

Malcolm Turnbull will visit China this week in his first time there as prime minister. The two-day trip, including Shanghai and Beijing, will juggle trade and political issues. ANU professor of strategic studies Hugh White tells Michelle Grattan that Turnbull will be primarily focused on the economic agenda.

“Turnbull is one of those who remain bullish about China. He thinks its economic prospects remain bright and he sees it as the principal source of economic opportunities for Australia over the next few years and indeed decades,” White says.

White believes Turnbull is downplaying the strategic challenges Australia faces in its relationship with China in an era in which US primacy will no longer remain uncontested.

“If we want to remain a military middle power in an Asian century, in which we can no longer assume that the Americans are going to be the dominant player, then we are going to have to spend a higher proportion of our GDP on defence than we have,” he says.

He suggests defence spending needs to rise to 3.5%-4% of GDP. At present it is just under 2%.

Michelle Grattan does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organization that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond the academic appointment above.

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