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# France's *Indo-Pacific Strategy*

## Summary



# *The Indo-Pacific:* a region with polarizing tensions and significant global issues

**T**he French strategy in the Indo-Pacific seeks to maintain an area that is open and inclusive, free of all forms of coercion and founded on multilateralism and the respect of international law.

The Indo-Pacific is an area seeing profound strategic changes. China's increasing power and territorial claims, as well as the global competition under way with the United States, are weakening the balance of power in the region. The context is also marked by transnational threats, proliferation crises, and security consequences due to climate change that are increasingly evident. The oceans are at the heart of the tensions, and securing shipping lanes and the freedom of navigation remain major issues. France seeks to preserve a rules-based international order, an approach that it shares with its main partners.

From an economic standpoint, the Indo-Pacific has been the new driver of global growth for the past two decades. The region demonstrates significant regional integration, and its economic vitality relies on a middle class that is mobile, connected, and increasingly urban. These markets offer great opportunities for French companies. The region's financing needs in terms of infrastructure are significant. The concentration of investments in the digital sector, and the proactive policies of States in favour of

research also make the Indo-Pacific an area that is on the cutting edge of innovation.

At the same time, the Indo-Pacific is at the heart of major global challenges. It is one of the global regions that is the most directly impacted by environmental issues and climate change. It is home to the richest and most fragile biodiversity reserves on the planet. A number of countries in this region are among the biggest emitters, alongside the States that are the most vulnerable to extreme climate phenomena. Needs in terms of healthcare are increasing, and combating infectious diseases is a major challenge.

Lastly, as part of its commitment to the rule of law, France works to support the protection of human rights in the Indo-Pacific region. •

# France and the Indo-Pacific, presence and influence

**W**ith its overseas departments and communities, France is a nation in its own right in the Indo-Pacific. These territories represent a population of 1.65 million people, and make France the second-largest economic exclusivity zone in the world (10.2 million km<sup>2</sup>). The protection of its citizens and its sovereign territory is one of the main missions of the French security and defence strategy in the Indo-Pacific. The role of the French territories is essential in regional cooperation, due to their strategic location, the size of their maritime domain and the resources that it contains, their role in ecological transition, and the existence of a very extensive network of agencies and research institutes.

The French State's network in the Indo-Pacific is dense, with a diplomatic and consular presence in 39 States. The French State agencies, including research bodies, are also very present. Furthermore, France also maintains a permanent military presence in the Indo-Pacific. These pre-positioned forces play a central role in implementing cooperation efforts with partner countries and also play a leading role in terms of evacuating French citizens and providing humanitarian aid during natural disasters. Furthermore, the regular deployment of ships and aircraft from continental France offers opportunities

for exchange with the main partner countries, including India, Australia, Japan, and the United States.

Commerce with the Indo-Pacific represents more than a third of French trade in goods outside of the EU, and it has grown by 49% in 10 years. The French instruments that provide support for export and development assistance are mobilized to meet needs in those areas. The total amount outstanding for funds from the AFD Group in Indo-Pacific countries was more than €9 billion in 2020, all sectors combined. In terms of credit insurance, the Indo-Pacific (excluding China) represented a total amount outstanding of almost €13 billion. Furthermore, the Indo-Pacific received a fifth of the global total of loans offered by the French Treasury from 2010 to 2020.

Lastly, the Indo-Pacific is an essential region for the development of French educational institutions, student mobility, and cooperation in research and innovation. Some 53,000 students are enrolled in 95 French educational institutions in the Indo-Pacific region and attract more and more foreign students. Students in Asia-Oceania represent 45% of global student mobility, and France hosts 50,000 of these students. In terms of research, in a very competitive environment, France

has a network of research bodies established across the region which have created solid partnerships and have renowned expertise. •

# France's partnerships in the Indo-Pacific

**F**rance's actions in the Indo-Pacific are built on large partnerships that it has developed with like-minded countries in the region, as well as with ASEAN, based on a shared vision of the issues and the solutions that need to be provided.

**With India**, the strengthening of the major areas of the strategic partnership has been in parallel with rapid progress in bilateral cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, including maritime security, renewable energy, and combating ocean pollution. Within the Indian Ocean regional organizations, such as the IORA and the IOC, the two countries work together to carry out joint actions.

**With Australia**, the strategic partnership is based on a very dense cooperation effort in security and defence. While Australia maintains close ties with the French communities in the Pacific, joint actions are strengthened in the region (fighting against illegal fishing, strengthening the response to natural disasters, and protecting the environment). Cooperation efforts were recently expanded to the Indian Ocean.

France also established a trilateral dialogue with India and Australia that covers three priority areas of joint action: maritime safety, management of marine resources and the environment, and the deepening of cooperation within multilateral forums.

**With Japan**, France developed an exceptional partnership which is specifically adapted to the Indo-Pacific. It identifies four priorities: maritime safety; climate, environment and biodiversity; quality infrastructure; and health. This roadmap results in joint military exercises and joint projects between our development agencies, including upgrading infrastructure and fostering climate change adaptation.

Given **ASEAN's** essential role in the Indo-Pacific, intensifying relations with it and its member countries is one of the priorities of the French strategy. In September 2020, France became a development partner for ASEAN, and cooperation is being strengthened in several areas of sustainable development, including global public goods. The AFD's actions in South-East Asia are substantial, with 170 projects carried out in the region between 2015 and 2020, and a total financial commitment of €3.7 billion. Cooperation with ASEAN highlights the establishment of French research institutes and agencies in South-East Asia. Furthermore, France has entered into close cooperation in defence with its ASEAN partners.

**In the Pacific**, France strengthened its commitment to facing the challenges that exist in this region. In this regard, the AFD's mandate was expanded in order for it to be

able to further develop its actions.

The French armed forces are regularly mobilized for maritime surveillance operations, or for rescue operations for victims of natural disasters, through the FRANZ mechanism. France also contributes substantially to the regional security architecture. Lastly, France and its territories are active within the regional organizations (Pacific Island Forum, Secretariat of the Pacific Community, and the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme).

**In the Indian Ocean**, France has developed a diversified economic footprint.

Pre-positioned forces carry out population support missions and contribute to training efforts for the benefit of neighbouring countries. In 2021-2022, France will hold the presidency of the Indian Ocean Commission, and works within this framework to favour synergies with the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), which it joined in December 2020. The French presidency of the IOC will strive to develop regional cooperation in the areas of maritime security, the environment, the economy, student mobility, and response to natural disasters. •

# France's objectives and actions in the Indo-Pacific

The implementation of the Indo-Pacific strategy involves concrete and diversified actions carried out in four large areas or “pillars”: security and defence; economy, connectivity, research, and innovation; multilateralism and the rule of law; and climate change, biodiversity, and sustainable management of oceans.

## *Pillar 1: Security and Defence*

### **Objectives:**

- ▶ Ensuring and defending the integrity and sovereignty of France, the protection of its citizens, its territories, and its EEZ.
- ▶ Contributing to the security of regional areas by promoting military and security cooperation.
- ▶ Preserving, alongside its partners, access to common areas in a context of strategic competition and increasingly restrictive military environments.
- ▶ Participating in the maintenance of strategic stability and military balances of power through international action based on multilateralism.
- ▶ Anticipating security risks brought about by climate change.

**Examples of action:** monitoring sovereign areas; organizing multilateral exercises; participating in rescue operations

for people and in fishing monitoring operations; affirming the respect of international law and the freedom of navigation; cooperating in sharing of maritime information; deepening of interoperability with partners; and cooperating on the issues of climate and environmental security.

## *Pillar 2: Economy, connectivity, research and innovation*

### **Objectives:**

- ▶ Ensuring diversification of the supply of strategic goods and reducing dependencies.
- ▶ Promoting existing international standards and making them prevail, in order to establish a fair competitive framework.
- ▶ Meeting needs in terms of connectivity and infrastructure.
- ▶ Supporting efforts of French companies in the Indo-Pacific region.
- ▶ Deepening research and innovation partnerships.

**Examples of actions:** entering into partnerships with regional countries to secure supply chains; implementing the G20 Principles for Quality Infrastructure Investment; making efforts on renewable energy infrastructure; accompanying French



companies and mobilizing “Team France”; strengthening cooperation efforts in research, particularly in the area of health.

### **Pillar 3: Multilateralism and the rule of law**

#### **Objectives:**

- ▶ Promoting multilateralism in countries in the Indo-Pacific region.
- ▶ Contributing to strengthening regional cooperation forums.
- ▶ Fostering strong involvement and better visibility of the European Union.
- ▶ Ensuring the central nature of the rule of law and the primacy of the law of the sea.

**Examples of actions:** working with regional countries in international organizations; supporting a multilateral response to the COVID-19 pandemic; enhancing the partnership with ASEAN and the regional organizations of the Indian Ocean; undertaking regional action in the Pacific in response to COVID-19; adopting an ambitious EU strategy for the Indo-Pacific; promoting the French model of ocean governance and maritime security.

### **Pillar 4: Climate change, biodiversity, sustainable management of oceans**

#### **Objectives:**

- ▶ Increasing partner involvement in the region in fighting climate change and in making progress on energy transition.
- ▶ Fostering strengthening of actions for biodiversity.
- ▶ Developing partnerships for ocean protection.
- ▶ Contributing to improving natural disaster response.
- ▶ Enhancing the use of the skills of our territories and regional cooperation on all of these issues.

**Examples of actions:** mobilizing countries in the region around ambitious climate objectives; making a specific effort in the area of solar energy; renewing the KIWA initiative and promoting the High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People; implementing partnerships with our main partners in the blue economy; building capacities for response to natural disasters; forming of regional partnerships with French research institutions established in the territories. •

# Strengthening the commitment of the European Union in the Indo-Pacific

**T**he EU is already very present in the Indo-Pacific region, including as an investor (the largest in the region), or as a partner in trade and development. This involvement should be strengthened in order to contribute to peace and stability, and to promote multilateralism based on the rule of law.

The EU is developing concrete sector cooperation projects with its partners. In the area of connectivity, a specific strategy, “Connect Europe and Asia”, was launched in 2018; in the area of security, the EU is active in the regional cooperation forums, and developing significant bilateral cooperation projects.

At the initiative of France and other Member States, an ambitious European strategy for the Indo-Pacific should be adopted before the end of 2021. The Council of the EU has identified several priorities:

- **strengthening cooperation efforts with partners in the region**, with mobilization of EU financial instruments, and the promotion of effective multilateralism;
- **the EU contributing to the political agenda of the international community concerning major global issues**;
- **the economic agenda**, with a focus on post-COVID recovery, the diversification of supply chains, and strengthening of trade relations;
- **developing security and defence partnerships**, including in the areas of maritime security and safety, cybercrime, and the fight against terrorism;
- **responding to connectivity needs** while complying with international norms and standards;
- **promoting collaboration in the areas of research, innovation, and digital technology**.

Lastly, in 2020, the partnership between the EU and ASEAN was raised to the level of a strategic partnership that is structured around five main priorities:

- **cooperating on public health**;
- **promoting rules-based trade** and respecting principles of sustainable development;
- **supporting rules-based sustainable connectivity**;
- **committing to effective multilateralism** and a rules-based international order;
- **security**, including on non-traditional issues. •



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