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Encircling China: US to sign military agreement with Australia after Philippines deal

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US Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel is slated to add his autograph to the deal on Tuesday this week, [AFP](#) reported, in turn authorizing for Marine and Air Force personnel to soon start rotational deployments in the Australian city of Darwin.

*"[T]omorrow we'll sign a force posture agreement that incorporates status of forces agreement that was signed in 1963 when we had a naval communication station at Exmouth on the northwest shore off of Western Australia,"* Australian Defense Minister David Johnston said at a joint press conference held on Monday with his American counterpart, according to a [transcript](#) provided by the Pentagon.

*"So, pursuant to the force posture agreement, approximately two-and-a half thousand US defense force personnel will come to, primarily, the Northern Territory to exercise on the vast open commonwealth exercise grounds -- military exercise grounds that we have in the Northern Territory,"* Johnston added.

Around 1,200 US troops have long been conducting drills in the Northern Territory during half of the calendar year, Johnston added, but the inking of a new agreement will ensure that more than double that number will be properly accommodated during the course of the next quarter-century.

*"The agreement that we'll sign tomorrow has a term of 25 years. And you know, it -- as I say, just nothing more or less than a win-win for both of us,"* said Johnston.

*"They'll interoperate with Australia. They'll do things that they want to do, go through exercise activities that are important to them," he said. "We'll assist them, we'll provide, obviously, hospitality. Can I tell you the Darwin Chamber of Commerce is elated with 2,500 hungry Marines in their city?"*

On his part, Sec. Hagel said he *"very much appreciate[s] the opportunity to renew our friendship and be together again,"* and will expand the United States' regional cooperation the Asia-Pacific, *"from engagement with ASEAN [the Association of Southeast Asian Nations] to the trilateral cooperation that we have been working on with Japan."*

*"We have our own bilateral relationships with Japan. But this enhances and broadens that bilateral relationship we each have with Japan into a trilateral relationship,"* Hagel said.

Hagel and Johnston will be joined at Tuesday's signing ceremony by Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop and her American counterpart, US Secretary of State John Kerry, who already spoke of America's interest in the Asia-Pacific region earlier in the week during the ASEAN Regional Forum in Myanmar. Sec. Kerry's remarks concerning Beijing's handling of a territorial dispute in the South China Sea at that meeting were met with scorn, however, as RT [reported](#) earlier on Monday.

*"Countries out of the region can reasonably voice their concern, but we disagree with them for coming to the region finger-pointing,"* Wang Yi, China's foreign minister, said this week reportedly of the United States' interest in the South China Sea dispute.

In Sydney on Monday, Sec. Hagel said *"It's important also, that document, to emphasizing and supporting America's rebalance to the Asia-Pacific in doing what we can to assure our own interests, as well as the interests of Australia and other nations in the Asia-Pacific, to sustain a peaceful and stable order throughout Asia-Pacific."*

Tuesday's signing will come barely three months after US President Barack Obama signed a similar agreement in Manila ensuring that US troops will be able to conduct exercises in the Philippines for the next 10 years. *"The Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement serves as recognition that there is even more we can do together to support the alliance and promote peace and security in the region,"* US Ambassador to the Philippines Philip S. Goldberg [said](#) at the time.