

U.S. defense secretary to visit Japan

by UPI

WASHINGTON -- U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates is expected to make his first visit to Japan since taking office to discuss defense support issues. Gates is to travel to Tokyo to discuss Japan's continued support of its Maritime Self Defense Force's refueling operations supporting U.S. counter-terrorism efforts in Asia, including Afghanistan, the Kyodo news agency said Wednesday. The Japanese law detailing MSDF operations in the Indian Ocean expires Thursday, causing U.S. officials to express their frustrations. The Kyodo News Agency quoted an unnamed Pentagon official saying, "If you take away a refueling ship, then more of the other ships have to spend more time in ports -- you have less patrolling out at sea and more time in ports -- you have less flexibility in how you use your ships." Gates also is expected to discuss a request to Japanese officials to increase payments for utilities and water supplies at U.S. military bases in Japan. The increases are to embolden the U.S. military capacity in Asia amid escalating tensions with North Korea and China. It is unclear if talks will provide any significant measures before the end of the year.

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