats from kinetic and non-kinetic actions in space as a cause of concern to its 'strategic independence'. Against this backdrop, the Space Command took control of military earth observation satellites from the French space agency *Centre National D'études Spatiales* (CNES) during 2019.

The purpose of expanding the Air Force into an Aerospace Force is to consolidate various military space organisations and overcome policy fragmentation. It is expected to allow the merger of geographically and functionally dispersed military space facilities into one cohesive unit and establish a single chain of command for space operations. The new structure would be followed by an overhaul of the military space strategy. The renaming also recognises space as a domain in its own right, with the same status as the other domains of war.

Ukraine Updates National Security Strategy

President Volodymyr Zelenskyi approved Ukraine's new national security strategy (NSS) on September 14. The strategy outlines the key threats and challenges facing the country and envisions the steps needed to uphold national security, stability and prosperity. It puts a premium on maintaining independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity including the restoration of the country's

“internationally recognised boundaries” – an oblique reference to regaining control over Donetsk, Luhansk, Crimea and Sevastopol.



Given frayed relations with Russia, the new strategy, unsurprisingly, revolves around strengthening Ukraine’s comprehensive national power to withstand Russian pressure. In this context, a key change from the 2015 NSS is the explicit recognition of Russia as Ukraine’s principal threat. The Kremlin is viewed through the lens

of an “aggressor”, with Ukraine tackling a multi-dimensional “hybrid” challenge posed by Moscow. The new NSS is now anchored in the principles of “deterrence” and “resilience”, aimed at raising the cost of Russia’s actions.

The NSS emphasises “European and Euro-Atlantic integration” as a vital instrument for bridging the prevailing asymmetry with Russia. Ukraine’s “full membership” of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and European Union (EU) is seen as the Holy Grail. The NSS seeks to fast-track military reforms to achieve quicker “interoperability” with NATO members. The underlying message, therefore, is a distinct westward shift in Ukraine’s foreign policy orientation. Ukraine will also seek to reduce its energy dependence on Russia by diversifying its hydrocarbon imports.

The NSS seeks to leverage the global competitiveness of Ukraine’s military industrial complex (MIC) to strengthen Kiev’s ties with the rest of the world. It puts emphasis on not just the sale of weapons but also transfer of technology (ToT) through joint ventures (JVs).

By conveying the westward shift in Ukraine’s foreign policy, the 2020 NSS leaves the door open for renewed confrontation with Russia. The NSS’s clarion call for protecting the “rights, freedom and legitimate interests of Ukrainian citizens in Crimea”, a region now controlled by Russia, threatens to further up the ante.

Caucasus 2020 Multinational Exercise

The Russian armed forces culminate their annual military training calendar with a strategic level exercise to validate military preparedness of each of Russia’s military districts. This year, they conducted a large scale, week-long, land and maritime exercise named *Caucasus 2020* (*Kavkaz* in Russian) from 21 to 26 September in the Southern Astrakhan region of the Russian Federation. Previous exercises – *ZAPAD 2017*, *VOSTOK 2018* and *TSENTR 2019* – had validated the

military preparedness of Russia's Western, Eastern and Central military districts. *Caucasus 2020* exercise validated the military readiness of the Southern military district.



Source: Tass.com

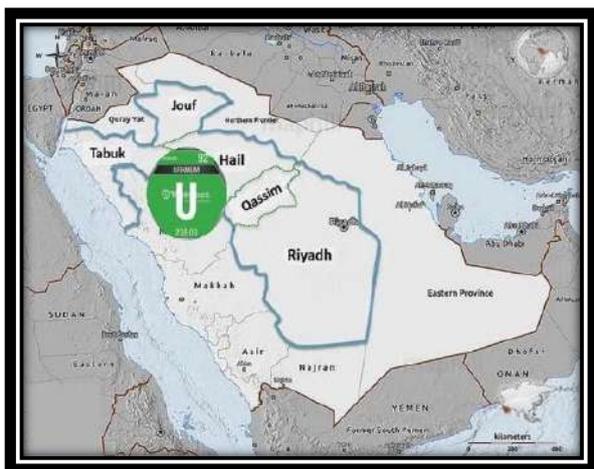
Caucasus 2020 was led by Chief of General Staff and First Deputy Defence Minister, General Valery Gerasimov. The exercise was divided into two parts: a planning and preparation phase, followed by an execution phase involving live firing from air, land and naval platforms. According to reports, the exercise involved about 80,000 Russian military personnel, 250 tanks, 450 armoured

personnel carriers and 200 Artillery Gun and Rocket systems, S400 missile systems, combat cruise missiles and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs). The drills practised included: testing of C2W systems leading to swifter fire power response, Electronic Warfare operations against enemy formations, training of air borne troops, augmenting vertical envelopment capabilities, and swift response to dynamic battlefield environs. The exercise also tested defence against cruise missiles and UAVs, deep penetration raids and night enabled operations. The Naval component of the exercise involved the Black Sea Fleet and the Caspian Flotilla.

International participation in the exercise was about 1000 military personnel from Armenia, Belarus, China, Myanmar and Pakistan. Azerbaijan, Indonesia, Iran, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Sri Lanka sent observers. India withdrew from the exercise due to COVID 19 pandemic concerns and associated logistics issues. Azerbaijan also withdrew possibly due to tensions over Russian military supplies to Armenia following the July 2020 Azerbaijan-Armenia military clashes. Armenia, however, participated and interestingly also Pakistan – the only country that does not recognise Armenia.

China and the Saudi Nuclear Programme

According to a report prepared by Chinese geologists for the Saudi government, Saudi Arabia may have enough mineable uranium ore reserves for the domestic production of nuclear fuel. The report is part of China's assistance under a bilateral nuclear energy cooperation agreement to map Saudi Arabia's uranium reserves. It has also been reported that China has also assisted Saudi Arabia construct a nuclear facility.



Source: debka.com

Even as Israel expressed concerns about Saudi Arabia moving towards the threshold of nuclear weapons capability, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) published a document stating it would help Saudi efforts to develop nuclear fuel for a peaceful programme. However, the IAEA also wants the Kingdom to adopt the Additional Protocol thus enabling the agency to monitor Saudi Arabia's nuclear programme more effectively.

The Saudi regime's choice of China for assisting it in the nuclear programme has also raised eyebrows, with some experts opining that it may have to do with the perception that China may be more accommodating if the programme were to later acquire a military character. Here, it is worth recalling that Saudi Arabia had purchased intermediate range ballistic missiles from China in the 1980s, and again in 2007.

Although Saudi Arabia asserts that its nascent nuclear programme is solely meant for peaceful purposes, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman famously declared in a 2018 interview that the Kingdom would be quick to obtain a nuclear bomb if Iran were to successfully develop its own nuclear weapon. There has also been speculation for many years that Saudi Arabia may acquire nuclear weapons from Pakistan.

Maldives-US Framework for Defense and Security Relationship

The Maldives and the United States of America (USA) signed the *Framework for U.S. Department of Defense-Maldives Ministry of Defence, Defense and Security Relationship* on September 10. It outlines "a range of bilateral activities, including senior-level dialogues, discussions, engagements and opportunities in areas such as maritime domain awareness, natural disasters and humanitarian relief operations." The Framework holds significance against the backdrop of the persistent threats of piracy, terrorism and illicit trafficking in the Indian Ocean Region.



Source: Miadhu Daily

During the signing ceremony in Philadelphia, the two countries reiterated their commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific. The US Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense and the Maldives Minister of Defence have agreed to work towards scheduling the first Defense and Security Dialogue between the two countries. The Framework is likely to result in

deeper bilateral engagement and cooperation in support of peace and security in the Indian Ocean.

The framework agreement comes seven years after the United States had proposed a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) to the Maldives. News of the SOFA proposal had caused an uproar in the Maldives and raised concerns about US warships and aircraft gaining access to Maldivian territorial waters. The US interest in concluding a SOFA with the Maldives appears to have been triggered by concerns that its lease on Diego Garcia may not get extended. While the Maldives government led by President Yameen did not conclude the SOFA, it facilitated the expansion of China's economic footprint in the country. At the same time, the Yameen government also downgraded the relationship with India, raising concerns in both Delhi and Washington. Against this backdrop, the latest US-Maldives security framework is a welcome step on the road to a free and open Indo-Pacific.