
JAPAN, FRANCE TO UNVEIL ROAD MAP FOR COOPERATION AMID CHINA'S RISE

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Japan and France are planning to unveil a five-year road map in late June that deepens cooperation in areas ranging from maritime security to infrastructure assistance amid China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific region, government sources said Monday.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and French President Emmanuel Macron are expected to announce the road map through 2023 when they meet in Tokyo during the French leaders official visit to Japan from June 26, the sources said. Macron is scheduled to attend the two-day Group of 20 summit in Osaka, which starts June 28.

Under the road map, Japan and France would deepen defense cooperation, assist developing nations in improving infrastructure and jointly cope with marine plastic waste.

The two countries are also looking at cooperation in space and cyberspace, seen as new frontiers in warfare and defense, details of which may be included in the document, according to the sources.

Japan views France as an important partner in realizing a free and open Indo-Pacific region. Tokyo is seeking to assist countries in building infrastructure to help them achieve economic growth and ensure debt sustainability.

France, for its part, has island territories in the Pacific such as New Caledonia and is cautious about Beijing's massive Belt and Road infrastructure initiative.

Some developing nations are struggling with excessive debt burdens after borrowing heavily from China under the plan seen as increasing its economic influence, critics say.

Tokyo and Paris are making arrangements to hold the first comprehensive maritime dialogue around this summer in France to tackle global challenges based on the road map, the sources said.

The governments have been working to finalize the five-year plan, which follows a similar one for 2013 through 2018, ahead of Macron's upcoming visit.

In recent years, Japan and France have strengthened security cooperation. An agreement to share defense and other supplies between the Self-Defense Forces and French armed forces will become effective this month.

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2019/06/18/national/politics-diplomacy/japan-france-unveil-road-map-cooperation-amid-chinas-rise/#.XQgmP7z7SuV>

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