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# Strategic Digest

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**New Maritime Strategy of the US Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard**

**Japan to build two Aegis-equipped Guided Missile Destroyers**

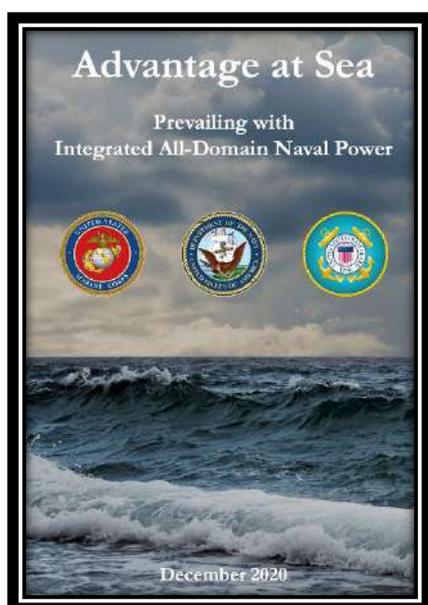
**China Issues New White Paper on Energy Security**

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## New Maritime Strategy of the US Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard

On 20 December 2020, the US Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard released a maritime strategy entitled *Advantage at Sea: Prevailing with Integrated All-Domain Naval Power*. In tune with other recent policy documents, the strategy designates China as the strategic competitor and Russia as the secondary competitor.

This is the third iteration of this joint maritime strategy document. The 2007 edition had highlighted challenges flowing from regional conflicts and non-traditional security threats. The 2015 revision depicted China's naval expansion as presenting both "opportunities and challenges". In contrast, the 2020 version recognises China and Russia "determined rivals" and asserts that "the United States can no longer presume unfettered access to the world's oceans in times of conflict".



Through a simple but powerful graph, *Advantage at Sea* highlights the current numerical superiority of Chinese naval forces including the PLA Navy, China Coast Guard and the People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia. And it acknowledges that whereas Chinese and Russian naval forces remain concentrated in areas adjoining their respective coasts, US resources are scattered around the globe.

This state of affairs, according to the strategy, calls for the setting of priorities to manage risk. US naval forces need to be present near potential scenes of action beforehand to deter aggression. At the same time, cooperation needs to be deepened with alliances and partners in order to generate "integrated all-domain naval power". Given the growing challenges to unhindered access for US naval forces, the strategy has placed renewed emphasis on controlling the seas to both ensure freedom of manoeuvre for own forces and thwart access to adversaries.

The Tri-service Maritime Strategy sketches the top priorities for force modernization, including a new class of nuclear-powered ballistic-missile submarines at the upper end and a new flotilla of light surface combatants and amphibious transports at the lower end, along with an array of unmanned capabilities. It also suggests dispersal of combat power among a larger number of smaller and more affordable vessels, thus making the fleet more resilient in the face of enemy action. The strategy also contemplates using seagoing forces in concert with ground forces to deny adversaries control of the sea and exert it on behalf of the United States and its allies.

## Japan to build two Aegis-equipped Guided Missile Destroyers

In December 2020, Japan's Ministry of Defense confirmed the decision to build two new Aegis-equipped guided missile destroyers in place of the scrapped Aegis Ashore ballistic missile defence system. With this, the Maritime Self-Defense Force will increase the number of its Aegis ships to ten, thus boosting its capacity to defend against Chinese and North Korean missile threats.

Japan cancelled the Aegis Ashore system in June 2020 due to increasing cost, technical challenges, stretched timelines and domestic politics. The country had opted for the Aegis Ashore in June 2017 in order to augment its ballistic missile defence capability.



Maya class Aegis Destroyer  
Source: Japantimes.co.jp

The decision to build the two new Aegis-equipped destroyers is the most feasible of the three choices considered. The other two options were: using big private sector merchant vessels as BMD platforms, and constructing offshore structures like oil rigs to host these systems.

Reports suggest that the costs of the two new vessels will be around US\$4.8 billion. In addition, Japan has decided to

develop upgraded Type-12 surface-to-ship guided missiles, and pursue the procurement and R&D of stand-off missiles in order to bolster the capacity to defend the country including remote islands.

December also saw Japan approving a defence budget of ¥5.34 trillion (US\$51.7 billion) for fiscal 2021. A key element in the defence budget is the allocation of ¥119.1 billion for space including research on the use of optical telescopes to detect hypersonic weapons. The budget has provided ¥30.1 billion for setting up a Self-Defense Force unit and a separate team to shield defence enterprises from cyber-attacks. Another important provision in the budget is ¥400 million for testing 5G technology. Japan has also allotted ¥57.6 billion for the development of the next-generation fighter jet, and in addition provided ¥15.5 billion for related research.

## China Issues New White Paper on Energy Security

In December 2020, China issued a White Paper on energy security, titled *Energy in China's New Era*. The document deliberates on China's vision of energy security with reference to improving its energy consumption structure, diversifying supplies, upgrading technologies, promoting faster growth of the sector, fostering global cooperation, and the guiding philosophies for policy making.



Source: english.cctv.com

The White Paper highlights the importance of promoting energy conservation and developing a low-carbon transportation system to enhance efficient energy consumption in an urbanising environment. Identifying renewable energy, nuclear power and non-fossil energy as sources of diversified

energy supply, it emphasises the importance of leveraging digital technology, big data and artificial intelligence to enhance clean and efficient energy exploration and exploitation.

The White Paper calls for the establishment of “a unified and open market with orderly competition” and a market determined price mechanism. And it showcases the Belt and Road Initiative as an endeavour that promotes “green and sustainable energy development” and improves “energy infrastructure connectivity”.

Energy security has been at the centre of China's geo-economic and geo-strategic understanding. The security of sea lanes and finding alternative land routes to the energy rich West Asia have emerged as defining features of its national security strategy. In this backdrop, the White Paper outlines China's vision for energy security in the coming era.

## Gulf Cooperation Council Restores Unity

The crisis in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) was resolved at the 41<sup>st</sup> Annual Summit held at Al-Ula in Saudi Arabia on 5 January 2021. With the Emir of Qatar attending the summit, the members of the grouping agreed to work as a single,

unified economic and political group for achieving security, peace and stability in the region. Saudi Arabia and Qatar announced the opening of their air space, land and sea borders, which were closed in the wake of the announcement of boycott of Qatar in June 2017. All countries have also resumed full diplomatic relations. The United States and Kuwait played a key role in bringing the estranged members of the GCC together.



GCC leaders at At-Ula  
Source: Aljazeera.com

Emphasising the principle of collective security against emerging challenges, the Al-Ula Declaration calls for further integrating the militaries of member countries under the supervision of the Joint Defense Council, the Supreme Military Committee, and the unified military leadership of the GCC. The Declaration has also highlighted the importance of strengthening the GCC's regional and international role by unifying policy and developing

strategic partnerships between the GCC and other states, groups, regional organisations, and international organisations.

Highlighting the importance of deepening economic integration, the Al-Ula Declaration called for completing the requirements for the Gulf Customs Union and the Common Gulf Market. The requirements include: providing GCC citizens the freedom to work, move, relocate and invest in all member states, ensuring them equal access to education and health care, constructing a regional railway network, and creating food and water security systems. Further, given that the summit occurred in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Declaration also called for establishing the Gulf Center for Disease Prevention and Control to coordinate efforts in combating COVID-19 and other epidemics.

The reconciliation among members of the GCC is a positive step in restoring the unity of the organisation. However, the issues that led to estrangement between Qatar and the other members remain unresolved. In particular, Qatar's relationships with Iran, Turkey and the Muslim Brotherhood, which Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates frown upon, is likely to remain a key challenge to the GCC's unity of purpose.