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USA-Maldives Framework on Defense and Security Relationship

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Why in News

Recently, a **Framework on Defense and Security Relationship** has been signed between the **USA and the Maldives**.

The move is seen as consistent with the growing alignment of the USA and Indian interests in the **Indian Ocean Region** (IOR) and **Indo-Pacific**.

Key Points

- The Framework intends to **deepen engagement and cooperation in support of maintaining peace and security in the Indian Ocean**.
- It marks an important step forward in the defence partnership between the USA and the Maldives, where **both of them agreed to reiterate their commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific** that promotes the security and prosperity of all nations in the region.
- The Framework **outlines a range of bilateral activities**, including senior-level dialogues, engagements etc. in areas such as **maritime domain awareness, natural disasters and humanitarian relief operations**.



Significance for India

- **India has not officially responded** to the announcement of the framework **yet**.
- This announcement can be seen as a **timely signal to China**, particularly when Indian and Chinese soldiers are locked in a **stand-off at the Line of Actual Control (LAC)** in Ladakh.
 - The Chinese presence and influence in the IOR have been a **constant source of worry** for India.
 - **India has taken steps to strengthen its strategic presence** in both the IOR and Indo-Pacific.
 - The **Quad**, a grouping that brings together the **USA, Japan, India and Australia**, with the apparent but unstated aim of **containing China** in the region, is also part of this process.
 - **Malabar Exercise** to strengthen the shared objective of a free, open and prosperous Indo-Pacific.
 - **Track 1.5 dialogue** between **India, France and Australia** to identify security challenges and sustainability issues in the Indo Pacific.
 - **Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement** between India and Japan which allows armed forces of both sides to coordinate closely in services and supplies.
- The framework has the **potential to blunt the security aspects of cooperation between China and the Maldives**, even if economic co-operation continues.

In 2017, the Maldives signed up to **China's Belt and Road initiative**. It is a part of the **Maritime Silk Route**.

- Given India-USA ties, India sees the pact as useful also because **India's own direct involvement in Maldivian security matters tends to be viewed with suspicion** domestically.

The framework can **provide an indirect route** to India if needed.

Source: IE