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INTRODUCTION

In the foreword of *France's Indo-Pacific Strategy*, Jean Yves Le Drian defines the Indo-Pacific as a region becoming “the world’s strategic centre of gravity”¹ and that a “considerable share of the balances of tomorrow’s world are today in play in the Indo-Pacific”. This extract outlines the pivotal significance of the Indo-Pacific, encapsulating the strategic challenges that lie ahead in the coming years.

Indeed, the Indo-Pacific has rapidly emerged as the dominant economic, political and strategic region shaping global affairs in the 21st century. The term Indo-Pacific is a relevantly new term but has made its place in today’s international political debate. It includes both geographical delimitations but mostly strategic and political ones. Geographically, the Indo-Pacific encompasses the region from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean, interconnecting the maritime space stretching from the west coast of the United States to the eastern shores of Africa and from Japan down to Australia. The Indo-Pacific anchors the world’s most dynamic economies, vital trade routes, and populous nations. However, the Indo-Pacific is a term that we can understand more geopolitically than geographically. Geopolitically, the term underpins an ideological vision. Japan and India were the initial proponents of the term Indo-Pacific during the 2010s. It has evolved and become part of official discussions starting in 2017 when it was promoted by the major actors of the region the United States (US), Australia, India, and Japan. It was then followed by Asian and European nations. The concept of the Indo-Pacific has emerged as an ideological battleground and mirrors the transformation of the Asian region from a political-economic perspective to a strategic construct. Indeed, even if not presented as such, the Indo-Pacific concept reflects geopolitical visions agreeing on the fact that China is becoming increasingly powerful. It is often perceived as an ideological concept aimed at restraining China's expansionism and its increasing influence in the region. China has been in the past decade growing economically, politically and militarily. Economically through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), it invests in infrastructure projects in the region to foster connectivity but also economic dependence. Politically, it plays an increasingly important role on the international political scene, seeking to build partnerships that align with its interests. Militarily, it has bolstered its military capabilities and adopts an assertive posture in the region notably by

¹ Ministère de l’Europe et des Affaires étrangères (2022), *La stratégie de la France dans l’Indopacifique* [France’s Indo-Pacific Strategy].

raising security concerns around disputed territories. Therefore, the Chinese threat to regional security is a key factor in understanding the dynamics in the Indo-Pacific. Regarding that fact, the Indo-Pacific fosters two different visions. The first one is focused on promoting an inclusive space, upholding multilateralism, a safe maritime space and freedom of navigation while maintaining a pragmatic dialogue with China. The second one, led by the US, is seeing the Indo-Pacific as an approach to oppose economically, politically and militarily the Chinese power. The Indo-Pacific is a relevant theatre to the Sino-American dispute. Considering those two visions, every country involved in the region tries to position its strategy accordingly.

Our analysis will focus on two actors in the Indo-Pacific, Japan and France. Firstly, Japan is a prominent player in the region. As the world's third-largest economy, Japan already has an essential economic weight that enables it to play an important part in the region. Moreover, it has not only been among the first to conceptualise the term Indo-Pacific (*Indo-Pacific*) in 2017 but has also played a pivotal role in its promotion. Japan's vision of the Indo-Pacific is articulated around its "Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy" (FOIP) which seeks to strengthen economic and security cooperation among states in the region. The key principles rely on economic connectivity, the protection of the rule of law and freedom of navigation, and a commitment to peace and stability in the region². Japan's strategy in the Indo-Pacific has sought to "expand its economic, military and diplomatic presence in order to gain greater energy security and implicitly restrain China"³. Japan is therefore a key component when looking into the Indo-Pacific. Japan has been very wary of China's expanding presence which is considered a growing threat to Japanese interests. Japan, with the US as its prominent ally, has adopted a stance toward China that is assertive but somewhat tempered due to its economic interdependence with China. Moreover, France is also a significant component of the Indo-Pacific. Since President Macron's founding speech in Australia in 2018, France has established itself as a legitimate and credible power in the region. Drawing on its sovereign presence, through its *DOM-TOM* (Overseas Departments and Territories)⁴ located in the Indian and Pacific Oceans, France affirms itself as an Indo-Pacific power. France maintains a non-confrontational position in the Indo-Pacific, even if the region experiences a growing trend toward conflict and polarisation. It seeks to promote an inclusive Indo-Pacific, based on multilateralism, the rule of law, and sustainable development. The French engagement in the Indo-Pacific is driven by considerations of sovereignty but also a pursuit of power and

² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2023), *Free and Open Indo-Pacific Basic Thinking Materia*.

³ Scott, D. (2019), "The Geoeconomics and Geopolitics of Japan's 'Indo-Pacific' Strategy", *Journal of Asian Studies*, 6 (2), pp. 136-161.

⁴ Throughout this analysis, France's DOM-TOM, *Départements et Territoires d'Outre-Mer*, will be referred as "overseas territories".

influence. Indeed, as the security and defence challenges shift towards the Indo-Pacific, France seeks to establish itself in this growing theatre of geopolitical challenges. As we will investigate further, France's external policy is closely linked to their position as a power globally. Moreover, France adopts a non-confrontational stance vis a vis China. It acknowledges China's growing influence but wants to embrace a posture of inclusivity, prioritising openness to negotiations and dialogue without the exclusion of any party. France is of course wary of China's growing military capabilities, its desire to appropriate resources and its geostrategic plans, but it does not invest itself in polarising frameworks. However, it fosters numerous flourishing partnerships in the region such as the one with Japan. Japan is one of France's closest partners in the region. Their bilateral relationship was established in 1995 and was elevated in 2013 to the rank of "exceptional partnership". Both countries regularly meet and exchange on various domains of interest, from security concerns to economic and environmental issues. Their partnership in the Indo-Pacific is characterised by a close military partnership, commitment to multilateralism, diplomatic initiatives and the pursuit of common objectives and visions for the region. Therefore, this paper seeks to provide an academic evaluation and analysis of France's foreign policy in the Indo-Pacific, with a specific focus on the role of its key partner in the region, Japan. Our work will investigate the following research question,

Does France leverage its strategic partnership with Japan to strengthen its position as a power in the Indo-Pacific?

The aim of this work is to investigate the relationship between France and its partners in the Indo-Pacific. By taking the relationship with Japan as a case study, we explore the ways in which France leverages its partnership to achieve its goal of assuming a more prominent role in the region. We further examine whether this partnership has indeed contributed to strengthening France's position as a power in the Indo-Pacific. Our hypotheses are twofold, and both respond positively to the question. The first hypothesis suggests that Japan, as a prominent security and military partner in the region, permits France to enhance its military capabilities and therefore strengthens its position as a power. The second hypothesis suggests that Japan's key position in the region benefits the perception of France amongst other actors through multilateralism, joint initiatives and diplomatic means. This could ultimately reinforce the narrative of France as a significant power in the region.

In order to respond to our research question and test our hypotheses, we will base our analysis on data that we have collected and analysed according to our research question. Our data collection method includes individual interviews, that we have conducted with six different

people, all actors or experts in the French strategy to the Indo-Pacific. This qualitative method allows us to investigate particular features of the French strategy and Japan's role, while also leaving room for the exploration of other topics and angles. To verify our hypotheses, we will mainly base our analysis on our interviews but also combine our results with the study of public data. This includes official documents, speeches and press releases that are useful to balance and support our arguments.

In order to correctly analyse our data and narrow the approach to our subject, we will integrate our analysis into a broader theoretical framework. Indeed, a theoretical framework is essential to any research. It is a structured foundation of existing theories and concepts that provides a context for our research and the interpretation of our data collection. We will encompass our analysis within two International Relations (IR) theories. To correctly envision our subject, we will base our analysis on a mixed approach of liberal realism⁵. This mixed approach relies on a realism base, more specifically neorealism, emphasising the central role of the state, driven by self-interest, survival and security. It is combined with the objectives of liberalism, putting forward the importance of cooperation and the promotion of shared values. This mixed approach framework is essential to our analysis. The realist perspective emphasises the driving aspects of national interests, security, and power in France's Indo-Pacific strategy. Meanwhile, the principle of cooperation, central to liberalism, is also crucial in examining Japan's role and the importance of partnerships in France's Indo-Pacific strategy.

For the purpose of our analysis, we will focus on the time period from 2018 to 2023. We consider President Macron's speech in 2018 at Garden Island naval base in Australia as the launch of France's Indo-Pacific strategy. We will mark off our analysis to today, September 2023, in order to include every event in a moving and evolving strategy. Moreover, to frame our analysis and its content, we must underline that this work aims solely at investigating the French point of view of our research question. This work does not aim at encompassing the Japanese foreign policy and its intricacies. Even if it would be extremely insightful, considering incorporating different opinions would greatly enrich the quality of the analysis, including a Japanese point of view would be too broad a framework. Our research will aim to understand the French perspective on our research question.

The main objective of this work is to comprehend better the French strategy in the Indo-Pacific. While this topic and geographic area are of paramount importance and contemporary significance, we note that the term 'Indo-Pacific' is relatively recent, which means that the body of literature is still evolving. We find an increasing amount of academic papers written on the

⁵ Jeangène Vilmer, J. (2020), "Chapitre VII. Les approches mixtes", *Théories des relations internationales*, PUF, pp. 101-120.

United States, Australian, or Japanese Indo-Pacific strategies, asserting different viewpoints and opinions. However, while there are numerous French scholars addressing the subject, there remain areas of research on the French strategy. In addition to that, the French external policy in the Indo-Pacific is constantly evolving which underscores the need for increased research and investment in this specific region. Also, academic research specifically centred on the role of Japan within the French strategy is even scarcer. Therefore, the aim of this analysis is to contribute to the growing literature on the French strategy and attempt to provide valuable insight into the role of Japan, an underexplored aspect of the field.

In order to answer our research question and investigate Japan's role in the French strategy, this work will be organised into five different chapters, divided into two sections. The first section will allow us to clearly grasp the theoretical framework of our work and contextualise the main challenges in the Indo-Pacific. The first chapter will touch upon the theoretical framework, key concepts, the state of the art and detail our data collection methodology. The second chapter will focus on contextualising the region, the presence of France in the Indo-Pacific and its strategy. This first section serves as a contextual and theoretical foundation for further analysis of our research.

Moreover, the second section will assess and operationalise our hypotheses. The third and fourth chapters will conduct respective analyses of our two hypotheses, drawing on our interviews and additional public data. We will dive firstly into Japan as a military partner for France as part of our first hypothesis. Secondly, we will investigate the diplomatic relationship between the two countries focusing on multilateralism, addressing our second hypothesis. However, our interviews showed that this last point was minor, and they rather revealed a shift in the French strategy, which we will investigate along with its impact on the France-Japan partnership. Lastly, in the fifth chapter, we will explore the limits and constraints of the partnership, shedding light on why Japan's role in the French strategy remains somewhat limited. This final aspect seems paramount in drawing a comprehensive conclusion to our research.

SECTION 1 : THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND CONTEXTUALISATION OF THE RESEARCH

CHAPTER 1: Theoretical framework and methodology

1.1 Theoretical framework

This study aims to understand the role of Japan in the French strategy in the Indo-Pacific. To conduct our analysis efficiently, we will develop our hypothesis and conduct our study within a theoretical framework. The theoretical framework most appropriate for our subject is combining two preeminent theories of International Relations (IR)⁶, neorealism and liberalism, both combining essential aspects to grasp the challenges of our study. This work will be based on the mixed approach of liberal realism⁷, or more specifically the “neo-neo synthesis”. While the neo-neo synthesis is still at the heart of a debate⁸ in the International Relations field, we just want to put forward a mixed approach between realism and liberalism. This mixed approach combines the realism base and the objectives of liberalism. This study is embedded in a mixed approach when it takes into consideration the postulates of realism, states as central actors seeking to maximise their national interests, and the objectives of liberalism, cooperation between states. We will firstly look into both theories separately.

Realism

Realism is a relevant point of view to understand this work, considering the analysis explores the attitudes of states in an area prone to tensions and disputes. In this context, the realist point of view is relevant because war is a possibility and states are defending their own interests. In order to be more accurate, we will focus on the theoretical framework of neorealism, to place our hypothesis and analysis of data collection. Neorealism is a theory in the field of IR, developed by Kenneth Waltz. This theory is based on the scholar’s most influential work *Theory of International Politics*⁹ published in 1979. Also called structural realism, neorealism is a direct response to classical realism. Both put the state at the centre of their theory, considering it as the main agent in international relations. States are engaged in protecting themselves, and their territorial borders, through the accumulation of power and capacity, mostly military. This particular point will resonate in our analysis when studying the French

⁶The term ‘International Relations’ (IR) here refers to the academic discipline of international relations, whereas the term ‘international relations’ refers to inter-state relations.

⁷ Jeangène Vilmer, J. (2020), “Chapitre VII. Les approches mixtes”, *Théories des relations internationales*, PUF, pp. 101-120.

⁸Baldwin, D. (1993), *Neorealism and Neoliberalism: The Contemporary Debate*, Columbia University Press.

⁹ Waltz, K. N. (1979), *Theory of international politics*, 1st ed, McGraw-Hill.

strategy. Neorealism distinguishes itself from classical realism by the fact that it is incorporated within an anarchic international system. It focuses, not on the internal struggles of the state, but rather on the structural constraints of the environment in which states interact. Our analysis refers rather on the structural constraints of the Indo-Pacific and the challenges, which we will deepen further, rather than the internal struggles of each state. The constraints of an environment are essential to grasp the challenges that states are facing. Moreover, neorealism asserts that states are rational actors and drive their decisions in the pursuit of security and survival, in an environment without central authority. The theorisation of neorealism puts the emphasis on “security rather than power as the concern of the units (states) of the international system”¹⁰. This last aspect is particularly relevant for our analysis since it will incorporate the means used by France to expand its security in the Indo-Pacific. Moreover, within the neorealist framework, we focus more precisely on defensive neorealism, argued by Waltz and Gilpin, enhancing states’ rationality and the elaboration of defensive strategies. At the core of this theory, we find the concepts of “balance of power” and “security dilemma” as recurring phenomena in the international system. These concepts can be appended to the Indo-Pacific, a region where states seek to maintain a balance of power, without a hegemon, to ensure their security. The security dilemma, a “phenomenon where a state's efforts to enhance its security can inadvertently lead to heightened insecurity for other states”¹¹, is also applicable to the growing tensions and security that the Indo-Pacific has fostered. Moreover, our analysis focuses on the role of another state, Japan, in France’s strategy. Therefore, we also have to take into consideration the concept of cooperation. Cooperation among states is viewed by neorealists through a lens of strategic behaviour driven by self-interest and survival. Limited forms of cooperation are conceivable for neorealists and cooperation is rational only if it serves the state’s own interests and strategies. The limited space allocated to cooperation in the realist theory is the reason we have chosen a mixed approach. While the aspects of power and security are connected to this study, the aspects of cooperation and multilateralism are also crucial elements to consider.

Liberalism

Therefore, the second component of our mixed approach focuses on the theory of liberalism, as we aim to integrate its guidelines as state objectives, alongside an established foundation of

¹⁰Jeandesboz J. (2021), “Relations Internationales” [notes provided in the course POLI-D408], Université Libre de Bruxelles.

¹¹ Lopez Lucia E. (2022), “Théories de la Sécurité” [notes provided in the course POLI-D410], Université Libre de Bruxelles.

realism principles. Liberalism is another prominent theory in International Relations, finding its roots in many scholars such as Kant with its work *Perpetual Peace*¹². It puts forward the potential of cooperation and institutions in the international system. We will more specifically put forward the principles of neoliberalism to assess correctly our work. Neoliberalism was developed by R. Keohane¹³, formulated as a response to neorealists and their stance on impossible interstate cooperation. Neoliberalism emphasises the potential for cooperation among states. Unlike traditional realist theories, neoliberalism acknowledges that states can achieve the pursuit of power and security by engaging in cooperative efforts to achieve mutual benefits¹⁴. States are rational actors and seek to maximize gains, just like neorealists, but the neoliberals will include cooperation with other states as a means to achieve their goal. The term cooperation describes a situation in which the “actions of each state are brought into line through a process of negotiation called ‘policy coordination’”¹⁵.

This mixed approach framework is essential to our analysis. Kai He underlined in an insightful article “the Three Faces of the Indo-Pacific”¹⁶ putting forward notably the different dynamics in the region through International Relations theories of realism and liberalism. He put forward that the realist perspective entails a strategy of balancing in response to China's increasing influence, and liberalism aims to facilitate cooperation among states. Throughout our analysis, the realist perspective is essential to understand France's strategy in the Indo-Pacific, focusing on its national interests and pursuing a strategy to ensure its security and maintain power. Moreover, the principle of cooperation at the centre of neoliberalism is equally essential in this analysis considering we will be studying Japan's role in France's Indo-Pacific strategy. The root of this work lies in the principles of interstate cooperation to ensure a state's security. Keohane and Nye actually considered realism and liberalism to be complementary to one another “Rather than viewing realist theory as an alternative to liberal ‘interdependence theory’, we regarded the two as necessary complements to one another”¹⁷.

¹² Kant, I. (1795), *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch*.

¹³ Keohane R. (1984), *After hegemony: Cooperation and discord in the world political economy*, Princeton University Press.

¹⁴ Battistella, D. (2015), “Chapitre 12: La coopération”, *Théories des relations internationales*, Presses de Sciences Po, pp. 423-454.

¹⁵ Jeandesboz J. (2021), “Relations Internationales” [notes provided in the course POLI-D408], Université Libre de Bruxelles.

¹⁶ He K. (2018), “Three Faces of the Indo-Pacific: Understanding the “Indo-Pacific” from an IR Theory Perspective”, *East Asia*, 35.

¹⁷Keohane, R., & Nye, J. (2012), *Power and Interdependence*, Boston, MA: Longman, pp.728.

1.2 State of the art and relevance of the work

The concept of Indo-Pacific being relevantly recent, the literature is still in its early stages. The region was not left unstudied, multiple scholars have been conducting research on the dynamics operating in Asia-Pacific. However, we have noticed that in the past years, the semantic shift from Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific is not senseless, and the French strategy in this region includes diverse objectives and dynamics compared to the Asia-Pacific. Therefore, our state of the art will solely include the literature regarding the Indo-Pacific. In order to acquire a global overview of the region, we can cite *From Asia-pacific to Indo-pacific : Diplomacy in a contested region*¹⁸ written by multiple authors, giving an insight into the semantic shift that operated in the diplomatic and academic field, providing an overview of the main actors and dynamics of the region. Its strength lies in the diverse expertise of the authors, each specializing in specific areas per chapter, collectively offering a comprehensive overview of the challenges at hand. To explore further security matters in the Indo-Pacific, we can focus on Rory Medcalf, a leading expert in the region, and notably on strategic interactions and security implications. *Indo-Pacific Empire: China, America and the contest for the world's pivotal region*¹⁹ maps out the past, present, and future of the region, focusing on the US-China relation and security aspects. The book takes on a definite realist point of view, focusing on the main role of states and military development across the region. While diving further into the subject, « L'espace indopacifique, un concept géopolitique à géométrie variable face aux rivalités de puissance »²⁰ in the scientific review *Géococonfluences*, gives a comprehensive overview of the concept of Indo-Pacific itself, how it emerged and which states endorsed it. It also glosses over the different alliances and national strategies in the region. Furthermore, in order to get an introduction to the French strategy in Indo-Pacific, *Géopolitique de l'Indo-Pacifique : Enjeux internationaux, perspectives françaises*²¹ by Milhiet and *Géopolitique de l'Indo-Pacifique : Genèse et mise en œuvre d'une idée*²² by Saint-Mézard distinguish themselves as the first comprehensive books on the Indo-Pacific from a French point of view. While navigating through the intricacies of the French policy, still in the making, Scott's regional expertise in "France's Indo-Pacific

¹⁸ Goh, E., Bollard, A. et al. (2021), *From Asia-pacific to Indo-pacific : Diplomacy in a contested region* (R. G. Patman, P. Köllner, & B. Kiglics, Éds.). Springer Singapore.

¹⁹ Medcalf, R. (2020), *Indo-Pacific empire: China, America and the contest for the world's pivotal region*, Manchester university press.

²⁰ Goin, V. (2021), « L'espace indopacifique, un concept géopolitique à géométrie variable face aux rivalités de puissance », *Géococonfluences*.

²¹ Milhiet, P. (2022), *Géopolitique de l'Indo-Pacifique : Enjeux internationaux, perspectives françaises*, Le Cavalier bleu éditions.

²² Saint-Mézard, I. (2022), *Géopolitique de l'Indo-Pacifique : Genèse et mise en œuvre d'une idée* (1re édition), PUF.

Strategy: Regional Power Projection”²³ and Meijer’s knowledge of security policies in “Pulled east. The rise of china, Europe and french security policy in the Asia-Pacific”²⁴ are complementary scientific articles to grasp the outlines of France’s strategy in the Indo-Pacific. Another prominent expert in France’s strategy in the Indo-Pacific is Bondaz, to which we can cite several insightful articles on the matter²⁵. With these resources, we can already form an exhaustive knowledge base to understand the challenges and strategic stakes of the region, and France's stance within it. This leads us to incorporate into our research the role of Japan in the French strategy in Indo-Pacific. Japan is both a key actor in the Indo-Pacific dynamics and a historical partner to France since 1995. Therefore, Japan emerges as a substantial component in the French strategy. Scott’s expertise is once again useful in “The Geoeconomics and Geopolitics of Japan’s ‘Indo-Pacific’ Strategy”²⁶, to have a synthesized overview of Japan’s regional strategy. However, since we are focusing on the French point of view, we rather concentrate on articles such as “New Japan-France Strategic partnership: A View from Paris”²⁷ written by Céline Pajon, a French expert on Japan and the Indo-Pacific. Another expert is Marianne Péron-Doise, researcher at *IRIS* with qualitative publications on Japan, France and the Indo-Pacific. An insightful article for our research to cite is “Japan-France Relationship under Abe: An Analysis of Security Trends for the Indo-Pacific Region”²⁸, where Dello Spedale Venti studies the France-Japan relationship under a security and defence lens. After outlining the main literature written on the Indo-Pacific, the French strategy, and its relationship with Japan, we can underline a few points. For a long time, French foreign and security policy, and the literature around it, has not been focusing enough on the Asia-Pacific region. Indeed, scholars agree on the lack of research and critical studies on French policy in Asia-Pacific. Antoine Bondaz regrets the shortage of independent research regarding Asia-Pacific “Strategic research on Asia-Pacific is largely insufficient in France, in contrast to strategic research on the Middle East and Africa.”²⁹ Hugo Meijer agrees in an article published in 2021, mentioning the lack of literature despite the Asia-Pacific being a growing region in terms of economic,

²³ Scott, D. (2019), “France’s Indo-Pacific Strategy: Regional Power Projection”, *Journal of Military & Strategic Studies*, 19 (4), pp. 76-103.

²⁴ Meijer, H. (2021), “Pulled east. The rise of china, europe and french security policy in the asia-pacific”, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, pp. 1-42.

²⁵ Bondaz, A. (2023), “Reconceptualiser la politique étrangère et de sécurité française en Indo-Pacifique”, *Fondation pour la recherche stratégique*, Note N°16/23.

²⁶ Scott, D. (2019), “The Geoeconomics and Geopolitics of Japan’s ‘Indo-Pacific’ Strategy”, *Journal of Asian Studies*, 6 (2), pp. 136-161.

²⁷ Pajon, C. (2018), “New Japan-France Strategic Partnership: A View from Paris”, *Lettre du Centre Asie IFRI*.

²⁸ Dello Spedale Venti, M. (2022), “Japan-France Relationship under Abe: An Analysis of Security Trends for the Indo-Pacific Region”, *Central European Journal of International and Security Studies*, 16 (3), pp. 6-33.

²⁹ Bondaz, A. (2014), “Le déclassement stratégique français et européen en Asie-Pacifique”, *Regards des doctorants IHEDN sur le Livre blanc défense et sécurité nationale*, Institut des hautes études de défense nationale, pp.111 - 123.

geopolitical, and strategic challenges. “virtually all academic studies of French foreign and security policy since the end of the Cold War [...] have focused on France’s role in the transatlantic relationship or on its policies in the Middle East and Northern Africa.”³⁰. The French external policy in the Indo-Pacific is constantly in evolution, notably because of its recent definition and the number of challenges it englobes. We find an increasing amount of academic papers written on the United States, Australian, or Japanese Indo-Pacific strategies, asserting different viewpoints and stances on the region, but French points of view are still lacking. Scientific research specifically centered on the role of Japan within the French strategy are even scarcer. This paper aims to assess and analyse academically the French external policy in the Indo-Pacific, with a particular emphasis on the role of its most significant partner in the region, Japan. This paper will investigate the following research question,

Does France leverage its strategic partnership with Japan to strengthen its position as a power in the Indo-Pacific?

Our analysis will focus on the time period from 2018 to 2023. We consider President Macron’s speech in 2018 at Garden Island naval base in Australia as the launch of France’s Indo-Pacific strategy. We will mark off our analysis to today, September 2023, in order to englobe every event in a moving and evolving strategy.

1.3 Key concepts

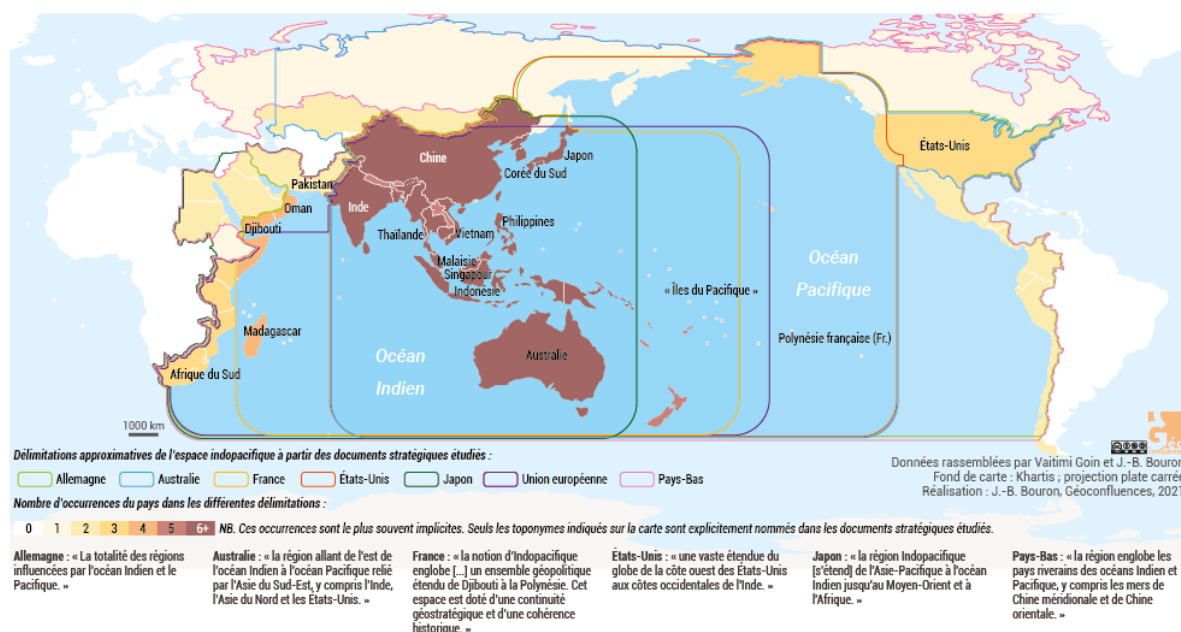
In order to fully grasp the challenges of this work, we will define the key concepts of our analysis. The three concepts identified as essential to our research are the notions of Indo-Pacific, power, and strategic partnership. Those concepts are deemed paramount considering they sculpt our research question.

Indo-Pacific

First of all, the concept of Indo-Pacific is central to this research. In terms of geographical aspects, the Indo-Pacific is a vast region extending from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. Regarding the states it englobes, a precise definition is yet to be defined. If we look at a strictly geographical and extensive definition, this area includes countries from the United States to the Asia-Pacific region, but also including South American, Middle Eastern, and African shores.

³⁰ Meijer, H. (2021), “Pulled east. The rise of china, europe and french security policy in the asia-pacific”, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, pp. 1-42.

The limitations of the Indo-Pacific zone are however fluctuating according to countries' interests and strategies. For example, New Zealand will focus its definition on the Pacific Ocean and the Pacific Island Countries (PICs), whereas the US will focus its attention on Australia or India. Generally, the Indo-Pacific puts the emphasis on China and India³¹, two pivotal actors in the area demographically and economically. As we can see in the following map, the perceptions of the Indo-Pacific differ among countries, but we notice that the countries in the darkest color are the most recurrent in Indo-Pacific conceptions.



Source: Goin, V. (2021), « L'espace indopacifique, un concept géopolitique à géométrie variable face aux rivalités de puissance », *Géoconfluences*.

The definition we have kept for this work encompasses the region from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean, interconnecting the maritime space stretching from the west coast of the US to the eastern shores of Africa and from Japan down to Australia³². Japan and France's geographic conceptions of the Indo-Pacific are quite similar, with however different focal points. Japan's approach to the Indo-Pacific is extensive and includes countries "from the Asia-Pacific across the Indian Ocean to the Middle East and Africa"³³. France defines the area as "from Djibouti to Polynesia [...] with vital maritime routes [running] from Indonesia to

³¹Meijer, H. (2021), "Pulled east. The rise of china, europe and french security policy in the asia-pacific", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, pp. 1-42.

³² Goin, V. (2021), « L'espace indopacifique, un concept géopolitique à géométrie variable face aux rivalités de puissance », *Géoconfluences*.

³³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2022), *Diplomatic BlueBook 2022*.

Madagascar, from Oman to Singapore, from Japan to Australia, and from China to Polynesia”.³⁴ We can see that each country has its own definition that answers its external strategy and main partners in the region. For example, the South Pacific is for France an important area of the Indo-Pacific considering its sovereign presence. Japan, on the other hand, will focus on the presence of its Chinese neighbour, or its strategic ties with the United States, India, and Australia.

Moreover, the Indo-Pacific is above all a strategic concept. It is important to underline that the notion of the Indo-Pacific emerged undoubtedly with an inherent geopolitical perspective. Its use goes beyond geographical terms and has been qualified as an “ideological battleground”³⁵. Indeed, even if not presented as such, the Indo-Pacific concept reflects geopolitical visions regarding the fact that China is becoming increasingly powerful. We will develop further the strategic vision of the Indo-Pacific in our analysis.

Power

The second concept we will define is the concept of power, essential to our research. The term power is a translation of the French term *puissance*, a concept difficult to define unanimously, because it incorporates different perspectives and implies other concepts. In its traditional definition, power implies the domination of other states, to control their actions³⁶. However, this definition is highly inserted from a realist point of view. For the purpose of our research, we will use Argounès’ comprehensive definition of *puissance* in *Théories de la puissance*³⁷, which he articulated in three approaches of power. The aggregative approach puts forward the accumulation of resources, both material and immaterial. The relational approach can be understood as a desire to influence others and impose its will. Finally, the structural approach underlines the actor’s ability to shape the system in which it operates. This definition encompasses France’s objectives globally, in its quest to maintain its position as a power. We can assume from this definition that France is a power. Firstly it possess and accumulates resources. They can be material, such as France’s military capabilities like its nuclear capability, professional armed forces and a history of participating in international military operations. Also, those resources can be immaterial such as its economic strength, but also its extensive diplomatic network, ranked as third with 160 embassies over the world. Moreover, France seeks

³⁴ Ministère des Armées (2019), *La France et la sécurité en IndoPacifique* [France and Security in the Indo-Pacific].

³⁵ Goin, V. (2021), « L’espace indopacifique, un concept géopolitique à géométrie variable face aux rivalités de puissance », *Géococonfluences*.

³⁶ Morgenthau, H. (1946), *Scientific Man versus Power Politics*, University of Chicago Press.

³⁷ Argounès, F. (2018), *Théories de la puissance*, CNRS Editions.

to play a role in shaping decisions and weight in the international system. This point is reflected in France's interest in the Indo-Pacific. We can therefore understand that the reason behind France seeking to enhance its position in the Indo-Pacific is to maintain its rank as a power, through the means included in the definition highlighted.

Strategic partnership

Finally, the third concept essential to our research is a "strategic partnership". To begin with, a partnership is an association of two countries that work together. In our analysis, the partnership between France and Japan implies the bilateral relationship they have established and their high-level cooperation in different fields. The strategic component narrows the partnership. The strategic field includes according to the *Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères* "issues relating to defence, civil nuclear energy, space and security"³⁸. Therefore, a strategic partnership covers "all aspects of bilateral cooperation which involve a strategic component". A strategic partnership between two countries illustrates a high level of trust. In our research, the strategic component is paramount.

1.4 Hypotheses

This analysis aims to investigate the role of Japan in the French strategy in the Indo-Pacific, and whether France leverages this strategic partnership to strengthen its position as a power in the Indo-Pacific. Our hypotheses to this question are twofold.

The first hypothesis suggests that Japan, as a prominent security and military partner in the region, permits France to enhance its military capabilities and therefore strengthens its position as a power. This hypothesis emphasises the fact that a partnership focused on joint military exercises, and cooperation on defence and security matters, can contribute positively to France. Indeed, it might increase its power projection in the region and therefore assert itself as a power in the Indo-Pacific.

This second hypothesis suggests that the key position of Japan in the Indo-Pacific can benefit the perception of France amongst other actors. Indeed, Japan and France are both advocates of the importance of multilateralism and share the same objectives in the region. We suggest that Japan, as a lead component in the Indo-Pacific, could be a springboard for France to enhance its position amongst other countries in the region. Japan and France might engage

³⁸ Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères, *The Indo-French Strategic Partnership in 4 questions*, [Web Page].

in joint initiatives and the partnership can reinforce the narrative of France as a cooperative power.

Our research follows an hypothetico-deductive reasoning. This means that we will use our hypotheses to guide our research and notably our data collection methodology. At the end of our analysis, we will observe if our hypotheses were confirmed or contradicted.

1.4 Methodology of data collection

Research design: qualitative method and semi-directive interviews

To answer our research question, we will develop a data collection method. First of all, we chose a qualitative study method. The aim of the qualitative method is to "understand people's motivations and obstacles"³⁹. In our case, a quantitative method would not be appropriate since we want to understand the motivations behind the French strategy, a parameter that cannot be obtained through a sample. The qualitative method allows us to widen the field of responses as much as possible, without closing off any avenues for reflection, whereas the quantitative method is very limited in this respect. We therefore conducted a series of individual interviews, which enabled us to gather the opinions of individuals separately on a range of subjects chosen by the interviewer.

In order to carry out our research, we chose to conduct semi-directive interviews. A semi-directive interview is one in which the interviewee is allowed to express himself freely on questions or themes set out in advance. The question grid or 'interview guide' is an important part of the data collection process, as it provides a framework for the subjects addressed in the interview, without constraining the interviewee too much so that there is room to deviate on other matters that are deemed important. This allows the researcher to explore ideas that were not included by the researcher. In our grid of questions (Appendix 1), we sought to address two main themes related to our two hypotheses. The first dealt with the military partnership between Japan and France. The second portrayed the importance of multilateralism and partnerships for the French strategy and its diplomatic relationship with Japan. The difficulty with semi-directive interviews is that it only partially frames the interview. The interviewee can then wander around other themes of the partnership that might not be completely connected to the research question. Another difficulty laid in the need to be flexible regarding the grid of questions. Indeed, we had interviewees with very different profiles, and it was necessary to

³⁹ Kalika, M., Mouricou, P. et al. (2021), "7. La méthodologie", *Le mémoire de master*, Dumod, pp. 81-112.

adapt the question grid to the expertise of the profile in question. This flexibility proved difficult to analyse.

Presentation of the field and sampling procedures

Defining the field is an important step before conducting the research. The field refers to the "context in which the empirical part of your thesis is carried out"⁴⁰. Defining the limits of the field allows for more precise data collection, one that is relevant to the subject. In the case of our study, it is important to emphasise that our fieldwork will focus solely on the French view of Japan's role in French strategy. This means that the aim of this work will not be to evaluate or understand the Japanese perspective or Japan's objectives in the Indo-Pacific. Of course, we will take their strategy into account, but the objective of the data collection is to understand the French point of view. Consequently, our sample of interviewees will mainly be composed of French administration actors, as well as Indo-Pacific experts. This decision is common to three important characteristics in field selection; relevance, accessibility and personal interest. Firstly, focusing on a French perspective is relevant in order to understand the mechanics of how the French strategy operates, and how Japan intervenes in it. In addition, accessibility was a significant factor. The Indo-Pacific and Japan are geographically distant from Europe. If the Japanese factor had to be taken into account, a trip to Japan to collect data, or at the very least, a thorough knowledge of the Japanese language, would have been necessary, both of which were impossible to achieve here. Finally, personal interest, or rather personal proximity, is also a factor, since, as a French person, it was culturally easier to focus on the French case. Therefore, our fieldwork and data collection sample will focus on the French point of view, in order to understand Japan's role in the French strategy.

Appendix 2 shows the composition of our sample. This list summarises the names (when possible) of the people interviewed, their current position and their area of expertise. Two interviewees wished to remain anonymous and we have only described general information about their position. This sample is not intended to be representative of all the players involved in the French strategy in the Indo-Pacific, which would constitute a too large sample, but rather a collection of diverse and varied actors who could provide insights for this analysis through their opinions and expertise. The diversity of the actors is reflected in their positions, sometimes as researchers - thus a greater guarantee of independence in their comments - and sometimes as

⁴⁰ Kalika, M., Mouricou, P. et al. (2021). "7. La méthodologie", *Le mémoire de master*, Dumod, pp. 81-112.

officials of the French administration, in order to understand the decisions concerning the strategy from an internal point of view.

Presentation of the data collection process

In order to conduct the semi-directive interviews, it was necessary to draw up an 'interview guide'. It consisted of an introductory question, the main themes to be addressed, and more or less precise questions to guide the interview. The need for questions proved important in our case in order to obtain increasingly precise information as the interviews progressed in time. In the case of our analysis, the interview guide and the questions were adapted according to the interviewee and his or her expertise. The interview guide, with an exhaustive list of all the questions asked, can be found in Appendix 1. It should be noted that not all of the questions were asked to all the interviewees, nor were they asked in a precise order. The main objective was to keep open the possibility of wandering to other subjects. Throughout the six interviews conducted, the responses were very diverse, touching on many important themes for our analysis.

Presentation of the data analysis process

In order to analyse our data, we relied on *verbatim* transcripts of the interviews. The complete written transcripts of the interviews are attached in Appendix 9. These transcripts were essential to conduct our analysis. We opted for a thematic analysis of the interviews, which consists of extracting the main themes and what was said by each interviewee on these themes. A summary of the thematic analysis can be found in Appendix 3. From this table, we carried out a vertical analysis (by interviewee) or a horizontal analysis (by theme), which was the most commonly used. Throughout our research, we will draw the necessary information used to conduct our analysis and verify our hypotheses from the interviews. When mentioned or quoted, we will refer to the number of the interviews that are all located in Appendix 9. We also underline that the translation of the interviews, conducted mostly in French, to English has been done by the researcher.

Finally, in order to complete our data collection based on interviews, we also used another qualitative method, the analysis of public data. This data mainly includes official documents published by ministries, transcripts of official speeches, and press releases. This data is publicly accessible and is detailed in the bibliography. This additional data collection method provides useful contextual information for understanding and describing the specific features of the field. It also reflects the mindset and aims of political actors, components of the

geopolitical strategy and therefore useful to our analysis. In addition, it also permitted to support and back the comments and information contained in the interviews.

CHAPTER 2: The French strategy in the Indo-Pacific, a quest for strategic influence

This chapter aims at contextualising our research. It provides an overview of the characteristics of the Indo-Pacific, its increasing significance and the key challenges it faces. Furthermore, it provides essential context regarding France's strategy in the Indo-Pacific, outlining its core ideas and principles. Finally, we present contextual information regarding Japan's relevance both within the region and as a strategic partner for France.

2.1 The global pivot towards the Indo-Pacific: where does France stand?

Comparable to the United States' (US) "Asian pivot"⁴¹, we have concluded from the literature review that there is a global pivot towards the Indo-Pacific, provoking increasing attention to this new geographical and strategic concept. Just as the states' attention toward this region is intensifying, the research on the Indo-Pacific is also intensifying. In this section, we will investigate the main actors that 'pivoted' towards the Indo-Pacific.

The Indo-Pacific region is fostering growing security and strategic considerations. While the region was already perceived as a centre for economic and energy interests, it has also emerged as a strategic and political hub containing key challenges for the upcoming decades. Indeed, with half of the world's population and one of the most used maritime routes, the Indo-Pacific was already an economic and commercial centre of gravity. Multiple "choke points" are situated in the Indo-Pacific, such as the Strait of Malacca, a key passage for petrol supply, from the Persian Gulf, and the exportation of goods from Asia to Europe. The axis Djibouti - Singapore - Shanghai is one of the most important trade routes, concentrating a substantial part of commercial exchanges. Also, the East China Sea holds significant hydrocarbon reserves, which stimulates efforts to protect the right of free access to the sea. As mentioned previously, the concept of Indo-Pacific is recent and has arisen undoubtedly with an underlying geopolitical and strategic vision. Indeed, when we observe the semantic shift from the term 'Asia-Pacific' to 'Indo-Pacific', we notice it coincides with the growing global concern regarding China's expanding influence. It is impossible to mention the Indo-Pacific without mentioning its intertwining with China's assertive policy in the region and the underlying security threats it poses. Rory Medcalf affirms that "the Indo-Pacific debate focuses mainly on

⁴¹ The American "pivot to Asia" was impulsed by the first Obama administration. The pivot to Asia was characterised by prioritising the Asia-Pacific region in the United States foreign policy. This was in response to China's rising influence. It included shifts in military deployment, but also economic and diplomatic measures.

China”⁴² and that the “Indo-Pacific appears to be the main conceptual challenge to the 'Belt and Road Initiative' ”⁴³. Multiple scholars, almost the entire academic field in the Indo-Pacific, agree that the term is more strategic than geographic. Indeed, ever since the development of China in the past decades, the neighbouring countries have been trying to build strategic alliances in order to counter its growing influence in the region. This development was translated through economic developments but also political and defence ones. Indeed, China has invested massively into its “Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI) since 2013, an infrastructure project aiming to connect Asia, Europe, and Africa through an extensive network of trade routes. It seeks to enhance global connectivity, but also China's influence by fostering economic partnerships and investments in participating countries. Moreover, the defence sector has not been sidelined, in light of China's consistent annual increases in military spending. As of 2021, it invested \$293 billion in military expenditure⁴⁴, a considerable amount even in a militarising region, compared to its military spending of \$164 billion in 2013⁴⁵. Therefore, China is seen as a state threatening the stability of the region. Firstly because with a neighbour increasing its military spending, it triggers the “security dilemma”⁴⁶ in the region, leading other countries to increase their military spending too. Indeed, the militarisation of China provoked a spiral of tension and militarisation in the region⁴⁷. Secondly, China has also demonstrated increasingly assertive behaviour, through its position regarding Taiwan or through maritime disputes and its territorial claims in the South China Sea. Resulting from that point, countries in the area have multiplied their alliances with other actors to contain China’s influence. The most prominent alliances are with the United States, a key actor to the Indo-Pacific, starting from the redefinition of its strategy to the Asia-Pacific in the 2010s. It was confirmed by the ‘Asian pivot’ of the first Obama administration, pursuing a clear policy to contain China and oppose it through multilateralism⁴⁸. Their aim through their Indo-Pacific approach is to “federate an alliance to oppose economically, politically and militarily China”⁴⁹. The United States has now established multiple alliances in the region, notably with Australia, India, and Japan, making them an essential spokesperson when looking at the Indo-Pacific. These actors were the first to adopt the term Indo-Pacific, translating a certain stance of the term in international relations. Japan

⁴² Medcalf, R. (2018), “La Chine et l’Indo-Pacifique : multipolarité, solidarité et patience stratégique”. *Revue Défense Nationale*, 811, 79-87. (translation from French made by the researcher)

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Data from the *World Bank*. Available at data.worldbank.org, accessed on 16 august 2023.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ See the definition of the “security dilemma” in Chapter 1.

⁴⁷ We will further research on that specific point in Chapter 3.

⁴⁸ Doyle, T. and Dennis, R. (2019), “The US ‘Pivot’ in the Indo-Pacific”, *The Rise and Return of the Indo-Pacific*, Oxford University Press.

⁴⁹ Goin, V. (2021), « L’espace indopacifique, un concept géopolitique à géométrie variable face aux rivalités de puissance », *Géococonfluences*.

was the first country to formulate and promote it. It incorporated the term into its strategic speeches and reports, a practice that started in 2007 during an official visit by Prime Minister Abe Shinzo to India. Furthermore, in 2016, Japan unfolded its strategy for a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific'(FOIP), a pivotal concept if we want to clearly grasp the dynamics in the region. In his 2016 speech in Kenya, Prime Minister Abe Shinzo explored Japan's strategy for the Indo-Pacific, based on the principles of freedom of navigation and overflight, the rule of law, and economic openness. In 2017, Japan's ambassador to India Kenji Hiramatsu mentioned the term Indo-Pacific as the 'keyword for Japan's strategic thinking'⁵⁰. The FOIP strategy was welcomed by other countries, such as the United States incorporating it in their first Indo-Pacific strategy in 2018. It is seen as a way to promote peace and stability in the region, but also to counter the growing influence of China. India also endorsed the term Indo-Pacific in 2012 and articulated a more specific strategy during Narendra Modi's speech at the 2018 Shangri La Dialogue. As a prominent actor in the region due to its geographical location and economic and military stature, the endorsement of the term holds significant importance. Moreover, Australia was among the most proactive countries in advocating for the Indo-Pacific concept. Located at the crossroads between the Pacific and Indian Oceans, and given the importance of its maritime routes, the country defined itself as a key Indo-Pacific actor when it adopted the term Indo-Pacific in its 2013 Foreign Policy White Paper. We now consider these countries as the main actors revolving around the conception of the Indo-Pacific, confirmed by the creation of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, known as the QUAD, an informal military and diplomatic cooperation group between the United States, India, Japan, and Australia. China, on the other hand, has rejected the existence of an Indo-Pacific, qualifying the term as a strategy of "containment" against itself. While this statement involves some accuracy, notably regarding the United States' policy, it has never been explicitly mentioned that the Indo-Pacific was formulated against China. Multiple countries in the region have also adopted the new term, among others Indonesia and Singapore, which see it as a means to foster cooperation and enhance stability in the region.

Furthermore, France has also 'pivoted' towards Asia. In the 2008 White Paper, Asia was already described as a region where "rivalries or conflict could take place"⁵¹ and could therefore "destabilise the system of international security"⁵². In the last five years, France has intensified its pivot and also incorporated the term Indo-Pacific in its strategy. This step was officialised through Macron's speech in Australia in 2018. To affirm its presence and

⁵⁰ Scott, D. (2019), "The geoeconomics and geopolitics of Japan's 'Indo-Pacific' strategy", *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs*, 6(2), pp. 136-161.

⁵¹Ministère de la Défense (2008), *Défense et sécurité nationale. Le Livre Blanc* [National Defense and Security. The White Paper], p. 33.

⁵² *Ibid*

involvement in the region, France has enhanced multiple bilateral relationships in the Indo-Pacific. Firstly, France and India signed a strategic partnership agreement in 1998 and continued to foster this relationship, illustrated by a joint roadmap ‘Joint Strategic Vision of India-France Cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region’ adopted in 2018. Their partnership is flourishing notably in the security field. The two countries participated in several joint exercises and France negotiated several arms sales to India, such as 36 Rafale for the Indian Air Force and another 26 Rafale for the Indian Navy sold in 2023. Between 2018 and 2022, Paris sold to New Delhi approximately 30% of its military equipment⁵³. This data illustrates France’s involvement with Indo-Pacific actors. The recent visit of Narendra Modi to France as a guest of honour at France’s annual Bastille Day in July 2023 confirms the strengthening of links between India and France. Moreover, France had tied a close relationship with Australia from the inception of France’s Indo-Pacific strategy. France considered Australia as a major partner in the region, if not the first, as illustrated by President Macron’s 2018 speech in Australia. However, when Canberra announced in 2021 its withdrawal from its contract with the French Naval Group to build diesel submarines and turned instead to the US and United Kingdom (UK) to build nuclear-powered submarines, the France-Australia strategic partnership was challenged. Nevertheless, we can note that since Australian Prime Minister Albanese came into office, the two countries have a clear desire to rebuild a “bilateral relationship built on trust”⁵⁴. Finally, France also entertains a partnership with the US, notably as traditional transatlantic allies. Both countries share a similar vision for the Indo-Pacific as a rules-based international order. However, France balances the assertive US confrontation with China and is distant from the AUKUS dialogue between the US, UK, and Australia. Even if there is a traditional cooperation, notably during joint military exercises, the France-US relationship is limited by diverging priorities in the region. As it is the core of this work, the France-Japan bilateral relationship will be addressed in a more detailed part, but they undoubtedly share similar interests in the Indo-Pacific region and have expanded their ties in various areas in the last few years. France also stimulated its partnership with Southeast Asian countries, such as Indonesia and Singapore.

While all of these actors have endorsed the term Indo-Pacific, their stance regarding China is not equal. Based on the typology made by Delphine Allès in “Le sens de l’Indo-

⁵³ Dépêche AFP (2022), “L’Inde donne son accord de principe pour l’achat de vingt-six Rafale et trois sous-marins français”, *Le Monde*. Accessed 19 August 2023 at <https://www.lemonde.fr/>

⁵⁴ Ministère de l’Europe et des Affaires étrangères, *Relations bilatérales*. France Diplomatie, [online], available at <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr> accessed 19 august 2023.

Pacifique : de l’ambiguïté sémantique à l’opportunité stratégique”⁵⁵, we can distinguish three types of view of the Indo-Pacific that can help us understand the dynamics in the region. Firstly, the one endorsed by the United States and Japan is a vision based on liberty and projective discourse. It is the most aggressive regarding China, clearly stating in their official strategy the aim to contain China’s influence. They promote common values such as democracy, freedom of navigation, and fair trade, based on Japan’s FOIP policy. The US has a strong military presence with over 50,000 troops stationed in the area, and Japan relies on the US nuclear umbrella for protection. The second type of view would be the one based on regional integration, supported by India, Indonesia, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). This view puts forward the importance of cooperation and collaboration between countries and underlines the importance of regional forums such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the East Asia Summit. Finally, the third type of view would be a mix of the previous two approaches, halfway between the diversification of partnerships and regional dialogue. This view is maintained by France and Australia, underlining the need for cooperation and regional organisations, but also fostering bilateral relationships. While this typology remains relevant today, we can suggest that Australia's position has shifted since the article, written in 2019, moving from the third to the first type, highlighting tighter links to the US and a more rigid stance towards China.

All in all, we have testified that there is a concrete pivot to the Indo-Pacific, illustrated by the involvement of diverse actors in the region. Even if the term seems geographically vague, incorporating different definitions, it is a strategic concept, highly revolving around China’s growing assertiveness.

2.2 Legitimation of France’s presence in the Indo-Pacific and redefinition of the strategy through time (2018-2023)

The Indo-Pacific is a region provoking growing interest from different states. Whether it is economically, diplomatically, or militarily, the area has invited itself into strategic agendas, including France’s. France is the first European country to have formulated a specific Indo-Pacific strategy, a decision incited by its sovereign presence in the region. Indeed, France counts multiple overseas territories located in the Pacific Ocean, with New Caledonia, French

⁵⁵ Allès, D. (2019), “Le sens de l’Indo-Pacifique : de l’ambiguïté sémantique à l’opportunité stratégique”, *Les Grands Dossiers de la Diplomatie*, 53.

Polynesia, Wallis et Futuna, and in the Indian Ocean, with La Réunion, Mayotte, the Scattered Islands, and the French Southern and Antarctic Territories. These sovereign territories are entirely part of what we call France, designated by the terms “DOM-TOM” (Overseas Departments and Territories). The TOM, *Territoires d’Outre Mer*, enjoy the status of “*Collectivité d’Outre Mer*”, meaning they are part of the administrative system of France but enjoy semi-autonomous status. Overall, these territories include 1.6 million French citizens in the Indo-Pacific, a significant number that France intends to protect. One of the first French interests in the area is, therefore, to safeguard the security of its citizens, “protect its sovereign interest and ensure the security of its citizens”.⁵⁶ Moreover, an important interest for France related to its sovereign presence in the Indo-Pacific revolves around the protection of its exclusive economic zone (EEZ). France possesses over nine million kilometres square of EEZs in the area, constituting over 90% of France’s EEZs in the world. It is crucial for France considering it permits it to have access to vital resources such as halieutics resources, but also ore resources. For example, New Caledonia contains 25% of the world’s known nickel resources⁵⁷, an ore extremely important today since it is used in electric car batteries. New Caledonia was in 2022 the third nickel mining country with a production of 190,000 tons⁵⁸. France also sees future potential to exploit seabed minerals in the Indo-Pacific as technology develops. All in all, the exploitation of these resources is crucial for the local economy but also for France’s broader economic interests in a world where access to resources translates to influence. France’s overseas territories are also linked to maritime routes. They give France jurisdiction over sea lanes that connect important harbours, such as Nouméa and Papeete, to major shipping routes in the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Therefore, the challenge for France is to protect its EEZs, from security threats or maritime piracy. In order to do that, EEZs are also a strategic outpost for France’s maritime and military presence. A strong military presence in the area ensures the security of its citizens and its territorial integrity. The troops deployed in the area help protect France’s sovereignty as well as provide security for French citizens, notably to face risks such as natural disasters. Also, if there were an external threat, France possesses immediate, nearby, and effective ways to retaliate. The military presence in the Indo-Pacific is paramount for France’s national sovereignty. French senator underlines that “given the geostrategic challenges, there are a lot of people eyeing up our territories and we need to be

⁵⁶ Ministère des Armées, (2019), *La stratégie de défense française en Indopacifique* [French Defense Strategy in the Indo-Pacific].

⁵⁷ Sénat, (2005), *Le nickel en Nouvelle-Calédonie: une opportunité enfin saisie?*, Rapport d’information au nom de la commission des finances.

⁵⁸ Statista (2023), *Principaux pays producteurs de nickel dans le monde de 2013 à 2022*, [online]. Available at <https://fr.statista.com/statistiques/565212/principaux-pays-producteurs-de-nickel/> accessed 15 July 2023.

able to defend them”⁵⁹. Moreover, the French overseas territories also represent a key vector for France to draw legitimacy as a resident Indo-Pacific power. Indeed, the French strategy underlines its continuous presence in the region to justify and legitimise its strategic interests and involvement in Indo-Pacific dynamics. Official of the SGDSN puts forwards that “ the idea is that it is through these territories that we are a power in the Indo-Pacific”⁶⁰. Through its overseas territories, France can have sovereign forces stationed in the Indo-Pacific and assert its military presence. The territorial presence of France is an explanatory element of the early definition of an Indo-Pacific strategy compared to its European neighbours for example. The importance of overseas territories for France’s Indo-Pacific strategy and legitimacy has been particularly underlined by President Macron's visit to the South Pacific in July 2023. This visit, including New Caledonia but also Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea, has been qualified as ‘historical’ by several scholars and the foreign press⁶¹. It is the first visit of a French president to the neighbouring Oceanian island states⁶², underlining the importance of the Indo-Pacific, and more precisely the South Pacific, in France’s strategy and the emphasis put on France’s overseas territories. When addressing New Caledonia in August 2023, President Macron emphasised “ France is an Indo-Pacific power through you and by you”.⁶³ Moreover, beyond its sovereign interests, France also has economic interests. Indeed, the Indo-Pacific represents 35% of France’s foreign trade (European Union excluded) and €120 billion are invested in the region by French companies⁶⁴. France counts 24 offices Business France, the national agency in charge of promoting international business development globally. Many opportunities are available for French companies in terms of energy, infrastructure, and finance. France also focuses on global issues such as environment, culture, and innovation, with notably 96 school establishments in the region. Furthermore, France’s interests in the Indo-Pacific are also linked to a broader strategy to project its power beyond metropolitan France and affirm the country as an influential power abroad. Benefiting from its permanent seat at the United Nations Security Council, the world’s second-largest EEZ, and armed forces capable of intervention across various theatres of operation, France maintains a high status globally as a military power with

⁵⁹ See interview 4. When referring to information in the interviews, please refer to the transcription of the interview located in Appendix 9. Also, every quotation from French to English in this work has been made by the researcher.

⁶⁰ See interview 6.

⁶¹ Sartre, J. (2023). “Macron to visit New Caledonia and Papua New Guinea on ‘historic’ Pacific tour”, *The Guardian*.

⁶² Péron-Doise, M. (2023), “Emmanuel Macron en Océanie : recalibrer les ambitions indopacifiques de la France à l’aune d’un ancrage néo-calédonien national et régional”, *IRIS*.

⁶³Macron, E. (2023), *Discours de M. Emmanuel Macron à l’occasion de son déplacement en Nouvelle-Calédonie*, [Nouméa].

⁶⁴ Bondaz, A. (2023), *La stratégie de la France pour l’Indo-Pacifique à l’occasion de la tournée d’Emmanuel Macron*, [Podcast RFI], 23 July 2023.

nuclear deterrence capabilities. As the security and defence challenges shift towards the Indo-Pacific, France wants to establish itself in this growing theatre of geopolitical challenges. Some scholars have underlined that France's interest and involvement in the Asia-Pacific, and now the Indo-Pacific, has been too slow. M. Vaisse already underlined in 2009 in *La puissance ou l'influence?*⁶⁵ that France overlooked Latin America and Asia and struggled to forge a consistent external policy, maybe indicating a loss of external influence.

France's influence can be translated by practical means such as being the third-largest diplomatic network in the world, having a significant military presence outside its borders, and contributing intensively to the funding of international organisations⁶⁶. When looking at the French involvement in the Indo-Pacific, we can distinguish some of these features. France has developed its diplomatic network in the region and counts 37 embassies including recent ones such as the one inaugurated in July 2023 in Samoa. It allows France to have a representation in all 52 countries of the area. France also multiplied in the past years official visits in several countries, from the Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs to the President but also the Minister of the Armed Forces. This shows its growing involvement in the region and its desire to be seen as a legitimate interlocutor. Also, as we will see in-depth further, France increases its military presence and military partnerships with other strategic allies in the region. This aspect underlines the desire to be a legitimate military partner in the region, contributing to its position as a power. Finally, France also takes part in several regional organisations to foster dialogue in the region. It contributes to the development of the region through the French development structure "Agence Française de Développement (AFD)", which is active in twenty-four countries and committed to invest €3,9 billion in 2020. From this data, it becomes evident that France has been integrating a more substantial portion of the Indo-Pacific region into its strategy as a significant influential power. While it reflects a French interest in this area, it mostly reflects the desire for France to sustain its stance as a 'great power'. France has been increasing its involvement in the Indo-Pacific region in recent years as a way to defend its interests and maintain its influence as a global power. The Indo-Pacific has become a singular geostrategic issue of the 21st century, and France cannot afford to be marginalised in this pivotal region if it wants to retain its global standing. Through growing engagement in Indo-Pacific affairs, France seeks to promote a multipolar vision of international relations and aims to be recognized as an influential resident power in this region decisive to the future global balance of forces. While France includes its overseas territories as underpinning regional interest, we

⁶⁵Vaisse, M. (2009), *La puissance ou l'influence? : La France dans le monde depuis 1958*, Paris, Fayard.

⁶⁶ Charillon, F. (2007), "La politique étrangère de la France : l'heure des choix", *Politique étrangère*, pp.139-150.

can put forward that there is also a desire to shape regional balances and exert independent leadership.

After examining the global pivot to the Indo-Pacific, and the interests of France to do the same, it is also relevant to evaluate how France demonstrated its interest. France chronologically transformed its strategy in the Asia-Pacific to its strategy in the Indo-Pacific. In the 2010s, France slowly paid more attention to the Asia-Pacific through a series of events that changed its outlook. Shaping the strategy and publishing the appropriate documents guiding and framing France's objectives in the regions was a cautious process. Even if mentioned only once, the term Indo-Pacific was used for the first time in the *Strategic Review of Defence and National Security*⁶⁷, published in 2017 by the Ministry of the Armed Forces. However, our paper has defined 2018 as the beginning of our time framework, as we consider it to be the concrete start of the Indo-Pacific strategy. The marking event would be President Macron's speech at the Garden Island naval base in Australia, on the 2nd of May 2018. While addressing the bilateral relationship between France and Australia, President Macron specified the term 'Indo-Pacific' for the first public address "this new Indo-Pacific axis"⁶⁸. This speech outlines France's vision of the Indo-Pacific region and underlines the space already dedicated to the importance of bilateral relationships in the region. Following this address, the Ministry of the Armed Forces published its own strategy and viewpoint for the region "France and Security in the Indo-Pacific"⁶⁹ in 2019. This publication represents an essential milestone in the formalisation of France's defence strategy in the Indo-Pacific region. It sets out in detail France's security and military vision for this strategic area, highlighting specifically the concept of Indo-Pacific as the new relevant geographical framework for France's action in the region. The paper stresses the country's national interest in the area, in terms of security but also economically. It puts forward the importance of strengthening bilateral strategic partnerships, notably with India, Australia, and Japan. Through this publication, the ministry sets out the base for the French strategy, with points still relevant today. What is most eloquent is the fact that the French Ministry of the Armed Forces published a strategy before the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs. This enhances how interlocked the security and military visions are with France's Indo-Pacific strategy. The publication of the document was accompanied by a speech given by the Minister of the Armed Forces Parly, in June 2019, during the annual IISS

⁶⁷ Ministère des Armées (2017), *Revue Stratégique de Défense et de Sécurité Nationale* [Strategic Review of Defence and National Security].

⁶⁸ Macron, E. (2018), *Déclaration de M. Emmanuel Macron, Président de la République, sur les relations entre la France et l'Australie*, [Sydney].

⁶⁹ Ministère des Armées (2019), *La stratégie de défense française en Indopacifique* [French Defense Strategy in the Indo-Pacific].

Shangri-La Dialogue. This dialogue is held annually, in Singapore, and organised by the think tank International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS). It gathers defence ministers and military actors of Asia-Pacific. The aim of this summit is to discuss security issues in the region, ranging from maritime security to terrorism, and military cooperation. While being an informal forum, it allows confidence-building between nations and is a great space to share the outlines of security policies. During its speech, Parly indeed announced the main key points of France's strategy from a defence point of view, underlining the increased presence of France in the region and promoting a multilateral approach to the Indo-Pacific⁷⁰. Moreover, the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs published its own document overviewing its strategy in the Indo-Pacific. A first document was published in 2018 *French Strategy in Asia-Oceania to 2030. Towards an inclusive Indo-Pacific area*⁷¹. This document was more of a tool prior to the annual conference of the French ambassadors in August 2018, rather than an official comprehensive document on the strategy. It still overviews France's position in the region and underlines the main points it focuses on. The main interest at first was the Indo-Pacific as an 'inclusive' region. The document defined the term geographically, emphasising the relevance of France's overseas territories. In the process of shaping its strategy, still nebulous, French officials have been visiting partners and took over the diplomatic scene in the Indo-Pacific. For example, we count in 2019 eleven public communications from both President Macron and Foreign Affairs Minister Le Drian mentioning the term 'Indo-Pacific'. We underline that several bilateral relationships have been the topic of allocutions, such as India or Australia. The France-Japan bilateral relationship was the subject twice during the year 2019 (January 2019 and June 2019), testifying to a strong relationship between the two countries. Moreover, France demonstrated its involvement in the Indo-Pacific region in September 2020 by appointing an ambassador for the Indo-Pacific, Christophe Penot⁷². As ambassador, his main duties involved "coordinating diplomatic efforts and complementing the actions carried out by others, including an ambassador for regional cooperation in the Indian Ocean zone."⁷³ We can observe that France has been working towards formulating and implementing a structured vision for the region during these years. The first official document from the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs regarding an Indo-Pacific strategy was published in July 2021, with an edited version in 2022,

⁷⁰ Parly, F. (2019), *Déclaration de Mme Florence Parly sur la coopération militaire de la France en Asie* [Singapore].

⁷¹ Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères (2018), *Stratégie française en Asie-Océanie à l'horizon 2030. Vers un espace asiatique indopacifique inclusif* [Strategy in Asia-Oceania to 2030. Towards an inclusive Indo-Pacific area].

⁷² As of 22nd of September 2023, the ambassador for the Indo-Pacific is Marc Abensour.

⁷³ (2022), "France's approach to the Indo-Pacific region", *Strategic Comments*, 28:6, i-iii.

titled *France's Indo-Pacific strategy*⁷⁴. In this document, France seeks to articulate in depth its vision of a strengthened engagement in the Indo-Pacific, in line with the priorities defined in previous speeches and various documents. The Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs reiterates its attachment to maritime and air security, the rule of law, multilateralism, climate security, and regional stability. France defines four pillars to its strategy; security and defence, economy and research, multilateralism and the rule of law, and climate change. In each section we can find the outlines of the objectives but also some examples of actions already conducted or for future references. The overall 67 pages document details the strategy but also sends a message globally of France's commitment to the area. France wants to underline its desire for an inclusive and multilateral vision for the Indo-Pacific, with a specific accent on bilateral and multilateral cooperation. France's diplomatic strategy advocates strengthening dialogue with key partners in the region, notably Japan and India (Australia was taken out of the 2022 version). This point is fundamental because it illustrates the relevance and place occupied by Japan in the French strategy. An entire section (section three) is dedicated to 'France's partnerships in the Indo-Pacific', highlighting cooperation as crucial for its interest in the region. France seeks to work in close collaboration with both countries in various areas, but we can observe that the strategic partnership is the most detailed "including defence, civil nuclear power, space and security, including counter-terrorism and cyber security"⁷⁵ (partnership with India). The partnership with Japan is more diverse, touching on subjects such as "climate environment and biodiversity, quality infrastructure, health"⁷⁶ (partnership with Japan). Its partnership with ASEAN is also mentioned but testifies of some limits in that area considering it dedicated only eight lines to it. Moreover, we understand the attention brought on partnerships considering the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs published an entire separate official document *France's Partnerships in the Indo-Pacific*⁷⁷ in 2021. It calls for better strategic coordination between its main partners in the region and underlines multilateral cooperation as a method to achieve its goals in the region "we are defending the principles of freedom, openness and inclusiveness and a method – multilateral cooperation – in a context based on the rule of law and democratic principles"⁷⁸. Through these two documents, we observe that cooperation is at the core of France's strategy in the Indo-Pacific, which sheds light on the relevance of investigating the partnership between Japan and France.

⁷⁴ Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères (2022), *La stratégie de la France dans l'Indopacifique* [France's Indo-Pacific Strategy].

⁷⁵ *Ibid*

⁷⁶ *Ibid*

⁷⁷ Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires Etrangères (2021), *Partenariats de la France dans l'Indopacifique*, [France's Partnerships in the Indo-Pacific].

⁷⁸ *Ibid*

Another turning point in the French Indo-Pacific strategy was the diplomatic crisis with Australia in 2021. To understand the extent of this crisis, we have to firstly remember that France used to include Australia as one of its closest partners in the region. In this perspective, France signed a \$66 billion deal to provide 12 conventional submarines to Australia. However, in September 2021, Australia retracted itself from the contract and turned instead towards the US and the UK to acquire 8 nuclear-powered submarines. Beyond a technological difference, September 2021 was also the announcement of the trilateral security partnership AUKUS, between the US, UK and Australia. France, taken by surprise by the cancellation, temporarily recalled its ambassadors from Canberra and Washington. The submarine crisis caused a major diplomatic rift between France and Australia and took several months for relations to start normalising. The France-Australia bilateral relationship was heavily impacted and France no longer considers Australia as a strategic partner in the region. More recently, Prime Minister Albanese and President Macron showed interest in rebuilding a relationship. During 2022 and 2023, France increased and diversified considerably its cooperation with other partners in the Indo-Pacific. In the year 2022, Ministers for Europe and Foreign Affairs (firstly Le Drian, then Colonna from May 2022) multiplied visits and meetings with their counterparts in the Indo-Pacific. We notice the diversity of the actors, such as Cambodia, Indonesia, India, and South Korea. We can see that France is turning towards Southeast Asian countries such as Thailand and Singapore. Also, the French government still maintained and strengthened its main alliances in the region, firstly with India. Indeed, the bilateral relationship France-India has been rapidly expanding, through several arms contracts secured with French companies, but also through Prime Minister Modi's visit on Bastille Day, where Macron underlined that they had "the same vision of the Indo-Pacific, an area that must remain open and free of any form of hegemony"⁷⁹. This partnership has also expanded through trilateral dialogues, such as the one gathering France, United Arab Emirates (UAE), and India, launched in February 2023 and used as a "forum with the aim of promoting the design and implementation of cooperation projects in the field of energy [...], as well as combating climate change and protecting biodiversity, particularly in the Indian Ocean region.". This trilateral dialogue is an illustration of France's attention to multilateralism and partnerships in various domains in the region. France also enforced its partnership with Japan in the last year, a point we will investigate in-depth later on. The diversity of these meetings only reflects France's desire to deepen cooperation in the region. Moreover, France reaffirmed its involvement in its overseas territories and neighbouring island states, through historical visits of French officials in July 2023. France stressed their

⁷⁹ Macron, E. (2023), *Déclaration de M. Emmanuel Macron sur les relations entre la France et l'Inde*, [Paris].

pivotal role as Indo-Pacific French territories through President Macron's visits to New Caledonia, Vanuatu, and Papua New Guinea. The Minister Colonna also made a high-profile visit to Fiji. These diplomatic visits are a reflection of France's active support in the region, but also of its dedication to legitimise its power in the Indo-Pacific.

2.3 Japan, a key actor in the Indo-Pacific

Japan is one of the most relevant actors when looking at the Indo-Pacific. As the world's third-largest economy, Japan already has an essential economic weight that permits it to play an important part in the region. Its economic position is due notably to its expertise and investments in research and innovation, but also as the world's sixth-largest destination for foreign direct investment⁸⁰. An important and developing economy undeniably enables a country to have more weight in multilateral negotiations, vis a vis to its partners. This can be illustrated by the important global stance of the G7, reuniting the largest economies in the world, which Japan is a member of. The G7 is not only about economic issues, it also tackles political matters and discusses global issues. Adding to that fact, Japan is indeed a prominent diplomatic spokesperson. Ever since the end of World War II, Japan defended pacifist positions and put forward diplomacy as a means to resolve conflict. This pacifist external policy is embedded in Article 9 of the Japanese constitution, which renounces war and prohibits Japan from having armed forces with war objectives. Japan has been relying on the United States for its security, allowing US military bases in Japan, counting 50,000 American soldiers, in exchange for a guarantee of protection. The strengthening of its bilateral relationship with the US has been an essential axis of Japan's diplomacy. Japan also sought increased cooperation with its regional neighbours, promoting multilateralism and international cooperation as a pillar for stability in the region. However, we have to underline that Japan has a difficult and tense relationship with its immediate neighbours, China, South Korea, and North Korea. Japan is highly dependent on China economically, considering it is its largest trading partner. However, they have ongoing territorial disputes over the Senkaku and Diaoyu islands, with recurring military tensions in the South China Sea. Japan's relations with South Korea are also double-faced. Even if they are both democracies and share similar values, as well as having strong economic ties, South Korea still bears the legacy of the WWII Japanese occupation and still demands proper excuses. However, Japan is still invested diplomatically in the region and is a fervent defender of international law and regional cooperation, as illustrated by its historic commitment to ASEAN.

⁸⁰ Setton, P. (2021), "Le Japon : un partenaire stratégique de la France dans l'Indo-Pacifique", *Revue Défense Nationale*, 844, pp. 28-34.

Therefore, Japan has also been a key actor in the definition and promotion of the term Indo-Pacific. Already in 2007, Prime Minister Abe Shinzo was talking about the “Confluence of the Two Seas”, representative of the Indo-Pacific rhetoric. The Japanese administration has been putting forward the term in speeches and official communication since the 2010s. Yet, Japan’s essential contribution to the concept is its ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)’ policy. The FOIP is a policy promoted in 2016 to strengthen economic and security cooperation among states in the Indo-Pacific region. The key principles rely on economic connectivity, the protection of the rule of law and freedom of navigation, and a commitment to peace and stability in the region⁸¹. Japan seeks to enhance security partnerships through this policy, in order to uphold a liberal, rules-based order to counter Chinese influence. The FOIP is highly concentrated on countering the influence of its Chinese neighbour, a specificity that has garnered support from the US but has not been as warmly received by France. The FOIP is a cornerstone of Japanese foreign policy in the Indo-Pacific and an essential policy in order to grasp the region’s dynamics. The US has joined Japan in promoting this policy. Through its active diplomacy in the region and its dedication to fostering regional stability, Japan has tied strong ties with other Indo-Pacific actors. Firstly, Japan has intensified its relations with India, in the fields of economy, security, and culture. They concur on working together for “peace and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific”⁸² and have established a Special Strategic and Global Partnership. Also, they are both part of security and defence dialogues, such as the QUAD, gathering Japan, India, the US and Australia. Japan also cultivates a close relationship with Australia and has significantly strengthened its security cooperation, making them key partners in the region. For example, Australia and Japan signed in 2022 a Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA)⁸³, allowing and facilitating joint exercises and operations in each other’s territory. The two countries have regular defence dialogues and military exercises, illustrating their commitment to the security of the region. Finally, Japan also interacts with the ASEAN regarding the Indo-Pacific, maintaining active participation in ASEAN-led forums. While ASEAN agrees with FOIP core principles, it does not want to endorse further the term nor participate in the QUAD dialogue.

We can see that Japan is an essential actor in the Indo-Pacific, due to its prominent posture as an economic power but also as a diplomatic power through the numerous strong bilateral relationships it fuels. France enjoys a privileged relationship with Japan, characterised

⁸¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2023), *Free and Open Indo-Pacific Basic Thinking Material*.

⁸² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2023), *Japan-India Relations*, MOFA, [online], Available at <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/india/data.html> accessed the 28 August 2023.

⁸³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2023), *Exchange of Diplomatic Notes for the Entry into Force of Japan-Australia Reciprocal Access Agreement*, [Press release MOFA].

by an ancient economic partnership. Indeed, France was one of the first foreign investors in Japan and has multiple branches of companies established in the country, in a variety of sectors from luxury goods, the auto industry or aeronautics.⁸⁴ Their economic cooperation is flourishing with growing trade, investment flow, and corporate partnerships. France's direct investment to Japan was ¥3,797 billion in 2021. As an economic partner, Japan also appears as a prominent political partner. Indeed, Japan is firmly attached to democratic values, such as trade openness, territorial integrity and the respect for sovereignty and the role of institutions in resolving conflict. The Japanese dedication to similar values to France has been a vector to increase cooperation in the region. Also, since the start of the development of the Indo-Pacific concept, Japan has been a preeminent actor and its influence in the region has only been growing. Since an early start, Japan has been worrying about China's growing assertion and they have been relying more and more on regional partnerships. Therefore, it benefits from a regional influence and a network capacity that is interesting for France. SGDSN official underlined that "Japan is interesting because it has a fairly broad reach and influence, which can be found in all areas"⁸⁵. Therefore, when France developed its Indo-Pacific strategy, it naturally turned towards Japan to further cooperate on issues close to both of them. This aspect is reflected in the bilateral strategic partnership between France and Japan, established in 1995 and upgraded in 2013 to the rank of "exceptional partnership". Since 2014, they have also enhanced their cooperation by establishing a political-military "2+2 dialogue", gathering from both parties the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and the Ministers of Defence. These types of meetings aim at boosting military and security cooperation. As of August 2023, France and Japan held seven 2+2 meetings. During the 2+2 meetings, it is regularly underlined that "France and Japan are today key partners for each other, privileged partners on the international scene"⁸⁶. It enables them to have a platform to coordinate security policies and discuss regional threats and how to boost their defence cooperation. We can also see that in 2018 when France officialised its strategy in the Indo-Pacific, France and Japan increased their cooperation. For example, we analysed that in the 2+2 meeting of January 2018, they both committed to deepen their cooperation "As the world evolves and our interests align, we need to do more together [...] we have to cooperate more"⁸⁷. Japan was already a key partner to rely on during the elaboration of the French strategy. The longevity of this partnership enhances the efficiency of cooperation and the

⁸⁴ Setton, P. (2021), "Le Japon : un partenaire stratégique de la France dans l'Indo-Pacifique", *Revue Défense Nationale*, 844, pp. 28-34.

⁸⁵ SGDSN stands for *Secrétariat général de la défense et de la sécurité nationale*. See interview 6.

⁸⁶ Le Drian, J.-Y (2018), *Japon - Conférence de presse conjointe de M. Jean-Yves Le Drian et Florence Parly*, [Press release], p.2.

⁸⁷ Parly, F. (2018), *Déclaration de Mme Florence Parly, ministre des armées, sur la coopération militaire franco-japonaises* [Tokyo].

multiplication of agreements. This partnership was strengthened by a “Roadmap for Franco-Japanese cooperation from 2019-2023”⁸⁸. This document puts forward the main outlines and areas for cooperation between the two countries. Half of the document is dedicated to security, defence, and multilateralism which highlights the areas that the two countries want to enhance. As an illustration of the importance and relevance of this partnership in the Indo-Pacific, the first part is dedicated to “strengthening cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region”. It notably puts forward their engagement for a region of “peace and prosperity, inclusive, free and open to all partners”⁸⁹. It reaffirms the similarity of their vision for the Indo-Pacific, and their engagement to work together towards it. The main pillars of the strategy focus on cooperation on maritime security, climate, and infrastructure. These pillars can be translated by strengthening the actions of the AFD, or by inviting Japan to support the Kiwa initiative focusing on the resilience to climate change of the Pacific Island states. The document also emphasises the security and defence cooperation, by engaging in developing interoperability of both armed forces such as “the participation of elements of the land, air or naval forces in exercises organised by one or other of the parties”⁹⁰. Moreover, the partnership between France and Japan does not only focus on security and defence but encompasses various areas. For example, cooperation in research and development has been strengthened, as well as cultural exchanges. Both countries have also concluded academic agreements permitting French and Japanese higher education institutions to exchange views.

Finally, the main characteristic bringing these two countries together in the region is their similar view and concept of the Indo-Pacific. SGDSN official affirms that “when it comes to the fundamentals, in terms of values, interests and vision for the region, there is also a great deal of convergence between our two countries”⁹¹. Both countries uphold a “free and open Indo-Pacific”, referring to the importance of respecting international law, freedom of navigation and overflight, free trade and peaceful resolution of disputes. Both countries also want to promote stability and prosperity in the region, through similar means such as partnerships, capacity building and multilateralism. The similarity of their values brings them together as essential partners for the region, permitting them to work together towards the same goals.

⁸⁸ Ministère de l’Europe et des Affaires étrangères, *Feuille de route sur la coopération franco-japonaise* [Roadmap for Franco-Japanese cooperation].

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Ministère de l’Europe et des Affaires étrangères, *Feuille de route sur la coopération franco-japonaise* [Roadmap for Franco-Japanese cooperation].

⁹¹ See interview 6

Through this first chapter we have laid the foundation for our research by establishing the theoretical framework of liberal realism, reviewing the current state of academic literature on the topic, and providing a comprehensive overview of our data collection methodology. We also provided contextual insights into the Indo-Pacific's challenges and significance. We discerned that with the global pivot toward the Indo-Pacific and France's engagement in the region, France actively seeks to expand its influence and assert its power in the region. It was crucial to gain an understanding of France's Indo-Pacific strategy and Japan's role within the region before operationalising our hypotheses.

Therefore, we will now move to the second section of our analysis that is focused on operationalising our hypothesis. We will start by investigating our first hypothesis stating that France enhances its position as a power through military and security cooperation with Japan.

SECTION 2: OPERATIONALISATION OF HYPOTHESES

CHAPTER 3: Japan as a military partner in France's *politique de puissance*

This chapter will investigate our first hypothesis, looking into France leveraging its strategic partnership with Japan to enhance its role in the Indo-Pacific through military and security cooperation.

3.1 The rising militarisation in the region: a stimulus for enhanced partnerships

The Indo-Pacific is a region crystallising more and more geopolitical tensions in recent years. Indeed, we have been observing military buildups, alliances growing and the development of strategic rivalries among major powers. All these pressures point to a “gradual militarisation of the Indo-Pacific” as underlined by Malhotra in its article “Is a Militarisation of the Indo-Pacific Occurring?”⁹² or by Fatton in “vers une nouvelle ère de militarisation en Indo-Pacifique?”⁹³. Militarisation is characterised by increasing military spending and modernisation of regional armed forces.⁹⁴ The region's transformation was first illustrated by the semantic shift operated from the “Asia-Pacific” to the “Indo-Pacific”. As mentioned in the introduction, the semantic shift is due partly to the growing involvement of different parties in the region and the desire to rally similar views around the same objectives for the region. This has been seen by China as a means to pursue the containment engaged by the US. Most significantly, China's rise as a relevant political, economic and military power has stirred anxieties related to shifts in the balance of power. Some territories are in imminent disputes with China, such as Taiwan, Japan or India. This assertive policy can be illustrated by the “nine-dash line” claimed by China, affirming its sovereignty in the South China Sea, violating the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the sovereignty of coastal countries. This policy is one of many in the region to exhibit growing assertiveness in upholding its interests. Starting in 2009 but increasing rapidly during the 2010s, China's behaviour became “increasingly muscular and confrontational”⁹⁵. The factors are indeed linked to its growing military apparatus, increased budget spending, and its ability to have more weight in the region. Other external factors should be taken into account such as the decline of the US after the 2008 financial crisis, but also the

⁹² Malhotra, S. (2023), “Is a Militarisation of the Indo-Pacific Occurring?”, *Australian Institute of International Affairs*.

⁹³ Fatton, L. (2022), “Vers une nouvelle ère de militarisation (et d'instabilité?) en Indo-Pacifique”, *Le Rubicon*.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*

⁹⁵ Meijer, H. (2021), “Pulled east. The rise of china, europe and french security policy in the asia-pacific”, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, pp. 1-42.

coming to power of President Xi Jinping, determined to lead a more ambitious foreign policy. China has developed its military means and militarised disputed islands such as the Hainan Island. Countries in the region, even if not directly impacted or in the middle of disputes with China, have been fearing escalations in the region. Other than China, North Korea is also continuing nuclear and missile programs, fuelling the growing fear and anxieties of the region. Therefore, while Indo-Pacific states wish to reap the benefits of connectivity, they are also strengthening defence ties with like-minded partners to ensure against destabilisation of the region. A common point throughout every regional Indo-Pacific strategy is definitely ensuring stability in the region. While China is a destabilising element, numerous countries are also maintaining economic ties. This complex duality of cooperation and competition defines the militarisation dynamics at play. Moreover, France has underlined the threat that terrorism poses⁹⁶, a subject not underlined by many scholars but still present. Terrorism is spreading in South Asia and South-East Asia, from local separatists to radical Islamic groups, with Indonesia and the Philippines most impacted. The growing militarisation of the region can be illustrated by the increased defence budget spending and modernisation of arsenals in other countries of the region too. Firstly, Japan is an expanding actor in terms of military. Japan already had a large weapons manufacturing sector after WWII. But, due to its post-war constitution, Japan is not allowed to develop its army above the self-defence limit and has a limitation on arms export. This pacifist constitution led Japan to advocate for more peaceful and diplomatic ways of conflict resolution. However, Japan still observed from a worrying eye the development of China's military, an immediate neighbour. It also entertains additional concerns regarding North Korea and the resurgence of Russian power. Therefore, since the 2010s, Japan found it necessary to gradually revise its defence and security capabilities. This is accompanied by Prime Minister Abe's actions and shift in military doctrine supporting greater military power and alliance integration. Japan endorsed a "new military profile"⁹⁷ when looking at the Japan Self-Defence Forces (JSDF), moving from a static defence force to a dynamic and mobile one, able to operate across different domains. Japan has been increasing its expertise in land, maritime and air self-defence forces, highlighting the maritime force considering it is one of the most important fields of dispute in the region. A significant illustration of Japan's increasing attention to security in the region is the creation under Abe's administration of the National Security Strategy (NSS) and National Security Council (NSC) in charge of outlining Japan's security policy and boosting its military power. It highly focuses on security aspects. In

⁹⁶ Ministère des Armées (2019), *La France et la sécurité en IndoPacifique* [France and Security in the Indo-Pacific].

⁹⁷ Hughes, C. W. (2022), *Japan as a global military power : New capabilities, alliance integration, bilateralism-plus*, Cambridge University Press, p. 7.

December 2022, Japan announced another raise in its defence budget, receiving increased attention from security analysts. Indeed, Japan released three new documents in December 2022 putting forward a new approach to national security and defence issues. These documents operationalise the country's significant shift from its historical approach to these issues since WWII. The Japanese military is seeking to "build offensive capability platforms and 'counter strike' abilities"⁹⁸. It has exposed its desire to increase defence spending "from one to two percent GDP, making it the world's third-largest defence spender."⁹⁹ With tensions with China still arising and Russia's invasion of Ukraine which could set examples for other nations, it is unlikely that Japan will decelerate its speed. We underline that Japan's enhanced security policy has been done in a tight partnership with the US. As close allies, Japan has been developing its defence policy in close association with the US. Japan is also looking to strengthen other partnerships such as the ones with France, Australia or India. Moreover, the growing militarisation is also occurring in South-East Asia with military spending and arms imports substantially rising in the past decade¹⁰⁰. Countries such as Indonesia, Cambodia and Vietnam have doubled their military budgets from 2005 to 2015¹⁰¹ (Appendix 4). Some scholars have qualified it as an "arms race", but the term is debated¹⁰². Other scholars would rather talk about "arms build-up"¹⁰³, characterised by the modernization of naval and air forces. The most significant is Indonesia's budget, more than doubling in 10 years, going from \$3 million to \$8 million. This also reflects Indonesia's growing position in the region, as an invested actor in multilateral forums such as ASEAN but also as a developing spokesperson of the Indo-Pacific. European arms exporters play a major role, France being an important character in the arms build-up. We can mention the 42 French Rafale jets that Indonesia settled to buy, with already 24 ordered¹⁰⁴ (as of August 2023). In this region, the increasing arms sales contracts reflect the strengthening of a security dilemma¹⁰⁵. To respond to this dilemma, several trilateral and multilateral security dialogues have been created, in order to gather allies together and work towards like-minded security goals. One major example is the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue 'QUAD', which is composed of the United States, Japan, India and Australia. Since its revival in 2017, the Quad has held regular summits and ministerial meetings, focusing on security and

⁹⁸ Malhotra, S. (2023), "Is a Militarisation of the Indo-Pacific Occurring?", *Australian Institute of International Affairs*.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Péron-Doise, M. (2018), "Course aux armements en Asie: mythes et réalités", *Centre Thucydide*.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*

¹⁰² Heiduck, F.(2017), « An arms race in Southeast Asia? Changing arms dynamics, regional security and the role of European arms exports », *SWP Research Paper*.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*

¹⁰⁴ Cabirol, M. (2023), "'Dassault: l'Indonésie a mis en vigueur un contrat portant sur 18 nouveaux Rafale", *La Tribune*.

¹⁰⁵ Péron-Doise, M. (2018), "Course aux armements en Asie: mythes et réalités", *Centre Thucydide*.

defence issues like maritime security, counterterrorism, but also in other domains such as infrastructure investment, and supply chain resilience. The Quad members have conducted joint military exercises like *Malabar* and have pledged to work together on critical and emerging technologies. Moreover, we have seen the emergence of trilateral dialogues, also described by scholars as ‘minilateral formats’¹⁰⁶. Minilateralism is a concept regularly used to describe dynamics in the Indo-Pacific. Minilateralism refers to “exclusive dialogue clubs built around shared identities or general interests, with no quest for representativeness or legitimacy”¹⁰⁷. It differs from alliances, which “imply mutual, binding, and lasting responsibilities”. We can cite several minilateralisms such as dialogues between Australia-India-Japan first held in 2015, or France-Japan-India. These minilateral security forums allow countries to share information, build personal relationships, and develop habits of cooperation. SGDSN official underlines that “their objective is not just to maintain convergence, but to find concrete areas of cooperation between the three of them”¹⁰⁸. It provides a mechanism for strategic consultations on shared regional concerns. Trilateral dialogues are definitely an area that France wants to look more into. Therefore, we can conclude that there is a militarisation of the region, and the military dimension needs to be addressed when we look at the Indo-Pacific. As an Indo-Pacific actor, France has been increasing its presence, military alliances and budget for the region.

3.2 France’s military apparatus in the Indo-Pacific as a tool to pursue a *politique de puissance*, with the support of security partners

Examining the existing literature and considering various perspectives in this field, we may find conflicting views regarding whether France has pursued an active strategy in the Asia-Pacific region over the last decades. Some scholars would argue that France was not interested enough in the Asia-Pacific until recently. An official of the Ministry of the Armed Forces agreed that “the realisation of our presence at the political level was late, [...] there was a sort of political *satori* [in 2019]”¹⁰⁹. Another former official of the Ministry of the Armed Forces disagreed and affirmed that “France has always been invested in the Asia-Pacific region and

¹⁰⁶ Allès, D. Fournol, T. (2023), “Multilateralisms and minilateralisms in the Indo-Pacific. Articulations and convergences in a context of saturation of cooperative arrangements”, *Fondation pour la recherche stratégique*, n°8/2023.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*

¹⁰⁸ See interview 6.

¹⁰⁹ See interview 1.

had a very elaborated Asia-Pacific strategy, based on a diplomatic network and above all a very large network of defence attachés"¹¹⁰. However, we can underline that what was put forward is the “political level”. When assessing the military dimension, it becomes evident that France had already been engaged in the region from a military perspective. France has a permanent volume of forces present in the region. In the 2010s, even if the region did not have the importance it has now, France still intensified its naval deployments¹¹¹ and multiplied missions. This is due to the presence of sovereign territories in the region, and France’s duty to protect them. We observe that the beginning of the French Asia-Pacific strategy was therefore focused on military aspects. An expert in the region and former Ministry of Defense official underlines that “we had excellent relations with our neighbours, with India, Japan and Australia. But at the beginning, at least when I was in charge of the Asia-Pacific sector, the main element of the French discourse was to have a defence diplomacy, to assert our presence in the area.”¹¹² At the beginning of the strategy, when the Indo-Pacific was not yet a concept, but was to follow the foundations laid by Asia-Pacific, a French strategy was highly focused on what it could bring to the table in military aspects. France conveyed its military posture to its regional partners. The strategy was “focused heavily on military industrial contracts”¹¹³. Therefore, as the Indo-Pacific is the continuity of the previous concept of Asia-Pacific, it is no surprise that the French strategy from 2018 onwards focuses mainly on defence matters. This is because the French presence in the past years before the Indo-Pacific strategy was based on military partnerships, joint exercises and arms sales contracts. France wanted to assert itself through the Indo-Pacific concept by continuing on that stance and affirming its role as a security actor in the region¹¹⁴. Consequently, the French military presence has been reinforced since 2018. As of 2021, France retained 7,000 military permanent personnel throughout the area¹¹⁵. We count 4,100 in the Indian Ocean and 2,900 in the Pacific Ocean. Also, France has two permanent French stations, one in the United Arab Emirates (FFEAU) and one in Djibouti (FFDj), equipped with combat aircraft (Rafale in the UAE, Mirage-2000 in Djibouti) as well as helicopters and transport aircraft. All of the land, air and naval armies operate in those bases. They support operational deployments in the region, develop bilateral military cooperation and promote regional cooperation. These permanent stations are crucial to France’s presence in the Indo-Pacific.

¹¹⁰ See interview 2.

¹¹¹ Meijer, H. (2021), “Pulled east. The rise of china, europe and french security policy in the asia-pacific”, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 1-42.

¹¹² See interview 2.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Ministère des Armées (2022), “Indopacifique: la France renforce sa présence aux avants-postes”, [Indopacific: France strengthens its presence in the vanguard].

Moreover, permanent French forces are also spread out in the region through five regional commands in order to “optimise its presence in the vast area”¹¹⁶. All of these regional commands possess personnel, vessels, and aircraft deployments (Appendix 6). We can see that the French military presence is highly focused on the Indian Ocean and the South Pacific. Mostly, the French military operates around its sovereign territories but still has some aircraft deployments, port calls and Defence and Armament Attachés throughout Southeast Asia. Moreover, France operates in addition to its permanent presence, rotational deployments consisting of organising one or two annual deployments of aircraft carrier strike groups, submarines for exercises, port calls and maritime security patrols. We can take for example the large-scale airborne system *Pégase*, deployed in South-East Asia. Already deployed in 2018 and 2022, the most recent deployment was reconducted from 25 June to 3 August 2023 for PEGASE 2023. This mission was conducted by the French Air and Space Force (AAE), deploying 19 aircraft, with 10 Rafale¹¹⁷ and made several strategic stopovers throughout the Indian and Pacific Oceans. These missions are also led by regional partners, in joint manoeuvres with Australia, Canada, the US, Japan etc. The joint exercises are important to share knowledge and techniques, but also to reinforce interoperability between the different air forces. Adding to that, France also focuses on its naval capability. The naval dimension is highly important in this area, provoking the concentration on the modernisation of regional marines and the importance of maritime programmes. Between 2012 and 2019, France deployed an average of 3.9 Navy capital ships per year¹¹⁸, mostly in joint missions with the US (see list in Appendix 5). France also conducted rotational naval deployments such as the *Jeanne d’Arc* missions since 2013. The most recent deployment was JEANNE D’ARC 2023, from 8 February to 13 July. During this mission, the objectives were to “deploy operational capabilities in areas of strategic interest” and “strengthen interoperability and regional cooperation”¹¹⁹. Two essential pieces of this mission are firstly the *Porte-hélicoptères amphibie (PHA) Mistral* capable of hosting 16 helicopters and 200 sailors. It is an essential piece because it serves as a helicopter carrier, deploys airborne assault resources, and troop transports and is a hospital ship. The *Frégate de type La Fayette (FLF) Guépratte* is also essential and is in charge of preserving and enforcing the State’s interests in maritime areas. Both of these pieces are illustrations of France’s *puissance*. Moreover, beyond its permanent presence and numerous deployments, we can also

¹¹⁶ Ministère des Armées (2019), *La France et la sécurité en IndoPacifique* [France and Security in the Indo-Pacific].

¹¹⁷ Ministère des Armées (2023), “PEGASE 23 - Bilan de 40 jours de mission”, [PEGASE 23 - 40-day mission report].

¹¹⁸ Ministère des Armées (2019), *La France et la sécurité en IndoPacifique* [France and Security in the Indo-Pacific].

¹¹⁹ Ministère des Armées (2020), “Mission ‘Jeanne d’Arc’ 2020”.

underline the involvement in the region of one of France's most important naval components, Task Force 473, centred around the *Charles de Gaulle* aircraft carrier. The *Charles de Gaulle* is a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier and is one of the major vessels and centrepiece of the French Navy. It is a critical element due to its power projection capabilities and its ability to carry out various military operations worldwide. The carrier plays a pivotal role in France's national defence strategy, allowing a strong naval presence, having a global reach and projecting France's industrial and technological expertise in the defence industry. The *Charles de Gaulle*'s presence in the Indo-Pacific is the illustration of France's power projection in the region. The carrier air wing includes Rafale jets, E-2C Hawkeye AEW aircraft and helicopters. This air-sea force has been deployed several times in the Indo-Pacific, notably in 2019 at the occasion of a long operation *Mission Clemenceau* which included operations in the Indian Ocean and South China Sea¹²⁰. The deployment of the naval-air group has been qualified as a "key vector of power projection, an aggregator of forces and a catalyst for cooperation"¹²¹ by the Ministry of the Armed Forces, underlining that naval presence is a vector of power projection and the multiplication of French military exercises is a direct parallel to this aim. In a public speech, Minister of the Armed Forces Parly at the Shangri-La Dialogue put forward that the presence of the *Mission Clemenceau* in the Indian Ocean was a reflection of geostrategic evolutions¹²². Indeed, the presence of French naval and air forces in the Indo-Pacific through large-scale missions sends a message globally that France is, and will be, more involved in the region. The Minister also included that "France is a sovereign power in these waters and each of your [*Charles de Gaulle* crew] actions bear the hallmark of our Indo-Pacific strategy"¹²³. We now know that 2019 was the beginning of a real defence strategy for France but we can already analyse the position of the Minister of the Armed Forces, incorporating more and more the term Indo-Pacific to invite it in the discourses. This speech is indeed a great illustration of France's desire to play a bigger role in the region and assert itself as a resident regional power "France intends to fully assume its role as a regional power"¹²⁴. Multiple missions with the *Charles de Gaulle* have been conducted following this speech, enhancing France's will to operate in the region, and most notably in the naval and maritime field. This commitment is evolving considering the French Navy is planning a "major mission for the *Charles de Gaulle* in the

¹²⁰ Lagneau L. (2019) "La mission 'Clemenceau' est terminée pour le porte-avion Charles de Gaulle et son groupe aéronaval", *Zone militaire opex360*. Available at <https://www.opex360.com/2019/07/07/la-mission-clemenceau-est-terminée-pour-le-porte-avions-charles-de-gaulle-et-son-groupe-aeronaval/>, accessed 15 August 2023.

¹²¹ *Ibid*

¹²² Parly, F. (2019), *Déclaration de Mme Florence Parly, sur la mission du porte-avions Clémenceau*, [Singapore].

¹²³ *Ibid*

¹²⁴ *Ibid*

Pacific in 2025”¹²⁵ in partnership with the US to carry out naval air synchronisation operations. The Minister of the Armed Forces has been a key driver for France’s Indo-Pacific strategy. Indeed, as they were the first to publish an official document in 2019 regarding the “Indo-Pacific”, they led the French policy towards a military direction. If we look closely, the document *France and Security in Indo-Pacific*¹²⁶ is highly similar to its previous strategic document, *France and Security in Asia-Pacific*¹²⁷, published by the Ministry of the Armed Forces (previously Minister of Defence) in 2016. The two documents look alike, almost the same, with only the regional and geographical terms changed¹²⁸. We can see the same objectives and aims in the two documents, to develop “comprehensive defence and security relations based on political and military dialogue, military cooperation and armaments cooperation”¹²⁹. France’s involvement in the region is highly centred around capacity and power projection, through extensive military means. The aim of the Minister of the Armed Forces is to project France’s power, its *puissance*, in an area gaining more and more attention and crystallising tensions. The strategic doctrine adopted for the Indo-Pacific has been concentrated on *puissance*.¹³⁰ SGDSN official affirms that fact. When asked “do you think that the value of France as a power can be developed through the Indo-Pacific strategy?”, he responds “Of course, of course. That's another reason why we have a strategy. It's so that the administrations behind us understand our signal, that this is a priority, at the highest level”¹³¹. In order to do so, France must establish its credibility and legitimacy within the region. France’s military presence is one vector to do that. In a public speech in India in 2016, Minister of Defence Le Drian underlined that “France [...] is also a credible power in the Indian Ocean, where we have a military presence”¹³². The term ‘*puissance*’ is mentioned fifty-eight times in the *Livre blanc Défense et Sécurité Nationale*¹³³ (2013), mostly correlated as a military power. The correlation between military and *puissance* is a defining parallel of France’s Indo-Pacific strategy. The sole fact that the Ministry of the Armed Forces published an official strategy before the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs speaks about this idea. In its official document, the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs picks up from the Ministry of the Armed Forces’s strategy and

¹²⁵ Faatau, J.-T. (2022), “Indopacifique : La France va renforcer son déploiement militaire en Asie-Pacifique, annonce Sébastien Lecornu”, *Outremers*360.

¹²⁶ Ministère des Armées (2019), *La France et la sécurité en IndoPacifique* [France and Security in the Indo-Pacific].

¹²⁷ *Ibid*

¹²⁸ See interview 2.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*

¹³⁰ *Ibid*

¹³¹ See interview 6.

¹³² J.Y Le Drian (2016), *Déclaration de M. Jean-Yves Le Drian, ministre de la défense, sur la vente d'avions Rafale à l'Inde*, [New Delhi].

¹³³ Ministère des Armées (2013), *Défense et sécurité nationale. Le Livre Blanc* [National Defense and Security. The White Paper]

insists on multilateralism.¹³⁴ Indeed, the strategy of the Ministry of the Armed Forces has been centred around military presence since the beginning of an Asia-Pacific strategy, a definition and aim they have kept during the reorganisation of the strategy towards the Indo-Pacific. Expert in the region underlines that “France’s Indo-Pacific strategy was inspired by the Ministry of Defence, which based the notion of French presence on security, defence diplomacy and on a powerful France”¹³⁵. The centrality of military means is therefore not surprising if we look at the Ministry of the Armed Forces strategy. In the past years, there has been an increasing amount of resources, budget and attention focused on the military aspect from the government¹³⁶. Indeed, the *Loi de Programmation Militaire* (LPM) 2023-2030 allocated more resources to the overseas territories and the Indo-Pacific in general “in particular the LPM devotes quite new resources and new credits to overseas territories”¹³⁷. Undoubtedly, the maritime component is essential to the strategy. At a confluence of two seas, the Indo-Pacific places a significant emphasis on maritime affairs, naval capabilities, and the freedom of navigation as central challenges. As a maritime power, France put forward the naval component from the beginning of its strategy. Firstly, since France has several overseas territories, spread out between the two oceans, it was natural to cultivate its maritime presence in this region. With its numerous vessels in permanent stations, and annual deployment involving submarines, frigates and maritime surveillance aircraft, France has made sure to underline the maritime aspect in its military involvement. France also participated in major naval joint exercises, such as *La Pérouse* or *Malabar*. Secondly, the naval and maritime aspect has been revealed to be a political tool in the region¹³⁸. Indeed, power diplomacy now revolves around the capacity to be present in the oceans of the Indo-Pacific. It illustrates a concrete presence and navigates throughout the region mainly composed of water. Also, the maritime aspect is at the heart of several challenges in the region. Oceans are abundant in resources, halieutic, ore. It can be an economic asset for a country to dispose of those resources. Oceans are now at the centre of disputes, as illustrated by the South China Sea, and the ability to navigate and protect those territories is essential for a power strategy. Therefore, in order to project its military power, France relies on its expertise and capacity to provide and project aircraft carriers and submarines, two key elements for a capable maritime power.

¹³⁴ See interview 2.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*

¹³⁶ See interview 6.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*

¹³⁸ Péron-Doise, M. (2018), “Course aux armements en Asie: mythes et réalités”, *Centre Thucydide*.

3.3 The security and military aspects as the guiding principles of the France-Japan partnership

The military aspect has not been at the core of the French-Japanese relationship since the beginning. In the 2000s, this relationship was characterised by economic, technological and cultural ties. The military aspect first arose from the 2010s onwards. A strategic dialogue and partnership were raised to the level of ‘exceptional’ and the first “2+2 meeting” was conducted in 2014¹³⁹. It underlined the intensification of a dialogue focused on political and security matters and on cooperation regarding defence equipment. The *Roadmap for French-Japanese Cooperation 2013-2018*¹⁴⁰ was also an illustration of the strengthened cooperation in the security field. The document mentioned that both countries “cooperate for peace and regional security”¹⁴¹ and “strengthened the cooperation in security and defence”¹⁴². We can see that enhanced cooperation in different military areas has been initiated, even though it was not a central matter at the time and focused more on economic matters. However, as the meetings multiplied and the situation in the region evolved, France and Japan intensified their military cooperation. Firstly, because France was seeking more military partnerships and Japan was already a strategic partner. But one aspect we can underline is Japan’s growing intention to open itself to more collaboration on security and defence aspects. As underlined by SGDSN official, “the fact that the JSDF are beginning to open up to international cooperation is something quite new for them, [...] which creates opportunities for exercises in international waters”¹⁴³. France’s desire to play a bigger role in the Indo-Pacific coincided with Japan’s desire to open up to international cooperation, and presence outside of Japan. Therefore, this benefitted both sides of the partnership. One key aspect that illustrates that fact is the numerous joint military exercises in which Japan and France engaged together. Their air, land and naval forces have been involved in several military exercises, the first one being Japan, taking part in the French-led military exercise *Croix du Sud* in 2014. Moreover, an Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) was signed in July 2018 in order to allow the “sharing of defence supply and services”¹⁴⁴. This is an important step mostly dedicated to facilitating cooperation in humanitarian assistance cases but remains a framework that facilitates more ambitious joint exercises. We can underline that 2018 was therefore a year where France pushed towards a more significant Indo-Pacific strategy, based on partnerships. Japan and France engage in

¹³⁹ See Chapter 1 for more references on 2+2 meetings.

¹⁴⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2013), *Roadmap for French-Japanese Cooperation 2013-2018*, MOFA.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*

¹⁴² *Ibid*

¹⁴³ See interview 6.

¹⁴⁴ Pajon, C. (2018), “France and Japan: the Indo-Pacific as a springboard for a strategic partnership”, in *Natural partners? Europe, Japan and security in the Indo-Pacific*, Elcano Policy Paper.

numerous multilateral missions with other partners of the region. Most significant military exercises involve quadrilateral drills, frequently in naval operations such as the *Jeanne d'Arc* mission in 2017, led by France and reuniting the US, UK and Japan. This military mission focused on maritime security cooperation, joint exercises with partners and port calls. Through this mission, we can see that there are growing ties between France and Japan in the maritime area. France is a relevant partner for Japan considering its involvement in the maritime field. With a capable and powerful navy, the *Marine Nationale*, its overseas territories, and permanent naval forces in Djibouti and the UAE, France appears as a consistent partner in the region. France and Japan are looking to enhance their collaboration in maritime capacity-building activities. The main areas they focus on are South-East Asia, South Pacific and the coast of Africa¹⁴⁵. Japan and France also take part in naval operations, such as *La Pérouse*, taking place annually since 2019 between France, India, Australia and Japan. It rotates between the Indian and Pacific Oceans and also focuses on maritime cooperation. Other types of joint military exercises are conducted, involving air forces, such as the *Pégase* mission. The PEGASE 2023 involved other partners in several missions such as the US, Japan and the UK. The mission involves numerous aircraft, among them 10 Rafale, and has been stopping in various partner bases. Another noticeable joint military exercise is the ARC21, part of the 2021 *Jeanne d'Arc* mission, organised on Japanese land, in Camp Ainoura in 2021¹⁴⁶. This exercise was particular because it was the first one where France was implicated in Japanese territories, training with both Japanese and US armed forces. SGDSN official underlines that this exercise was new of its kind and reflected the openness of the JSDF to new exercises.¹⁴⁷ The mission consisted of the coordination of naval troops, soldiers and engineers on the ground. It involved the simulation of an assault at the Kirishima combat camp, in a scenario involving the recapture of an island from an enemy force. This type of exercise resonates when we have knowledge of the territorial disputes Japan has with China, and this exercise was not far from the Senkaku islands. This aspect is one of the key reasons Japan engages in joint military exercises. Japan seeks to send signals to China of alliances and partners backing them if they were to engage in a crisis. Joint military exercises are frequent between Japan and the US, as their prime partner but also to show their support in the case of confrontation.

These naval and air missions are a clear illustration of the logistical support between France and Japan. The objectives of these missions are primarily to reinforce interoperability.

¹⁴⁵ Pajon, C. (2018), "France and Japan: the Indo-Pacific as a springboard for a strategic partnership", in *Natural partners? Europe, Japan and security in the Indo-Pacific*, Elcano Policy Paper.

¹⁴⁶ Pflimlin, E. (2022), "France-Japon : un partenariat d'exception réaffirmé", *IRIS*.

¹⁴⁷ See interview 6.

Interoperability refers to the capacity for different systems and organisations to seamlessly collaborate, ensuring that armed forces can efficiently coordinate their efforts during joint missions. The involvement of Japan and France in joint exercises proves their common desire to work together to guarantee stability in the region, respect of international law and free maritime movement. France and Japan also expressed their desire in May 2023 to conclude a *Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA)*¹⁴⁸, an agreement reinforcing interoperability between both armed forces, as well as bilateral cooperation on security and defence issues. It enables a framework for both armed forces when they go to their respective countries. Japan has already signed an RAA agreement with Japan, the UK. This shows that France and Japan aim to strengthen their cooperation in the future. France also benefits from increased interoperability to project its power and contribute to the meaning of its *puissance* in the region. Indeed, France is increasing its capacities of interoperability with other armed forces. The capacity to coordinate tactics, procedures, infrastructures, and resources is a real asset to any armed force. Courmont and other scholars, when describing military force and the definition of power, have underlined that “today, it is the effectiveness and interoperability of forces within the framework of international actions seems to be important”¹⁴⁹. Interoperability is a key competence of any military power, and if an armed force cannot intervene in partnership with other armed forces, it loses efficiency and cannot truly be weighed as a military power. Therefore, the reinforcement of France’s military forces, through joint exercises with Japan, reinforces its power projection in the region and as a military power in itself. Adding to that, joint exercises in the South Pacific, conducted with Japan, also sends a signal to external powers affirming France’s presence and the support from other regional powers. Military exercises are an accurate tool for power projection, a fact also highlighted by the Ministry of the Armed Forces¹⁵⁰. Moreover, another key benefit of Japan-France joint exercises is that they contribute to France’s legitimacy in the region. Even if it is already a sovereign power of the Indo-Pacific, engaging in joint exercises enhances its position as a regional power. Ministry of the Armed Forces official has underlined that planning to send military means in the Indo-Pacific from mainland France shows that they are meetings with “a high strategic value” and would not be done if it did not have a strategic value for France¹⁵¹. Moreover, joint exercises also enable

¹⁴⁸ Nippon.com (2023), “Nouvelle réunion « 2+2 » entre le Japon et la France, pour renforcer leur coopération militaire”, *Nippon.com*. Available at <https://www.nippon.com/fr/news/yj2023050900644/> accessed 17 August 2023.

¹⁴⁹ Courmont, B. et al. (2004), *Quelle évolution de la notion de puissance et de ses modes d'action à l'horizon 2030, appliquée aux Etats-Unis, à l'Europe et à la Chine?*, Etude pour Délégation aux Affaires Stratégiques, p.19.

¹⁵⁰ Ministère des Armées (2019), *La France et la sécurité en IndoPacifique* [France and Security in the Indo-Pacific].

¹⁵¹ See interview 1.

France to better protect its sovereign territories. Firstly because it maintains and enhances in-depth knowledge of these areas. It permits France's military forces to study any changes and to anticipate crises in the region. Enhanced military collaborations enable France to bolster the defence of its overseas territories. The primary objective of France's military presence in the Indo-Pacific is to safeguard its sovereignty and protect its citizens. Therefore, participating in military exercises increases the preparedness of its forces, ultimately leading to a more responsive and effective defence. Through military partnerships in the region, France can also gain access to valuable information, a deeper understanding of potential threats, and assistance during times of crisis. Adding to that fact, we also underline that joint exercises have the same aim for Japan. Japan seeks concrete results through these exercises and notably the preparation for any crisis it would be involved in. Indeed, in the case of a crisis, military joint exercises prepare countries to face the crisis together and organise a potential military response. Japan is highly interested in this objective considering its territorial disputes with China. It is one of the high points of the US-Japan alliance, enabling Japan to be protected in the scenario of such a crisis. Therefore, Japan's pursuit in these partnerships also revolves around securing a safeguard in times of crisis. France provides that in the case of a crisis in North Korea¹⁵². Indeed, France follows the situation in the Korean peninsula closely and could be a potential ally to intervene in the case of a crisis. France has been part of several multilateral missions, off the coast of North Korea¹⁵³, which aim to ensure compliance with United Nations (UN) Resolutions regarding nuclear proliferation. France's presence permits deterring violations of embargos and the collection of evidence. However, France never signed any agreement agreeing to intervene in Taiwan or the Senkaku islands if a crisis of any sort erupted. This is the kind of military exercise Japan is interested in and France has never shown any interest in engaging in that path "we have not signed a commitment, whereas that's what Japan is looking for"¹⁵⁴. However, we still have to ponder those remarks, considering, as seen ahead, France participated in a ground mission in Japanese territory in 2021, not far from the Senkaku island which can be seen as a signal. It is true nevertheless that France has never publicly spoken and confirmed a French intervention in the case of a crisis. We have seen through the extensive examples of Japan-France military joint exercises and cooperation that ever since the elevation of the partnership to the level of "exceptional" in 2014, both countries have increased their collaboration. Moreover, France and Japan's partnership is evolving in multiple ways other than strictly interoperability through military exercises. The France-Japan partnership can be illustrated

¹⁵² See interview 2.

¹⁵³ Assemblée Nationale (2022), *Rapport d'information sur les enjeux de défense en Indopacifique*.

¹⁵⁴ See interview 2.

through their cooperation in technology and defence equipment transfers. France and Japan signed an agreement concerning the Defense Equipment and Technology Transfer¹⁵⁵ in 2016. This agreement establishes a legal framework to cooperate on the transfer of defence equipment and technology between the two countries¹⁵⁶. The aim is to enhance collaborative research, development and production in the defence-related fields. Expert in Japan-EU relations underlined that Japan is seeking to develop its cooperation regarding defence innovation matters. He put forward that “in the case of the France-Japan relationship would put more emphasis on defence cooperation projects. For example, when it comes to new technologies, AI, quantum, and defence innovation”¹⁵⁷. Committees were also established between the two countries “Committee on Defense Equipment and Technology Cooperation” and “Committee on Export Control” facilitating discussions for further collaboration on defence technologies and export regulations. We can note the exhibition of a P-1 maritime patrol aircraft, built by a Japanese company, was displayed at the Paris Air Show in 2017 as a symbol of the Franco-Japanese defence cooperation¹⁵⁸. However, we have to underline that France does not play a significant role in arms exports to Japan, considering it accounted for 0.4% of Japan’s arms exports 2013-2017¹⁵⁹. The main suppliers of arms to Japan remain the US. Even if they show signs of intensive cooperation in the field of defence, Japan and France have a limited relationship regarding arms transfers.

Moreover, France and Japan cooperate in other security matters such as space. In January 2023, a Franco-Japanese dialogue on space matters was organized at the SGDSN. This dialogue aimed at strengthening the partnership, sharing strategic visions and exposing ongoing cooperation projects¹⁶⁰. The CNES (*Centre National d’Etudes Spatiales*) and JAXA (Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency) have been working on different projects together such as the MMX robotic exploration mission to the Martian system. This dialogue overall aimed to “illustrate the shared desire to strengthen the exceptional partnership”¹⁶¹. This an example of the diverse cooperation between Japan and France, highly focused on security matters. Other domains of cooperation include also targeting piracy and illegal trafficking. Both countries have participated in joint exercises in anti-piracy¹⁶². Both countries are also cooperating on

¹⁵⁵ Ministry of Defence of Japan, *Defense Equipment and Technology Cooperation*.

¹⁵⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2016), *Entry into Force of the Agreement between the Government of Japan and the Government of the French Republic concerning the Transfer of Defence Equipment and Technology*, [Press release].

¹⁵⁷ See interview 5.

¹⁵⁸ IRSEM (2018), *L’industrie de défense Japonaise*, Etudes de l’IRSEM, 54.

¹⁵⁹ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)

¹⁶⁰ CNES (2023), *Dialogue spatial franco-japonais au SGDSN : la coopération plus que jamais à l’honneur*, [Press release].

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*

¹⁶² Ambassade du Japon en France (2021), “Exercice conjoint anti-piraterie Japon – France – Etats-Unis”.

intelligence sharing. Indeed, both countries are sharing operational information, notably on maritime security. We can take for example a situation of an attack against a Japanese vessel. If France has information, it will share them. However, France and Japan do not have extensive intelligence agreements regarding classified information¹⁶³. Indeed, regarding piracy or illegal trafficking groups, France and Japan have not signed any specific accord on the sharing of sensible intelligence. For example, to give the position of a criminal group operating in the Pacific Ocean, France could share that information. But it does not go as far as naming chiefs, or persons in charge, since they are sensible information that should be protected by binding agreements. Therefore, we underline that the France-Japan partnership in these areas is still very limited. Finally, beyond the strengthening cooperation between the two countries, we can investigate if the military partnership between France and Japan is concretely as significant as it seems to be. We have underlined that both countries have a determination to enhance cooperation in the field of military and defence. Through joint military exercises, cooperation agreements and exceptional partnerships, we see that there are a lot of initiatives. However, behind the initiatives, is there concrete action? For an expert and former government official, the military partnership lacks substance, even though France has been working on it for several years¹⁶⁴. Expert in Japanese foreign policy affirms that “the security relationship was not really considered an important factor in Japan’s relationship with European countries for a long time”¹⁶⁵. He argued that Europe is a “very respected but distant partner”¹⁶⁶. The geographical distance is definitely an aspect that prevents the partnership from growing further. Japan tends to focus on other partners, such as the US, Australia and maybe South Korea in the near future¹⁶⁷. These Indo-Pacific actors will be considered as the main spokesperson for Japan in order to conduct Indo-Pacific strategies “I think when it comes to the actual practical cooperation for contingencies in the near future with the US, Australia, and South Korea. These are definitely more important than other countries far away”¹⁶⁸. Moreover, it is also true that both countries have different strategic priorities and different regional focus. Japan’s primary security concern lies in its immediate neighbourhood, China, North Korea, and seeks to enhance partnerships that share this common interest. While France is involved in the region, it is also involved in other regions of the world and seeks to maintain global engagements. Its foreign policy is characterised by a global reach and a willingness to address international challenges

¹⁶³ See interview 2.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*

¹⁶⁵ See interview 3.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*

across multiple regions, such as Africa and the Middle East¹⁶⁹. France has a significant military presence globally and does not only focus on the Indo-Pacific, preventing it from investing as much as wanted in other bilateral relationships. Also, France has an undeniable European focus, and Russia's aggression on Ukraine in 2022 has impacted its capacity to engage more in the Indo-Pacific¹⁷⁰. Therefore, Japan and France have differing strategic priorities hindering the development of a more concrete relationship.

All in all, the Indo-Pacific's increasing militarisation has prompted regional actors, including France and Japan, to strengthen their partnerships and military commitments. Our interviews revealed that France's military presence was a means to project its power and that France and Japan share a tight partnership in military and security aspects. Therefore, we can confidently affirm the validation of our first hypothesis. Japan did strengthen France's power in the Indo-Pacific through their cooperation in the military and defence sphere, thereby bolstering France's capacity to project power in the region.

The militarisation of the Indo-Pacific has led all actors to bolster their defence and security capabilities, as well as allocate increased budgetary resources. This trend is evident in both France and Japan. Our interviewees have attested that the partnership France-Japan has been increasing in the military area in the past years, focusing on joint military exercises and various security domains. However, we will investigate in the next chapter our second hypothesis, which centres on whether Japan's strategic importance in the Indo-Pacific enables France to expand its regional role through collaborative efforts in promoting multilateralism initiatives and institutions.

¹⁶⁹ See interview 1.

¹⁷⁰ See interview 2.

CHAPTER 4: The promotion of multilateralism and the evolution of France's Indo-Pacific strategy

While our second hypothesis focused on multilateralism initiatives between Japan and France, our interviews consistently indicated that despite a diplomatic relationship focusing on multilateralism, it was viewed as minor. It did not serve as a significant catalyst for France to enhance its position in the Indo-Pacific. What emerged from the interviews was primarily a shift in the French strategy, putting forward more diverse themes but shifting away from a heavy focus on Japan.

4.1 The France-Japan partnership fostering multilateralism in the Indo-Pacific

One of the key elements of the Franco-Japanese partnership is the importance of multilateralism and cooperation as both a means and an end. This means that both countries rely on multilateralism to achieve stability in the region. They also want to, in the end, have stable relations with other countries and discuss issues through cooperation and multilateral platforms. Multilateralism is defined as “a cooperation between more than two institutional actors in the international field”¹⁷¹ and is often associated with peaceful means to resolve disputes. It is often correlated to the use of international organisations (IOs) since they are a tool and a platform to peacefully engage in cooperation with other countries. Multilateralism is, therefore, an important component of both strategies, French and Japanese, in the Indo-Pacific and is a cement to their partnership. Concerning the French strategy in the Indo-Pacific, the French government has put forward their desire to cooperate with partners in the region. Firstly through their official document for the Indo-Pacific, the presence of multilateralism has been mentioned since the start. In the first official document by the Ministry of the Armed Forces, a page was dedicated to “structuring partnerships in the armament sphere”¹⁷², illustrating the importance of strengthening cooperation. In the defence sector, France played a role in enhancing and updating the defence capabilities of its allies. In a consecutive document by the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs¹⁷³, there is a stronger emphasis put on multilateralism. Section three

¹⁷¹ Vaïsse, M. (2007). « Une invention du XIXe siècle », In: Bertrand Badie, *Le multilatéralisme: Nouvelles formes de l'action internationale*, pp. 11-22, Paris, La Découverte.

¹⁷² Ministère des Armées (2019), *La France et la sécurité en IndoPacifique* [France and Security in the Indo-Pacific].

¹⁷³ Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères (2022), *La stratégie de la France dans l'Indopacifique* [France's Indo-Pacific Strategy].

underlines “France’s partnerships in the Indo-Pacific”¹⁷⁴ and multilateralism is one of the four pillars put forward as France’s objectives and actions in the region. It underlines that France wants to contribute to strengthening regional centres of cooperation and promote multilateralism. Indeed, multilateralism is deemed by France as the best way to preserve stability in the region, by preventing conflicts and risks of escalation¹⁷⁵. It is a way to provide platforms for dialogue and diplomatic engagement to reduce tensions and prevent the escalation of disputes. In a region where tensions are particularly high, notably between the US and China, it is seen as an essential aspect of the region’s stability.

The promotion of multilateralism by France can be perceived through its official documents but also through its actions. France has been, ever since the start of its strategy, focused on defence and security. It has invested and actively participated in security dialogues and cooperation forums in the Indo-Pacific. For example, France is regularly present at the Shangri-La Dialogue, an annual conference in Singapore gathering defence actors of the region. The Indo-Pacific is a region where we observe the development of numerous multilateralism and minilateralism forums and dialogues¹⁷⁶. Therefore, a way for France to increase its influence in the region is by having a voice in those forums and seeking representation. In 2020, France saw its membership confirmed to the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), after years of participating as a dialogue partner. In 2022, France presided over the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), an intergovernmental organisation gathering five member states; Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles, La Reunion (France) and Comoros. France also chaired in 2022 the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), a forum aiming to increase maritime security cooperation among the twenty-five member states. France is represented in the forum by its territories Mayotte and La Réunion. The country is also part of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) through New Caledonia and French Polynesia. Moreover, metropolitan France’s government is also involved in the region through its participation in the South Pacific Defense Ministers’ Meeting (SPDMM) and even hosted the 2023 edition in Nouméa. Defence Minister Parly also participated in 2020 to the ADMM+, a forum gathering ASEAN’s defence ministers and their eight dialogue partners. However, France has participated as an observatory member. France also expressed its desire to join the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP). Through these examples, we can underline

¹⁷⁴ Ministère de l’Europe et des Affaires étrangères (2022), *La stratégie de la France dans l’Indopacifique* [France’s Indo-Pacific Strategy].

¹⁷⁵ Assemblée Nationale (2022), *Rapport d’information sur les enjeux de défense en Indopacifique*.

¹⁷⁶ Allès, D. Fournol, T. (2023), “Multilateralisms and minilateralisms in the Indo-Pacific. Articulations and convergences in a context of saturation of cooperative arrangements”, *Fondation pour la recherche stratégique*, n°8/2023.

that France engages in several multilateral initiatives in the region and promotes cooperation in the region. Moreover, Japan also puts forward multilateralism in its strategy, a point we can underline by its presence in several forums in which France participates. Japan is a member of several regional initiatives such as the ReCAAP, ASEAN Plus Three, East Asia Summit etc. It is also part of similar forums as France such as IONS, SPDMM 2022, IORA, and ADMM+ as a dialogue partner. Through these initiatives, we can see that both countries uphold the need to engage in multilateral platforms in the Indo-Pacific, a point supporting our hypothesis. Our hypothesis can be further confirmed by one of our interviewees. Indeed, SGDSN official affirmed that Japan was a facilitator for France to integrate multilateral platforms¹⁷⁷. He gave the example of the HACGAM, the Heads of Asian Coast Guard Agencies Meeting, that Japan created and to which France participates. He assured that “as can be seen in other examples, Japan's benevolence and support in strengthening our positions in these multilateral frameworks has been present”¹⁷⁸.

We can observe that Japan also puts forward the importance of engaging in cooperation at the core of its diplomacy. Indeed, Japan has always encouraged dialogue as a means to resolve conflict and contribute to stability. Of the three pillars defining Japan's FOIP strategy, the third one mentions that “commitment for peace and stability that includes [...] cooperation in such fields as disaster risk reduction and non-proliferation”¹⁷⁹. The basic FOIP thinking materials also include a document “Items of cooperation”¹⁸⁰ putting forward detailed and extensive ways to address challenges through cooperation. Moreover, as we have seen that both countries share the importance of cooperation as the core of their foreign policy, we can see that France and Japan entertain a prosperous diplomatic relationship, that enhances their influence. Firstly, both countries are part of international organisations and forums where they share common views and defend similar values. For example, they are both permanent members of the United Nations (UN) Security Council and members of the G7 where they both advocate for the rule of law, human rights, security and peacekeeping, and economic cooperation. For France, the importance of participating in multilateral structures globally has been underlined in our interviews “France has been a major player in various multilateral structures, the UN and NATO. We are a country that is not big enough to be influential on its own, so we need others”.¹⁸¹ The importance of multilateralism is the case in any region in order to be influential.

¹⁷⁷ See interview 6.

¹⁷⁸ See interview 6.

¹⁷⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2022), *Diplomatic BlueBook 2022*.

¹⁸⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2022), *New Plan for a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)” Items of Cooperation*.

¹⁸¹ See interview 4.

However, in the Indo-Pacific, where France seeks to legitimise itself and play a bigger role, to which multilateralism appears as a useful tool. Moreover, the importance of increasing the work with Japan has also been underlined “there's a real subject with Japan for example, I think it's absolutely vital that we work with them.”¹⁸². We can observe that indeed, France truly needs others to be influential in the region and Japan is one way to achieve that. Japan plays an important role in France’s partnerships and their relationship needs to be nurtured. Moreover, we have also observed during interviews that Japan also leverages France in international organisations “usually [the partnership] was in relation to multilateral diplomacy for political influence”¹⁸³. Indeed, Japan counts on France’s international stance and its diplomatic influence to gain weight on issues it defends. For example, Japan counts on France’s voice at the UNSC or NATO. At the UNSC, Japan is very influential and involved regarding the nuclear proliferation of North Korea “when Japan wants to advance its interest vis a vis North Korea for example”¹⁸⁴. France’s voice is also an important signal regarding China. France, and Europe in general, are actors that matter “we still have significant economic and military influence and we can carry weight. For the Chinese, Europe's position is an element”¹⁸⁵. Therefore, counting France as a close partner is multiplying the chances of support for Japan in the case of a crisis with China. Even through just undertaking joint military exercises sends a signal to China “in terms of the general deterrence, it’s important for Japan to make it clear through these signals that China should be opposed by the wider international society”¹⁸⁶. However, a third interviewee qualified the remarks and tempered that “we’re on a classic diplomatic footing, [...] we’re very close and we’re counting on Japan, but our multilateral formats are still very traditional”¹⁸⁷. Japan and France entertain a strong but classical relationship on the international scene. We can however mention that already numerous official interactions have been conducted only in 2023 between France and Japan, illustrating a strong partnership. A France-Japan summit was organised in January 2023, followed by the annual 2+2 meetings and reunions at the G7 in May 2023. There are still many initiatives on both parts to talk about, and issues to discuss and cooperate on. As an illustration of the intensified strategic links, Japan inaugurated in January 2023 a consulate office in Nouméa broadcasting its involvement with France.

¹⁸² See interview 4.

¹⁸³ *Ibid*

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid*

¹⁸⁵ See Interview 1.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*

¹⁸⁷ See interview 2.

While these facts are illustrations of the cooperation between France and Japan on the importance of putting forward multilateral initiatives and platforms, it has not been a point of agreement amongst all interviewees. Most of them recognised an important military partnership, but the multilateral aspect was not as applicable to France's position in the region "we are defending a one-man policy, [...] we prefer a more flexible policy of choice"¹⁸⁸, "we are very close and we're counting on Japan, but we are working on multilateral formats that are still very classic"¹⁸⁹. While we have assessed that our hypothesis can be partially validated, our interviews indicate that the multilateralism aspect was however leaning more towards different aspects of the French strategy. This suggests a re-orientation of France's strategy and leads to a shift in the nature of the Japan-France partnership.

4.2 Evolution of the French strategy after AUKUS, from a *politique de puissance* to a *politique d'influence*

The French strategy in the Indo-Pacific, developed in 2018, has been in motion ever since and has relied on Australia as a primary partner. This strategy was mostly, as we have seen, focused on the defence and military fields. Illustrating that fact was the agreement from Australia to acquire twelve submarines from the French constructor Naval Group. This contract was estimated at 56 billion euros and engaged a collaboration with the group for 25 years. However, in September 2021, Australia withdrew from the contract with no prior explanations to France or the group. This news was combined with the announcement of a trilateral partnership between Australia, the US and the UK called AUKUS. It is not formally a military alliance but the definition is still blurry¹⁹⁰. Australian Prime Minister Morrison described it as an "enhanced trilateral security partnership", UK Prime Minister Johnson formally termed it as a "trilateral defence partnership" and US President Biden talked about a "trilateral security cooperation". The notion of a security partnership is the preeminent one, an important aspect for France and the Indo-Pacific. AUKUS aims to enhance security and defence cooperation among its members. Key elements of the cooperation include technology sharing, a focus on Indo-Pacific security challenges and cooperation in addressing them. AUKUS reflects the alignment of these nations' strategic interests and their commitment to promoting regional stability and upholding a rules-based international order. AUKUS has been understood and

¹⁸⁸ See interview 2.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid*

¹⁹⁰ Wilkins, T. (2022), "Is AUKUS really an 'Alliance'?", *ISAS Insights*.

described at times as an alliance to counter China in the region. The double announcement was described as a ‘slap’, ‘tsunami’, and ‘treason’ amongst the French counterparts. Many words have described the Australian decision, underlining its impact on the French strategy and diplomacy. The double announcement reflects a double failure for France in two distinct domains. Firstly, it reflects a failure in the partnership with Australia. The ‘diplomatic blow’¹⁹¹ is all the harder for Paris because its Indo-Pacific strategy relied heavily on Australia. Firstly, with President Macron’s speech at Garden Island announcing the development of a French strategy in the Indo-Pacific, Australia was a key partner from the outset. This setback is a brake on the French momentum. Also, Australia was a prominent partner in the military field. The primary agreement for the purchase of twelve submarines reflects this closeness and cooperation in defence matters. The two countries also shared the centrality of maritime security to their Indo-Pacific strategy and took part in several maritime dialogues. Beyond this, the two powers also enjoyed good economic relations. This decision has highly impacted the Franco-Australian partnership, with France symbolically recalling its ambassador for a short period of time, but also taking off Australia of the list of Indo-Pacific partners in an MEAE document published in 2022¹⁹². The loss of Australia as a strategic partner affects France’s strategy as a whole in the region but also affects concretely its capacity to protect its sovereign territories. Indeed, our interviewee underlines that “France has lost in terms of strategic capability because it cannot compensate its interoperability with Australian forces and submarines”¹⁹³. Australia, as a direct neighbour of New Caledonia and French Polynesia, was an important partner in ensuring the security of French territories. SGDSN official also underlined that Australia is also “essential for supporting our scientific missions in Antarctica”¹⁹⁴. Australian military forces engaged in several joint exercises in the region with France and contributed to sharing intelligence. Secondly, the Australian decision also reflected a “failure of the discourse that France had constructed for the region and was working”¹⁹⁵. This discourse was focused on the presence of France in the Indo-Pacific through military means and the growth of strategic and military partnerships. Japan, but mostly Australia, were seen as prominent partners. By choosing US submarines over French ones, Australia also made a bigger choice of rallying next to the US in the Indo-Pacific and affirming the dichotomy of US-China in the region. Therefore, France is seen as sidelined in the Indo-Pacific theatre and its discourse has lost in efficiency.

¹⁹¹ “Diplomatic blow” is the translation for “Camouflet diplomatique” in Milhiet, P. (2022), “Aukus quelles conséquences pour la stratégie Indo-Pacifique française?”, *Asia Focus IRIS*, p.3.

¹⁹² Ministère de l’Europe et des Affaires étrangères (2022), *La stratégie de la France dans l’Indopacifique* [France’s Indo-Pacific Strategy].

¹⁹³ See interview 2.

¹⁹⁴ See interview 6.

¹⁹⁵ See interview 2.

Indo-Pacific expert sees this episode as an “external rejection of the French discourse, which has suddenly become less credible”¹⁹⁶. The French strategy needed to be reinvented and recalibrated. Australia used to bring weight to the French discourse, and after 2021, this discourse was weakened. There was a clear need for France to rethink what the strategy was, and which partners it could rely on. It was not a failure of the strategy in itself, but rather a reorientation of this strategy. According to our interviewee, the creation of AUKUS led France to shift from a diplomacy of power, *puissance*, to a diplomacy of influence¹⁹⁷. The diplomacy of *puissance* is an approach to diplomacy in which a state actively uses its economic, military and political resources to achieve its national objectives and defend its interests on the international stage. It is mainly focused here on the central role of the military forces in an Indo-Pacific strategy. We could correlate it to the notion of hard power, put forward by Nye¹⁹⁸, who underlines the power of a country’s military capacity to influence others through coercion, force, or economic pressure. The diplomacy of *puissance* put forward by France can be illustrated by its increased military presence in the region, numerous joint military exercises and intensification of military and strategic partnerships such as the one with Japan. All these actions contributed to the image of France having the capability to influence through military and coercion means. However, with the loss of its Australian partner, highly important and inclusive in the field of security for the region, France was left diminished. There was a period of transition during which France searched to rebalance its strategy, seeking other ways it could influence the region. Our interviewee therefore put to light that France had concentrated and shifted towards a diplomacy of influence¹⁹⁹. The diplomacy of influence is an approach to diplomacy aiming to shape the perceptions, opinions and policies of other international actors through means such as cultural diplomacy, development aid, or public diplomacy, to promote national interests and values. It can also be correlated to the concept of soft power, also put forward by Nye²⁰⁰, which lies in the ability to attract and persuade through culture, political values and policies. In our case, France’s diplomacy of influence lies in the development of partnerships and the promotion of multilateralism. We notice that France relies and projects less on its *puissance* and puts forward a policy of enhancing its partnerships in the region. This shift can be observed through President Macron’s speech at the 2023 conference to the ambassadors. Globally, France’s foreign policy emphasises partnerships and its participation in major international organisations. The term ‘partnership’ was mentioned forty-three times in

¹⁹⁶ See interview 2.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.* The term ‘*politique*’ is here translated to ‘diplomacy’ rather than ‘policy’ since it is not a conscious and concrete shift in French policy but rather a general reorientation of France’s diplomacy in the region.

¹⁹⁸ Nye, J. S. (1990). *Bound to lead: The changing nature of American power*. Basic Books.

¹⁹⁹ See interview 2.

²⁰⁰ Nye, J. S. (1990). *Bound to lead: The changing nature of American power*. Basic Books.

the speech. President Macron underlines that there has been a “weakening of [...] our existing cooperation and partnerships mechanisms”²⁰¹. He also allocated a significant part of his speech to the “second geographical partnership, the Indo-Pacific”²⁰². Macron has started talking about an “Indo-Pacific partnership”, which reveals the emphasis on regional partnerships for the strategy. While he put forward the importance of partnerships with regional actors, he also admitted that France should have a “humble military agenda”²⁰³, contrasting with the diplomacy of *puissance*. Another illustration of that shift is the emphasis made by the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs on partnerships, notably through their sixteen-page document published in 2021 “France’s partnerships in the Indo-Pacific”²⁰⁴. This document gives an overview of the main partners in the region and underlines the priority for France to strengthen them. While we could have predicted that France would enhance its partnership with Japan following Australia’s shift in position, we can observe through our interviews no such thing. SGDSN official underlined that “I wouldn't say that Japan was an immediate rebound priority for the AUKUS”²⁰⁵. France and Japan continued to maintain a close relationship, carrying out joint military exercises and maintaining close cooperation with their 2+2 annual meetings. However, all interviews conducted proved that the general idea regarding the France-Japan partnership was that it was not strengthened enough, and we concluded that it had not increased in the past years “[talking about French strategy] there is an extremely important partnership component beyond Japan, which may no longer be France’s preferred partner”²⁰⁶. Indeed, while analysing the data collected through interviews, all interviewees mentioned that France and Japan maintained a close partnership, but Japan was never mentioned as France's primary partner. We can see through various speeches and diplomatic attitudes from France, such as diplomatic visits, and symbolic speeches that Japan is not a primary partner. Similarly, we have also seen that Japan does not rely primarily on France as a partner in the region. Japan has mostly intensified its partnerships with the US, Australia and recently South Korea, “these are definitely more important than other countries far away”.²⁰⁷ Japan’s stance regarding AUKUS is ambiguous considering it is not part of the partnership but remains a primary partner to the US. When announced, Japan avoided criticism and continued to emphasise France’s importance as a security partner. However, Japan’s desire to increase its proximity with the US, and

²⁰¹ Macron, E. (2023), *Conférence des Ambassadrices et des Ambassadeurs*, [Paris].

²⁰² *Ibid*

²⁰³ *Ibid*

²⁰⁴ Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères (2021), *Partenariats de la France dans l'Indopacifique* [France’s Partnerships in the Indo-Pacific].

²⁰⁵ See interview 6.

²⁰⁶ See interview 2.

²⁰⁷ See interview 3.

enhance partnerships with the UK and Australia, points towards the likeliness of joining AUKUS. According to *The Guardian*²⁰⁸, the UK foreign affairs select committee (House of Commons) recommended Japan and South Korea to join the AUKUS pact to develop advanced defence technology. This is a field in which Japan is seeking to develop its partnerships. Expert in Japan's foreign policy underlines that the partnerships with European countries could increase mostly in industrial cooperation for defence technology, with European firms²⁰⁹. However, Japan's primary partnerships focus on regional actors.

France and Japan continue to maintain classical diplomatic ties as part of their still exceptional partnership, but France has turned and diversified its partnerships, notably towards the European Union (EU). France turned to the EU as a support in the Indo-Pacific. SGDSN official mentioned that “for us, the real augmenting stakes will be the EU”²¹⁰. Even if the EU strategy is still at “its early stages” the interviewee mentioned that it was among today's priorities for France in the Indo-Pacific. France has been pushing for an EU policy in Indo-Pacific and succeeded “I think it's very obvious that France played a huge role. I would say *the* role”²¹¹. Indeed, France's presidency of the Council of the European Union from January to June 2022 was an opportunity for the country to promote and push for a stronger EU Indo-Pacific strategy. The EU adopted a ‘strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific’ in September 2021²¹², motivated by Asia's growing economic and political weight and driven by Member States such as France, Germany and the Netherlands. The strategy outlines the EU's aim of becoming a more coherent actor in the region by coordinating member states' initiatives and increasing its presence. Key priorities include promoting effective multilateralism, trade integration, connectivity, maritime security, climate action, and digital governance²¹³. The EU also emphasises upholding international law, human rights, transparency, and sustainable development principles. While not directly aiming to counter China, the strategy reflects concerns about China's rising influence and supports a rules-based regional order. France's presidency was an occasion to boost the visibility of the EU's strategy and promote a deeper and more extensive one. This permits France to present itself as a credible power in the region, holding behind the economic and political weight of the EU²¹⁴. Even if the EU is geographically far from the region, its investment is still a significant point for regional actors and does not go

²⁰⁸ Hurst, D. (2023), “Japan and South Korea should be invited to join Aukus, UK parliamentary committee says”, *The Guardian*. Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/aug/30/aukus-alliance-australia-us-uk-japan-south-korea> accessed 10 September 2023.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid*

²¹⁰ See interview 6.

²¹¹ See interview 5.

²¹² European Commission (2021), *The EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific*.

²¹³ European Union External Action (2023), *EU-Indo Pacific strategy*.

²¹⁴ See interview 2.

unnoticed. The diversification of France's partnerships through the engagement of the EU permits the country to give an Indo-Pacific discourse more credible and legitimate. France has incorporated in its official 2022 Indo-Pacific strategy the importance of partnerships and notably has underlined the EU's strategy under their multilateralism objective²¹⁵. The EU can be an actor that backs France's interests when they find common interests and dialogues. Therefore, France has been diversifying its investments in the region, not focusing only on the projection of *puissance*, but also on the importance of the environment, aid development, infrastructure projects, and connectivity development, which are issues at the core of the EU's strategy. The Europeanisation of the French strategy invigorates its economic, financial and investment aspects.

4.3 Re-orientation and diversification of the French strategy and its impact on the France-Japan partnership

After the creation of AUKUS, a shift occurred in the French strategy, impacting its partnership with Japan. While France was less focused on projecting a diplomacy of *puissance*, it was putting forward a diplomacy of influence. SGDSN official mentioned that “one of the challenges for the French strategy, particularly in the case of AUKUS, is to diversify the nature of the relationships, the issues and the areas of cooperation action”²¹⁶. France now seeks to diversify the nature of its partnerships. This shift was first reflected in a deeper partnership with island states²¹⁷. France focused on the South Pacific firstly because they are its neighbours. The diversification of partnerships has occurred at a moment when France needed to emphasise its posture as a resident power in the Indo-Pacific, by putting forward its overseas territories. It is true that France has always included its overseas territories as a major figure in its Indo-Pacific strategy. However, it has now been incorporated into a more comprehensive and inclusive approach. As SGDSN official underlines “the idea is to make them part of France's geostrategic ambitions”²¹⁸. This idea can be illustrated by the numerous symbolic visits by President Macron and other officials in the island states. These visits included firstly the Minister of State for Development, Francophonie and International Partnerships Zacharopoulou to Papua-New Guinea and Vanuatu in November 2022, underlining the interest shown in these partners. President Macron visited in July 2023 New Caledonia, Vanuatu, Papua-New Guinea, Sri Lanka

²¹⁵ Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères (2022), *La stratégie de la France dans l'Indopacifique* [France's Indo-Pacific Strategy].

²¹⁶ See interview 6.

²¹⁷ See interview 2.

²¹⁸ See interview 6.

and Foreign Affairs Minister Colonna visited Fiji. Macron's visit to Papua-New Guinea was the first visit of a French president since the country's independence. In a public speech, Macron emphasised the importance of island states in France's partnerships "our mobilisation, our desire to forge new partnerships"²¹⁹. In this reorientation, France maintains the topic of security and defence in the region as primordial. Both countries have signed a bilateral agreement on defence cooperation and are planning on strengthening it. The *Loi de Programmation Militaire* (LPM) 2024-2030, outlining the French armed force's budget and objectives, has been voted by Parliament and puts notably an emphasis on strengthening overseas territories. President Macron has underlined in New Caledonia the investment of France's military in the region and the desire to "increase the number of partnerships with all the neighbours to help them protect themselves, their waters and their airspace"²²⁰. There is a concrete involvement to englobe more partners in France's strategy. According to our interviewee, this transition is a means for France "to continue to be credible in its Indo-Pacific policy"²²¹, given its status as a micro-island nation, and underscores the need to align with its key allies. Moreover, while the defence aspect is still relevant in the French strategy, France turned its eye towards the South Pacific to also put forward a different message focused on different issues. Indeed, since 2021, France has been incorporating in its Indo-Pacific strategy the climate change issue and an environmental dimension. In the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs document, France incorporated "climate change, biodiversity, sustainable management"²²² as its fourth pillar of objectives in the region. France seeks to foster actions for biodiversity, develop partnerships for ocean protection and fight climate change. The Indo-Pacific is a zone prone to climate change, incorporating two oceans with a rich biodiversity and coral reefs, fisheries as a vital source of livelihood and marine pollution. It is facing great consequences of climate change such as natural disasters or rising sea levels. Therefore, when addressing its partners in the South Pacific, France has leveraged this aspect more than the defence and security aspect "in New Caledonia, in French Polynesia, in Wallis-et-Futuna, everywhere in the region, we live the consequences of climate change".²²³ France also shows its investment in countering climate change concretely in the region. President Macron announced that the AFD²²⁴ will invest 760

²¹⁹ Macron, E. (2023), *Déclaration de M. Emmanuel Macron, sur le partenariat entre la France et la Papouasie-Nouvelle-Guinée en matière de protection de l'environnement et la stratégie de la France en Indopacifique*, [Port Moresby].

²²⁰ *Ibid*

²²¹ See interview 2.

²²² Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères (2022), *La stratégie de la France dans l'Indopacifique* [France's Indo-Pacific Strategy].

²²³ Macron, E. (2023), *Discours de M. Emmanuel Macron à l'occasion de son déplacement en Nouvelle-Calédonie*, [Nouméa].

²²⁴ Agence Française de Développement, France's Development Agency.

million francs in New Caledonia to protect biodiversity and 200 million²²⁵ in its island-state partners for climate-oriented projects. Through this focus on climate change and development investments, France displays a different approach to its Indo-Pacific strategy. It commits to the South Pacific and diversifies its partnerships. In order to stand out from different partners, notably Australia in the region, France has focused its strategy on climate change and safeguarding biodiversity, an “innovative niche”²²⁶, permitting France to position itself on the regional chessboard. Our interviewee underlined that “this diplomacy, more insular-focused, on environmental issues [...] France weighs as an international actor, capable of influencing major discussions”²²⁷. Indeed, France puts forward its close partnership with the EU to underline its value and extend its influence in the region through other means than its *puissance* and hard power. Papua-New Guinea Prime Minister Marape acknowledged Macron’s commitment “My friend Emmanuel Macron has become [...] our advocate at all the major international forums [...] I am counting on my brother President Emmanuel Macron to speak globally in the world.”²²⁸. We can see that France’s strategy has an impact and posing as the defender of climate change for these nations emphasises its influence in the region. France has been forging this position internationally, notably through its involvement in the UN High Seas Treaty²²⁹, and pushing for an international treaty to prohibit plastic. The maritime feature is undoubtedly an issue that France advocates for globally. Additionally, France puts an emphasis in its strategy on the governance of oceans and on the blue economy²³⁰. It seeks to strengthen partnerships through maritime dialogue and participate in ocean-focused initiatives in the region. France is also quite active in environmental regional organisations and is working on several topics such as marine biodiversity, and illegal fishing. There is a real focus on a “*marimité* less strategic, much more diluted, where the focus is on global maritime governance”²³¹. Our interviewee emphasises that the maritime domain has consistently held importance for France, although its focus has shifted from primarily strategic considerations to a greater emphasis on environmental concerns. However, we need to ponder that idea considering in another interview, SGDSN official underlined that this shift in the environmental

²²⁵ Guibert, N. (2023), “La France mise sur l’adaptation climatique pour maintenir son influence dans le Pacifique”, *Le Monde*. Available at https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2023/07/29/la-france-mise-sur-l-adaptation-climatique-pour-maintenir-son-influence-dans-le-pacifique_6183799_823448.html accessed 18 August 2023.

²²⁶ Regaud, N. (2021), *France’s Indo-Pacific strategy and its overseas territories in the Indian and Pacific oceans*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, p. 17.

²²⁷ See interview 2.

²²⁸ RFI, “France’s Macron announces initiative to preserve primary forests of Papua-New Guinea”, *RFI*.

²²⁹ See interview 2.

²³⁰ According to the World Bank, blue economy is the “sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods and jobs, and ocean ecosystem health”. Available at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/infographic/2017/06/06/blue-economy> accessed 22 September 2023.

²³¹ See interview 2.

aspect was due to the international impact of the COP21, that Paris organized and the international standing of the Paris Accords “I think that the real trigger for France was COP21, and the diplomatic and therefore human mobilisation for COP21”²³². This interviewee justifies the intensification of the environmental issue as the result of global concerns on climate issues, emphasised by the international standing that France acquired after the COP21. Moreover, we can investigate if this shift has affected the Japanese-French partnership. As we have previously underlined, the security and defence aspect are still present. However, we have noticed that there are more joint initiatives turned towards the environment and the South Pacific. Japan focuses highly on maritime security, a common issue in the South Pacific. France and Japan have installed in 2019 a bilateral maritime dialogue, in order to intensify cooperation in maritime aspects such as security, blue economy, illegal fishery and scientific research²³³. This dialogue illustrates a deeper investment of Japan in the South Pacific, an axis that could bolster the partnership with France considering it is a common issue. Furthermore, Japan is increasingly including South Pacific nations as partners in its foreign policy. For example, Japan opened in January 2023 diplomatic representations in Kiribati and New Caledonia. Japan also conducted several official visits in 2022 to Fiji, Palau and to Solomon and Cook Islands in 2023²³⁴. Japan and France have also been coordinating joint development projects in the region, through their respective development agencies, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and AFD. They both advocate the incorporation of infrastructure to address climate change adaptation. SGDSN official underlined that aspect “ of course, in my opinion, the Japanese are extremely competent and have the means to cooperate in development”²³⁵. Both agencies sign regular agreements towards energy transition, sustainable transportation, or natural disaster risk reduction. To illustrate this point, we can mention the Disaster Resilience Enhancement And Management Program (DREAM), which the AFD and JICA support, in order to help disaster resilience in Indonesia.²³⁶ We can see that Japan can be a relevant partner in the region on issues such as climate change, environmental protection and development cooperation. Both countries contribute and partner on those issues. We have seen that the partnership France-Japan evolved, notably focusing on the importance of tackling climate change in the region, incorporating diverse entities such as development agencies. While this strategic transition is still beneficial to both countries, it is discernible that Japan's significance within France's overall strategy has

²³² See interview 6.

²³³ Setton, P. (2021), “Le Japon : un partenaire stratégique de la France dans l’Indo-Pacifique”, *Revue Défense Nationale*, 844, 28-34.

²³⁴ Embassy of Japan to France, (2023), *Réunion des ministres des Affaires étrangères du G7 de Karuizawa*, [Compte-rendu de la session consacrée à l’Indo-Pacifique], [Nagano].

²³⁵ See interview 6.

²³⁶ AFD (2019), Programme d’amélioration de la résilience aux catastrophes (DREAM), AFD.

undergone a notable decline. Our interviews revealed that Japan no longer occupies the same pivotal role it once did in the French strategy. Although both nations maintain ongoing defence cooperation, it is apparent that progress in this aspect has stagnated in recent years. This shift in France's strategic priorities, which now emphasise island states and environmental concerns as focal points, has resulted in Japan assuming a less central position as a partner. This transformation has led to a growing divergence between the two countries, and their partnership has encountered new challenges. As France forges ahead with its evolving Indo-Pacific strategy, the dynamics of its relationship with Japan are undergoing a transformation that merits further exploration and analysis.

In conclusion, we can extract from these interviews that our second hypothesis was partially confirmed. The France-Japan partnership has indeed served as a platform, albeit a modest one, for enhancing France's position in the Indo-Pacific. However, what we have noticed through our interviews is that France is focusing on a different nature of partnerships, focused on influence rather than *puissance*. While the Franco-Japanese partnership is still following classical patterns, France has begun prioritising collaborations with island states and elevating environmental concerns to the core of its strategy. Our interviews underscore that even though Japan has historically been considered France's preeminent partner for enhancing its regional presence, France realigned its focus and no longer depends on Japan to the same extent as before. This shift also translates the limits to a deeper Franco-Japanese partnership and the obstacles, conscious or not, to an enhanced cooperation.

Therefore, we will explore in a fifth and final chapter the obstacles preventing a strengthened France-Japan partnership. We will explore the limits and constraints of the partnership, shedding light on why Japan's role in the French strategy remains somewhat limited. This final aspect seems paramount in drawing a comprehensive conclusion to our research.

CHAPTER 5: The obstacles preventing a strengthened France-Japan partnership

In this chapter, we will touch upon the obstacles to the France-Japan partnership that we have identified throughout our interviews. These obstacles encompass a variety of factors originating from both sides. The identification of obstacles has led us to understand that the partnership is not as flourishing as portrayed in our hypotheses. Therefore, this chapter presents critical elements that lean towards a negative response to our research question. It puts forward that a hindered relationship will not enable France to leverage its partnership to enhance its position in the region.

5.1 The French “Third way” and the concept of *puissance d’équilibre*

One of the main obstacles observed throughout our interviews is the difference between France and Japan in their position regarding China. Japan, as we have mentioned, has territorial disputes with China and has been a direct and immediate neighbour to their growing assertive policy. As underlined by expert in Japanese foreign policy, Japan has been wary about China since 2007 “Japan has been balancing the rise of China quite early, already from 2007, [...] Japan’s perception of the threat of China peaked before others”²³⁷. Japan has therefore adopted the concept of an Indo-Pacific ‘free and open’ (FOIP) and has been a driver country to ensure Indo-Pacific security. These initiatives were consciously taken as a defence against China’s influence. While the US currently maintains a robust and assertive stance towards China, Japan has chosen a lighter approach to counter China's influence, primarily through its alliances and diplomatic channels. Nevertheless, Japan remains deeply economically intertwined with China. It heavily relies on China both as a vital source of imports and as a significant export market. Japan has been taking steps to safeguard its economic security by “diversifying supply chains, strengthening infrastructures”²³⁸ with the aim of reducing its reliance on China. Given its substantial economic dependence on China, Japan faces constraints in adopting an excessively strong political stance. If Japan were to align with the US on a more assertive policy vis a vis China, a retaliation could hurt the country economically, diplomatically and even militarily. However, as a country primarily affected by China’s growing militarisation, coupled with North Korea’s military programme, Japan finds itself in a position where enhancing its security

²³⁷ See interview 3.

²³⁸ Adler, E.D. (2023), “Why ‘Economic Security’ Became Magic Words in Japan”, *Foreign Policy*.

remains a paramount objective. SGDSN official underlined that point “we have to understand the security psychology of Japan”²³⁹. Taking this into consideration, we can grasp why France's stance on China might pose challenges to the partnership and may not necessarily facilitate enhanced cooperation. Indeed, France’s position is not as firm and countering as the US or even Japan. France still has concerns about China’s ambitions but acknowledges its growing economic and political weight. France puts forward a “Third way”, rejecting the Sino-American dichotomy in the region and putting forward its own political stance regarding China. France’s “Third way” entails maintaining cordial and constructive ties, particularly in the economic area, and ensuring open lines of communication without resorting to closure. Macron, for example, visited Xi Jinping in April 2023 and put forward the need for the two countries to “strengthen the political dialogue and promote mutual political trust”²⁴⁰. The most notable areas of cooperation are economics but also climate change. President Macron is embracing a posture of inclusivity, prioritizing openness to negotiations and dialogue without the exclusion of any party. This “Third way” is based on pragmatism, recognising that in today's global geopolitical landscape, China plays a substantial role, and it would not be relevant to exclude one of the largest economic partners, a significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions and an influential political actor. This “Third way” path has been put forward by President Macron in a geopolitical context of rising strategic competition between the US and China, intensifying in the Indo-Pacific. advocating for a 'Third way' unconsciously acknowledges the existence of two opposing sides and the necessity to make a choice²⁴¹. This point underlines why it is negatively perceived by the partners in the region. By refusing to completely side with its partners such as the US, Japan or Australia, France confirms in a way that there is an ‘allied bloc’ to which France wants to distinguish itself from. France rules out confrontation with China but also rejects subordinating its foreign policy to Washinton’s escalating rivalry. This desire to engage in a non-confrontational stance regarding China can be illustrated through France’s attitude in the Indo-Pacific. Indeed, France advocates prudent engagement with China by diversifying partnerships. France deals with many partners in the region and is not part of any security dialogues seen as confrontational regarding China. For example, the strategic alliances AUKUS or QUAD could have been platforms joined by France in the context of an alliance with the US. AUKUS has particularly been perceived by China as an alliance challenging its own interests. Regarding France, SGDSN official confirmed that France does not want to be a part of these

²³⁹ See interview 6.

²⁴⁰ Ambassade de France en Chine, (2023), *Déclaration conjointe entre la République française et la République populaire de Chine*.

²⁴¹ See interview 2.

strategic dialogues “we don't want to find ourselves in polarising dynamics and frameworks”²⁴². The strategic dialogues are therefore seen by France as polarising, underlining this organisation in ‘blocs’ that France wishes to avoid. The French “Third way” portrays a nuanced stance, based on mutual respect, and avoiding containment or conflict. This “Third way” is a broader reflection of France’s desire to appear globally as a *puissance d’équilibre*. This term has been used by the French administration since the 2000s but has been reinvigorated since President Macron’s 2017 mandate. A *puissance d’équilibre* can be translated as a “balancing power”²⁴³. France considers itself neither a middle power nor an aligned power, but a balancing power. Le Drian put forward in 2018 in Tokyo, that France was indeed a *puissance d’équilibre* “a power that brings solutions and has a strengthened credibility”²⁴⁴. Macron has only offered a precise definition since 2019 “a *puissance d’équilibre* means we have a freedom of play, mobility and flexibility. We are not an aligned power”²⁴⁵. “But to put it simply, we are not a power that considers that the enemies of our friends are necessarily our own, or that we refrain from talking to them”²⁴⁶. This stance is an illustration of France’s strategy in the Indo-Pacific. It considers that even if the US has refrained from including China in their discussions, France should not do the same. President Macron has developed and promoted this stance throughout its alliances in the region. Aiming at countries that are not positioned in this Chinese-American dichotomy, France promotes its “Third way” as a means of avoiding involvement in the competition. It aims notably at South-East Asian countries such as Singapore, Thailand, and Indonesia but also more recently enlarged it to Sri Lanka,²⁴⁷ countries which uphold close historical ties with the US but also strengthened their economic cooperation with China. President Macron put it forward in several speeches regarding the Indo-Pacific. In its most recent conference to the ambassadors, as a first tone about the Indo-Pacific “it is a policy of demand and engagement with China”²⁴⁸. In another speech, President Macron underlined that this stance was crucial for France to keep its independence “we have never been aligned or subjugated to any power”²⁴⁹. Another illustration of this policy in the Indo-Pacific is the opposition of President Macron to

²⁴² See interview 6.

²⁴³ Bondaz, A. (2023), “Reconceptualiser la politique étrangère et de sécurité française en Indo-Pacifique”, *Fondation pour la recherche stratégique*, Note N°16/23.

²⁴⁴ Le Drian, J.-Y. (2018), *Point de presse de M. Jean-Yves Le Drian, sur les relations franco-asiatiques et franco-japonaises*, [Tokyo].

²⁴⁵ Macron, E. (2019), *Déclaration de M. Emmanuel Macron, sur les défis et priorités de la politique étrangère de la France et de l'Union européenne*, [Paris].

²⁴⁶ *Ibid*

²⁴⁷ France Info, (2023) “Emmanuel Macron au Sri Lanka : "La montée de la puissance chinoise" au cœur de cette visite du chef de l'Etat, selon l'historien Éric Paul Meyer”, *FranceInfo*. Available at <https://www.francetvinfo.fr>. accessed 14 August 2023.

²⁴⁸ Macron, E. (2023), *Conférence des Ambassadrices et des Ambassadeurs*, [Paris].

²⁴⁹ Macron, E. (2023), *Déclaration de M. Emmanuel Macron, sur les défis et priorités de la politique étrangère de la France*, [Paris].

a NATO liaison office in Tokyo. He affirmed it would be a “big mistake” and is “reluctant to support anything that fuels tensions between the alliance and China”²⁵⁰. This decision was a hard blow for Japan, relying greatly on France for political backup²⁵¹. Expert in Japanese foreign policy confirmed that “the Japanese side was very perplexed”²⁵² but also conceded that “in that sense, France has more diplomatic weight than other countries”²⁵³. This worry from Japan is also reflected in the questions addressed to France by Japanese journalists, notably in 2018 when journalists questioned Minister Le Drian “how can France develop its partnership with China without losing its outspokenness?”²⁵⁴. The French “Third way” is a political stance difficult for Japan to understand and advocate. It has been put forward as a main obstacle in our interviews to the France-Japan partnership “for its partners, the threat posed by China is not taken seriously enough in our discourses. [...] the Japanese are not happy about this”²⁵⁵. Indeed, the “Third way”, perceived by Paris as an independent political stance, is perceived by Tokyo or Singapore as a risk of alignment with China, depending on how the global balance of power develops²⁵⁶. After President Macron’s visit in 2023 to Beijing, one of our interviewees agreed that “it is true that the President's visit to Beijing was taken very badly by the Japanese”²⁵⁷. Another illustration of the discord on this matter is France’s refusal to officially endorse Japan’s FOIP strategy. The FOIP strategic vision for the Indo-Pacific is based on several principles that France has already reaffirmed in previous discourses, such as the freedom of navigation, rule of law and peace and stability in the region. However, the FOIP policy is perceived by China as a containment policy and has been endorsed by the US. One of our interviewees underlined it “the Indo-Pacific ‘free and open’ is for French diplomacy an anti-Chinese Indo-Pacific”²⁵⁸. FOIP is seen by the US as a “very interesting conceptual presentation”²⁵⁹ and aligned with their strategy in the Indo-Pacific. Therefore, the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs has difficulty endorsing official terms for the concept of FOIP. Some officials have already used it in speeches but never in official press statements or documents. Although Japan and France use the same language regarding multilateralism, freedom of navigation and other pillars of FOIP, “when it came to adding a free and open Indo-Pacific, the ministry was very reluctant”²⁶⁰. Even

²⁵⁰ McCurry, J. (2023), “France opposed to opening of Nato liaison office in Japan, official says”, *The Guardian*.

²⁵¹ See interview 2.

²⁵² See interview 3.

²⁵³ *Ibid*

²⁵⁴ Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères (2018), *Point de presse de M. Jean-Yves Le Drian, ministre de l'Europe et des affaires étrangères, sur les relations franco-asiatiques et franco-japonaises*, [Tokyo].

²⁵⁵ See interview 2.

²⁵⁶ Bondaz, A. (2023), “Reconceptualiser la politique étrangère et de sécurité française en Indo-Pacifique”, *Fondation pour la recherche stratégique*, Note N°16/23.

²⁵⁷ See interview 6.

²⁵⁸ See interview 2.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid*

²⁶⁰ *Ibid*

if it is a simple language detail, it is symbolic and revealing of France's position. The partnership between the two countries has some obstacles and this gap in vocabulary is an indicator of that aspect. Therefore, the French stance regarding China is an obstacle to greater cooperation between the two countries since they do not calibrate the same containment towards China. SGDSN official while talking about China's containment underlined it "even if we have the same variables, we're not necessarily at the same cursor within these variables"²⁶¹. However, even if the French stance has been seen as ambiguous by other partners and notably Japan, SGDSN official underlines that France has been clear about its position in international forums and discussions vis a vis Japan "I think that we are sufficiently present together in multilateral meetings, or the content of our bilateral dialogues are also sufficiently substantial and clear on certain subjects"²⁶². He also underlines that "there are a lot of formats, strategic and military discussions, in which France and Japan are with other countries and the discussions are very clear"²⁶³. He believes that the limits of the partnerships do not rely mostly on this aspect.

While in official declarations the aspect of China is not deemed the priority in the Indo-Pacific, it is interesting to underline that we have noticed the contrary in our interviews. Indeed, we have noted that China was a recurring subject and mentioned several times. Even if our questions did not mention China, we always wound up talking about it at some point. For example, one interviewee agreed that "what is at stake is deterring China from getting involved in a conflict in Taiwan"²⁶⁴. Another interviewee hinted it while talking about the French overseas territories "I want to say that in the Pacific South sector, New Caledonia, we don't have too many problems because the Chinese presence is not too great"²⁶⁵. We can see through these extracts that China is an area of concern and of priority for the Indo-Pacific, even if stated otherwise in official statements. In one of the interviews, with an official of the Ministry of the Armed Forces, he even affirmed that it was the main aspect to care about in the Indo-Pacific. He put forward that "the Indian Ocean is in the foreground for us"²⁶⁶ and that the main future challenges will revolve around Taiwan, the US and China. He put a lot of emphasis on the US actions in the Indo-Pacific and the lack of recognition of the Chinese influence by France. Moreover, in an information report, the French Senate also recommended that France should take a more assertive position concerning China. Indeed, they included in their proposals for

²⁶¹ See interview 6.

²⁶² *Ibid*

²⁶³ *Ibid*

²⁶⁴ See interview 1.

²⁶⁵ See interview 6.

²⁶⁶ See interview 1.

the region's strategy to "reaffirm a strong and realistic French position vis a vis China"²⁶⁷. The report underlines that the French discourse is ambiguous and poses questions on the credibility of the French strategy. One of our interviewees underlined the ambiguity in France's actions in the South Pacific "he was almost contradicting the speech he gave in Vanuatu or even in Nouméa, where he spoke of interference and hegemony"²⁶⁸. Indeed, President Macron put forward a non-confrontational posture but then qualified China's actions as hegemony. Scholars also point out that this stance is ambiguous and difficult to understand. Céline Pajon, expert in the Indo-Pacific, agrees that the posture of "balancing power" locks France in a "Sino-American stranglehold"²⁶⁹ and complicates its influence. She gives the example of France refusing to join the US-led Partners in the Blue Pacific initiative, to which other partners such as South Korea and Germany are expected to join. Pajon thinks that "France runs the risk of appearing isolated rather than independent in the absence of a credible option to offer"²⁷⁰. Another expert in the region, Bondaz, also agrees that the French "Third way" is a concept difficult to grasp and does not present a credible position. He underlines that the concept of *puissance d'équilibre* is confusing and poorly conceptualised. It is "unrealistic, counter-productive and inappropriate"²⁷¹ when we compare it to the means put in place notably in the Indo-Pacific and proposes to use the concept of "proactive power and solutions provider"²⁷². Former diplomat Michel Duclos also underlined in a recent article²⁷³ that one of France's foreign policy weaknesses lies in the risk of strategic isolation. He underlines the blow that AUKUS was for France and questions the French campaign for a European strategic autonomy.

5.2 Internal and national limitations to France for a stronger partnership with Japan

While we have seen that the French "Third way" strategy was an obstacle to a closer cooperation with Japan, we have also identified several other factors contributing to the limited development of the Japanese-French partnership and therefore preventing France to leverage

²⁶⁷ Sénat (2023), "La stratégie française pour l'Indopacifique: des ambitions à la réalité", *Rapport d'information de la Commission des Affaires étrangères et de la Défense*.

²⁶⁸ See interview 2.

²⁶⁹ Pajon, C. (2018), "New Japan-France Strategic Partnership: A View from Paris", *Lettre du Centre Asie IFRI*, 74.

²⁷⁰ Pajon, C. (2023), "La visite d'Emmanuel Macron dans le Pacifique vise à redéfinir une légitimité ébranlée", *Le Monde*.

²⁷¹ Bondaz, A. (2023), "Reconceptualiser la politique étrangère et de sécurité française en Indo-Pacifique", *Fondation pour la recherche stratégique*, Note N°16/23.

²⁷² *Ibid*

²⁷³ Duclos, M. (2022), "Le déclassement de la France est une idée fausse", *Le Rubicon*.

this partnership for its influence in the region. These factors are mostly linked to internal and national limitations in the French strategy.

Conceptual limitations

Firstly, our interview with an SGDSN official gave us a significant insight into the partnership. While the interviewee underlined the privileged position of Japan as a partner in the region, he did confirm that the relationship was missing something, “something substantial that anchors the commitment at a political level, on both the French and Japanese sides, to take the bilateral relationship a step further”²⁷⁴. He has not found yet what the missing part was “the challenge is to find a framework, an object and a subject for cooperation that will change people's minds”²⁷⁵, “the relationship lacks the trigger that allows thresholds to be crossed and institutional, legal or diplomatic glass ceilings to be broken”²⁷⁶. The first obstacle to the partnership is not material but conceptual, it refers to a necessary shift in the minds of both parties to enhance the partnership “from a bilateral relationship of dialogue to cooperation”²⁷⁷. It is about discovering that catalytic agent, which can stimulate a deeper commitment at the highest political levels of both countries and influence a tighter cooperation. We can read between the lines and guess that the partnership needs more than discussions and agreements, but a substantial element that will shift the partnership to a higher level. This shows that there is still room for evolution and that on the French side, there is a positive and hopeful desire to develop a stronger partnership with Japan, with the Indo-Pacific as a core point of convergence.

Geographical limitations

Secondly, the most mentioned obstacle to a deeper partnership is geography. On its own, the considerable geographical distance between the two nations does not facilitate the deepening of their relationship. It is crucial to underline the significant distance between them, which poses challenges in fostering close ties and facilitating personal communication. Almost all of our interviews mentioned distance as an obstacle to a deepened partnership “we are talking about an elongation between France and the Indo-Pacific, to go to Japan, it is pushed to a level, it is as far as possible”²⁷⁸, “I think the geographical distance makes the security relations difficult”²⁷⁹, “the one obstacle to more cooperation [...] is the lack of Japanese presence in

²⁷⁴ See interview 6.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid*

²⁷⁶ *Ibid*

²⁷⁷ *Ibid*

²⁷⁸ *Ibid*

²⁷⁹ See interview 4.

Europe”²⁸⁰. It can be understandable on the one side that Japan focuses its attention more towards closer partners. Also, interviewees have noted that there are differences in culture between the two countries “also, culture has accounted on all of this [...] they have different ways of working, different business culture”²⁸¹. While this is a normal fact, this is still an obstacle we had to mention. On the other side, it is also understandable that France has other geographical areas it focuses more on, notably Europe. This geographic difficulty reflects itself in projection exercises that France and Japan conduct in the Indo-Pacific. SGDSN official underlined how hard it was to plan joint military exercises “it is not always easy to combine plannings, to be there, to get together”²⁸². Another interviewee also remarked that on the French end, it is also difficult to be in all operation theatres and that France had other geographical priorities “we are far away, and France has many priorities”²⁸³.

France’s lack of resources and military means allocated to the Indo-Pacific

Thirdly, our interviews have also shown material obstacles to the France-Japan partnership. Indeed, our interviewees from a French point of view agreed that France lacked material means, mostly military, to live up to its strategy. Several scholars have put this forward, emphasising that France's credibility in its strategy is contingent on a realistic assessment of its available resources and capabilities²⁸⁴. The lack of military means notably has been put forward in an information report by the French Senate “the military resources of sovereign forces are ill-suited to the characteristics of the Indo-Pacific and to the stated ambitions of France's strategy in the Indo-Pacific”²⁸⁵. Their proposal for a stronger strategy included notably “providing the armed forces with the resources corresponding to France’s ambitions in the Indo-Pacific”. The report underlines that the military equipment is too ancient and needs to be replaced. It particularly underscores the significance of the maritime dimension, which holds great importance in the Indo-Pacific and is also integral to the partnership with Japan. Since this report, the LPM 2023-2030 took note of the proposals and allocated more budget and resources to the South Pacific. However, the increasing budget was noted as insufficient by our interviewee “yes, there have been improvements, but in my opinion, they are not enough”²⁸⁶. An expert in Indo-Pacific underlined that this lack of means was one of the aspects that shifted the French *politique de*

²⁸⁰ See interview 5.

²⁸¹ See interview 5.

²⁸² See interview 6.

²⁸³ See interview 1.

²⁸⁴ Bondaz, A. (2023), “Reconceptualiser la politique étrangère et de sécurité française en Indo-Pacifique”, *Fondation pour la recherche stratégique*, Note N°16.

²⁸⁵ Sénat (2023), “La stratégie française pour l'Indopacifique: des ambitions à la réalité”, *Rapport d'information de la Commission des Affaires étrangères et de la Défense*.

²⁸⁶ See interview 4.

puissance “it is realising that its rhetoric and strategy need to be more closely aligned with the reality of its resources. Its resources are rather diplomatic”²⁸⁷. This factor contributes to the reduced involvement of Japan with France. France has not made it a point of honour to invest all of its capacities in military means. It has actually been noted that in 2019, France decreased its military presence in the Indo-Pacific (Appendix 8). One of our interviewees underlines that this aspect is one of the future challenges of the strategy. France needs to assess if the means put in place are proportionate to the rest of the actors in the region “in the end, efforts to increase means and resources if it is to be diluted in comparison to what others are doing”²⁸⁸. Numerous scholars have repeatedly highlighted the insufficient allocation of military resources to the French presence in the Indo-Pacific. They put forward that if France wants to put forward a strategy based on its *puissance*, it should allocate the means in accordance. This gap reflects itself in the partnership between France and Japan. Japan expects France to be much more involved in the security of the Indo-Pacific, and that goes hand in hand with resource allocation “for France as well, despite its growing military engagement in the Indo-Pacific region, it is hardly easy to find the necessary assets and resources”²⁸⁹. Moreover, while some of our interviewees and scholars regret the lack of military means, another one of our interviewees actually puts forward that France should allocate its resources differently, avoiding an exclusive concentration on the military domain. Indeed, he advocated increasing investments in other sectors such as economic and financial sectors “it is one of France’s weaknesses, our assets are of military nature and very little of economic nature”²⁹⁰, “a great indo-pacific strategy cannot be based solely on the security and defense pillars”²⁹¹. He explains this point of view by the desire for countries in the Indo-Pacific to develop themselves and therefore to be more interested in investments and development projects rather than power projection “to have weight we need economic, financial, investment and commercial aspects. That’s what the actors of the region are waiting for”²⁹². Another interviewee emphasized the significance of investment in development to enhance partnerships, particularly by increasing the budget allocated to project investment in the Indo-Pacific through the AFD²⁹³. He put forward the essential cooperation between the AFD and JICA to aim at other countries and develop different projects. This point of view is pondered however by other interviews, notably saying as we

²⁸⁷ See interview 2.

²⁸⁸ See interview 6.

²⁸⁹ Tsuruoka, M. (2018), “A new Japan-France strategic partnership : a view from Tokyo”, *Lettres du Centre Asie*, IFRI.

²⁹⁰ See interview 1.

²⁹¹ *Ibid*

²⁹² *Ibid*

²⁹³ See interview 6.

have previously seen that the lack of military means affects the partnership. Indeed, it has been touched upon in many interviews that Japan seeks more military-oriented partnerships because it has engaged in enhancing its defence and security policy.

Internal structure and organisation of the French strategy in the Indo-Pacific

Moreover, other obstacles have been identified, more centred on the necessity to improve the internal structure of the French strategy for increased effectiveness in partnership relations. The first one touches on the administrative side of the strategy. Indeed, one interviewee emphasised that one obstacle blocking an enhanced Indo-Pacific strategy was the lack of an efficient interministerial body “if we had a more robust interministerial organisation”²⁹⁴. He explained that France had a lot of ideas and initiatives, but they were too “disorganised”. He believes that if the approaches were coordinated, in all domains, it would enhance France’s strategy “no matter how many different things we do politically, militarily, economically or financially, that's not what makes sense. What makes sense is when we take joint action”²⁹⁵. Again, we have to ponder this point considering that the SGDSN is an interministerial body coordinating the security actions of France, including the Indo-Pacific. One of its officials confirmed it to us “we act as a very high-level interministerial coordinator, to ensure that the guidelines decided and written down are actually followed by action”²⁹⁶. The other interviewee regretted however that this body was not more developed “the interdepartmental approach is an existing envelope, but its content is limited”²⁹⁷ and took as an example the Japanese National Security Council (NSC). For him, the NSC is a more organised and efficient body that assists the Prime Minister. He really underlined that a stronger interministerial body would enable France to tie stronger links with its partners, notably Japan “this would enable us to do much more with our Japanese partners on a broad spectrum”²⁹⁸.

The second obstacle linked to France’s internal structure is the relation between Paris, meaning the administration of metropolitan France, and the administrations of its overseas territories. Indeed, France has a complex and historically significant relationship with its DOM-TOM (*Départements et Territoires d’Outre-Mer*). They are a central component of the French strategy in the Indo-Pacific, due to their geographical position granting France’s legitimacy in the region. However, there have always been complications and tensions between metropolitan France and the overseas territories’ population. Indeed, New Caledonia, French Polynesia and

²⁹⁴ See interview 1.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid*

²⁹⁶ See interview 6.

²⁹⁷ See interview 1.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid*

Wallis and Futuna enjoy greater autonomy and have regular debates about the possibility of independence. One of our interviewees underlined the importance of having a coherent policy between metropolitan France and its overseas territories. These territories enjoy greater autonomy and have Presidents of governments with territorial assemblies (New Caledonia and French Polynesia), while Wallis and Futuna also has a territorial assembly with three traditional kingdoms and a chiefdom. These distinctive governance characteristics pose challenges in formulating a cohesive strategy that adequately represents the interests of all parties involved. Our interviewee underlined “there was also the idea of establishing coherence and legitimacy for France in the region, [...] and valorise these territories as part of this geopolitical entity”²⁹⁹. A well-structured strategy with the overseas territories could permit stronger partnerships with other actors. Indeed, the overseas territories are sometimes the representatives of France in regional forums such as the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF). This point was also put forward in the information report written by the Senate, in which it was recommended in their proposal to “adapt the Indo-Pacific strategy by strengthening co-management with overseas territories”³⁰⁰. The report underlines the need to build a partnership based on trust to have a rethought strategy in the Indo-Pacific, including the representatives of these territories. The local relationships that these territories can foster are crucial to metropolitan France, which does not have this geographical proximity to leverage. A good relationship is an overall key to ensuring stable partnerships in the region since it provides permanent military basing and a strategic position to monitor maritime zones, which France can leverage with its partners. In general, the overseas territories are the focus point of France’s status as a resident power in the Indo-Pacific, and “if we are talking about extreme scenarios, it is a lot more complicated to sell our legitimacy and our influence and deployment [without the territories]”³⁰¹.

5.3 Japan, on the contrary, moving towards a *politique de puissance* ?

Another obstacle to a strengthened partnership between France and Japan lies in Japan’s strategy. Even if our analysis focuses on the French point of view, Japan’s side on this matter is important here to understand the domains in which it will strengthen its partnerships.

This part will focus on Japan’s desire to focus more on military and defence matters, which may present a hurdle in its partnership with France. France, on the other hand, aims to

²⁹⁹ See interview 6.

³⁰⁰ Sénat (2023), “La stratégie française pour l’Indopacifique: des ambitions à la réalité”, *Rapport d’information de la Commission des Affaires étrangères et de la Défense*.

³⁰¹ See interview 6.

prioritise different facets of its engagement in the Indo-Pacific. While analysing our interviews, we encountered conflicting information on this issue, and we will carefully consider both perspectives. First of all, our interviews have revealed a strong inclination for Japan to enhance its defence capabilities as a means of bolstering its resilience against China's growing influence. We have seen in Chapter 2 that as part of the growing militarisation in the region, Japan has also been increasing its defence budget and modernising its armed forces. This has been underlined by several scholars and is stated in our interviews “the fact that the Japanese self-defence forces are beginning to open up, to take an interest in the outside world, to open up to international cooperation is something quite new for them”³⁰², “when we see Japan wanting Tomahawk missiles, increasing its defence budget, moving forward and integrating with the US in operational terms”³⁰³. This newly increased investment in its self-defence forces reflects Japan’s desire to put forward defence and security matters “yes, and Japan has also done a kind of 360° turn on its security policy as well”³⁰⁴. Expert in Indo-Pacific actually underlined that while France shifted from a *politique de puissance* to a *politique d’influence*, Japan did the opposite³⁰⁵. She puts to light that Japan was previously an advocate of a *politique d’influence*, investing in multilateralism and diplomatic means, but has now started to shift towards a *politique de puissance*. This diplomacy of *puissance* is characterised not only by the increase in their defence budget or their artillery but also by the nature of the equipment. Indeed, Japan seeks to enhance its deterrence capacity by acquiring the capacity to destroy military targets located on the territory of a potential attacker. This interest has been illustrated by Japan’s plan to acquire Tomahawk missiles from the US, around 400 as confirmed by Prime Minister Kishida in February 2023³⁰⁶. In this respect, Japan is therefore strengthening its alliance with the US through intensified defence cooperation and exercises. Japan is also a part of the strategic dialogue QUAD, revived by the US and committing to security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. Another illustration of Japan’s growing interest in the defence sector is its opening to international actors to cooperate. For example, one of our interviewees underlined that one axis that could be invested in the near future is on “defence cooperation projects”³⁰⁷. He noticed that “Japan has become much more open to the idea of cooperation on defence technologies”³⁰⁸.

³⁰² *Ibid*

³⁰³ See interview 2.

³⁰⁴ See interview 5.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid*

³⁰⁶ Lagneau, L. (2023), “Le Japon veut se procurer 400 missiles de croisière « Tomahawk » auprès des États-Unis”, *opex360*.

³⁰⁷ See interview 5.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid*

We have seen in this analysis that Japan is seeking to invest more in its defence sector. This point includes also investing in partnerships that are relevant to that matter. Japan seeks to enhance partnerships which have similar objectives and also want to enhance their military strategy. The close partnership that France and Japan have fostered (see Chapter 2) is an illustration. However, we have also observed that France is seeking to diversify the nature of its partnerships. While Japan and France's military partnership carries on, Japan's expectations extend beyond this. One of our interviewees underscored that since AUKUS, Japan has reevaluated its partnerships in the region "Japan has also reassessed the nature of its relationship with France, [...] I think the UK has passed us by"³⁰⁹. Japan has primarily prioritised partnerships with countries that share similar military commitments and objectives, along with a comparable stance concerning China. The interviewee gave the example that a few years ago, Australia held a lower position than France on Japan's list of strategic partners. Now, Australia is one of Japan's privileged partners, finding themselves in several strategic platforms, and concluding strategic agreements. Therefore, we can deduce that there has been a re-evaluation of Japan's partnership, notably in its strategic and military form. In a conference, Professor Miyashita from the Hōsei University expressed his desire for France to strengthen its partnership with Japan. He highlights that "Japan has become an exceptional partner, but is far from an ally"³¹⁰ and suggests France to look towards the Japan-Australia partnership for inspiration. He puts forward the Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA) signed between Japan and Australia in 2022, permitting and facilitating the implementation of defence forces in respective countries. Professor Miyashita highlighted a potential area for future collaboration and affirmed Japan's willingness to strengthen its strategic relations with France. Through these numerous examples, we observed that the France-Japan partnership encounters a challenge stemming from their divergent objectives and intentions for the region. These objectives are indirectly linked to their stance regarding China, a limit we have underlined previously in our analysis.

Nevertheless, one of our interviewees pondered this argument. He underlines that, on the contrary, Japan is looking towards Europe due to its less aggressive stance against China. Indeed, one of our interviewees raised the question of a deeper partnership between Europe and Japan. He underscores that Japan "has a strong impetus to have close relations with EU, simply because they do not want to be left alone with the US in the Indo-Pacific and the China problem"³¹¹. Through this quote, he emphasises that the US is adopting an increasingly

³⁰⁹ See interview 2.

³¹⁰ Miyashita, Y. (2022), "Sécurité en Indo-Pacifique : quel rôle pour la coopération franco-japonaise ?" [online conference], *IRIS*.

³¹¹ See interview 5.

assertive stance against China's expansion, a discourse that Japan may find somewhat too forceful. As observed, Japan maintains an economically dependent relationship with China and cannot afford to appear overly hostile. Consequently, when the US, a key ally of Japan, adopts a confrontational stance towards China, it places Japan in a challenging position. The partnership with Europe is therefore a way to “control the more hawkish impulses of the US”³¹². Europe adopts a softer stance regarding China and Japan could be seeking diplomatic support in dealing with China. This would allow Japan to avoid appearing hostile and confrontational. Both Europe and Japan come “from the same philosophy, of not pocking China too much, of understanding that any kind of war with China would be destroying the world economy”³¹³, “for Japan it’s important to have this backup from the EU”³¹⁴.

In conclusion, the main obstacle to a stronger partnership between France and Japan in the Indo-Pacific region is their differing positions on China. Japan's cautious approach, focusing on security and defence measures, contrasts with France's "Third way" policy, aiming to maintain constructive economic ties with China. This disconnect complicates their partnership, raising questions about the credibility of France's approach. Additionally, internal challenges such as geographic distance, limited military means, as well as the need for a more efficient interministerial body, further hinder the partnership's development. Japan's shift towards a more military-oriented approach in the Indo-Pacific presents another hurdle, at the same time that France seeks to diversify its partnerships and areas of cooperation. Overall, this chapter provided a necessary assessment of the limitations of the France-Japan partnership, which hinders the French strategy from relying extensively on Japan in the Indo-Pacific.

³¹² See interview 5.

³¹³ *Ibid*

³¹⁴ *Ibid*

CONCLUSION AND RESULTS

In the wake of a rapidly changing global landscape, the Indo-Pacific region has emerged as a critical theatre for international relations. The next decade's challenges and balances are located in this newly named but strategic region. In this theatre, we find two crucial actors that are France and Japan. France is a significant component of this theatre through its sovereign overseas territories in the South Pacific. Japan, not only through its geographical position and preeminent economy but also by its diplomatic presence has confirmed itself as a crucial player in the Indo-Pacific. This research aimed to look into the French strategy in the Indo-Pacific and focused on the significant role played by Japan. As one of France's key partners and as a central actor in the region, Japan was a relevant and interesting case study. This work aimed at participating and contributing to the evolving state of the art on the Indo-Pacific. We focused our analysis on the following research question: *Does France leverage its strategic partnership with Japan to strengthen its position as a power in the Indo-Pacific?* This research question is embedded in a liberal realism framework, which underlines the necessity for France to rely on its strategic partners to bolster its position as a power in the Indo-Pacific. The case of Japan proved to be extremely insightful, shedding light on the complexities, challenges, and opportunities that this strategic partnership entails.

Our research started exploring in its first section the theoretical and contextual aspects on which the research was based. This permitted us to frame correctly our research and findings, by embedding them in a liberal realist theoretical framework. We then provided a contextualisation of the Indo-Pacific and an overview of the French strategy in the region. The contextualisation was particularly valuable because it allowed us to put forward the reasons behind France's necessity to strengthen its position as a power in the first place. We established that the Indo-Pacific was a region holding strategic and political importance, drawing more and more actors engaging and committing to the term. France established a strategy for the Indo-Pacific in 2018 and invested a growing attention to this region. We detailed the strategy to understand how and why France committed to the region, and what aspects were put forward. This interest is rooted in France's global status as a power and its objective and commitment to preserve this position. This aim is reflected by the attention given on the overseas territories, a source of legitimacy for France, but also by the intensified relationship between France and Japan. Indeed, we underlined that the two countries established an "exceptional partnership" and have fostered closer ties since 2018.

Furthermore, we moved to the second section in which we operationalised our hypotheses. This means that we investigated the probability of the hypothesis to be confirmed or denied, by analysing the responses and information we obtained through our data collection process. We started by investigating in the third chapter our first hypothesis, which stated that promoting the military partnership between France and Japan could be a springboard to enhance France's position in the region. We established that this hypothesis is confirmed. Our interviews underscored the centrality of the military aspect in the France-Japan partnership. It was in first place underlined by the growing militarisation in the region, putting the security aspect in the front row for both France and Japan. This was particularly relevant for Japan which has been enhancing its security and military means rapidly and therefore is seeking new strategic partners. We also analysed that the military aspect was a way for France to seek legitimacy in the region, since the beginning of the strategy, notably through its military maritime component, the *Marine Nationale*. Therefore, there has been a growing military partnership between the two countries, that is highly centered in joint military exercises in the region. They have participated in numerous exercises together, notably some on Japanese soil which was highlighted as a turning point in the partnership. Japan takes advantage of the profitable maritime component of the French military forces deployed in the Indo-Pacific. For France, it contributes to its image as a military power in the region which enhances its legitimacy in the region. We notably underline the crucial aspect of developing interoperability for any country wanting to weigh in as a military power. This strategic partnership is also oriented towards other security domains such as space and intelligence but to a lesser extent.

Moreover, we investigated in the fourth chapter our second hypothesis and analysed if it could be confirmed by our interviews. The second hypothesis suggested that Japan's key position in the Indo-Pacific can benefit the perception of France amongst other actors, through the promotion of multilateralism. We proposed it could reinforce the narrative of France as a cooperative power. Our findings were twofold. Firstly, our interviews consistently indicated that despite a prosperous diplomatic relationship focusing on multilateralism, it was viewed as a minor component of the French strategy. We highlighted significant initiatives between the two actors, but the diplomatic ties between France and Japan were ultimately perceived as "classic". It did not benefit as a significant catalyst for France to enhance its position in the Indo-Pacific. However, what emerged from the interviews was primarily a shift in the French strategy since the creation of AUKUS. France oriented its strategy towards more diverse areas of influence and shifted away from a heavy focus on Japan. We decided to focus on this aspect because it was a recurring subject in our interviews. Most of our interviewees emphasised the change in France's priorities and the impact on the French-Japanese partnership. Since AUKUS,

France shifted from a *politique de puissance* focused on military aspects to a *politique d'influence*, focused on its overseas territories and diverse themes beyond the military. This shift impacted the partnership. We analysed that even if France included Japan as its most prominent partner to enhance its position in the region, it has changed its outlook and no longer relies on Japan as much as it used to. We can stress through this point the relevance of choosing a qualitative method, with semi-directive interviews considering this topic was not present in our hypotheses. Consequently, after these findings, we believed it was paramount to then investigate the limits to the Franco-Japanese partnership and the concrete obstacles, conscious or not, to an enhanced cooperation.

Therefore, our fifth and final chapter concentrated on the obstacles to a deeper Franco-Japanese partnership. These obstacles are of a diverse nature and emerged from both parties. The identification of obstacles in our interviews has led us to understand that the partnership is not as flourishing as portrayed in our hypotheses. This chapter presented key elements that lean towards a negative response to our research question. It put forward that a hindered relationship will not enable France to leverage its partnership to enhance its position in the region. The first obstacle identified was the ambiguous French position towards China, an idea recurrent to our interviews. France's "Third way", refraining from adopting a polarising stance regarding China and being overly inclusive to Japan's taste, is a significant obstacle. Japan considers that France does not take the Chinese expansionism seriously enough. Related to that fact, the desire for Japan to enhance its military and defence capabilities, as a response to China's influence, is also an obstacle to a deeper partnership. Indeed, Japan seeks partnerships in which they enhance their defence capabilities, an area that France does not prioritise as significantly in its partnerships. Indeed, France focuses more on its partnerships with the Pacific South, in relation to its sovereign presence. This is an element highlighted in the internal and national limitations of France.

Results

Overall, we have seen that we brought significant elements of responses to our research question. Our first hypothesis was confirmed, considering that Japan did strengthen France's power in the Indo-Pacific through their cooperation in the military and defence sphere, thereby bolstering France's capacity to project power in the region. Furthermore, our second hypothesis was partially confirmed. Japan did enhance France's position in the Indo-Pacific through their diplomatic ties but to a modest extent. What became evident is that France has redirected its attention within the region and decreased its dependence on Japan when looking to enhance its position as a power in the Indo-Pacific. Therefore, we can conclude to our research question

that indeed, France leverages Japan to strengthen its position as a power in the Indo-Pacific, through their military partnership, but that it has recently reduced its reliance on Japan and diversified its strategy.

Another intriguing aspect to explore is the potential role of the EU in this context. Our interviews have indicated that the EU is gaining prominence in the Indo-Pacific, presenting a new factor that could potentially reinvigorate the partnership. France's growing reliance on the EU for regional legitimacy and Japan's interest in expanding its defence partnerships, possibly within Europe's defence industry, make this aspect worth investigating.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Interview guide and grid of questions.

The interview guide is composed of the following content.

Name, position and expertise of the interviewee

Introductory question: What are the main objectives driving France to establish a strategy in the Indo-Pacific, and to strengthen its partnership with Japan?

Themes:

- Bilateral partnership between France and Japan
- Military partnership France-Japan
- Joint military exercises
- France's influence and projection of puissance
- Importance of partnerships in the region
- Regional forums and institutions
- Obstacles to the partnership

This following table includes all the questions asked during the six interviews. We note that not all questions were asked to all interviewees, but adapted and selected according to the profiles.

QUESTIONS IN FRENCH	TRANSLATION IN ENGLISH
Pourquoi la France s'investit-elle autant en Indo-Pacifique depuis ces dernières années ?	Why has France engaged so much in the Indo-Pacific in recent years?
Est-ce que l'Indo-Pacifique est un espace de projection de puissance pour la France ?	Is the Indo-Pacific an region of power projection for France?
Quels sont les principaux objectifs stratégiques qui poussent la France à renforcer son partenariat avec le Japon ?	What are the main strategic objectives driving France to strengthen its partnership with Japan?
Pourquoi le Japon est un atout pour la stratégie française ? Quelle plus-value apporte-t-il?	Why is Japan an asset for French strategy? What added value does it bring?
Quel(s) domaine(s) de coopération entre la France et le Japon (économique, diplomatique, militaire...) vous semblent les plus importants pour la France en Indo-Pacifique ?	What area(s) of cooperation between France and Japan (economic, diplomatic, military, etc.) do you consider to be the most important for France in the Indo-Pacific?

<p>En prenant en compte la marge de manœuvre limitée des Forces japonaises d'autodéfense (JSDF), quelle forme prend le partenariat militaire France-Japon et quels en sont les objectifs ? Partenariat dans la lutte contre la piraterie, partage d'informations...</p>	<p>Given the limited room for manoeuvre of the Japanese Self-Defence Forces (JSDF), what form does the France-Japan military partnership take and what are its objectives? Partnership in the fight against piracy, information sharing...</p>
<p>Quel rôle jouent les exercices militaires conjoints en Indo-Pacifique et est-ce un biais pour affirmer sa présence dans la région? Véritablement techniques ou un moyen d'affirmer son partenariat et sa présence stratégique?</p>	<p>What role do joint military exercises in the Indo-Pacific play, and are they a way of asserting our presence in the region? Is it genuinely technical, or a means of asserting its partnership and strategic presence?</p>
<p>Comment se positionne la France par rapport aux instances de dialogue stratégiques (QUAD, AUKUS) auxquelles le Japon participe? Volonté d'intégrer, par le biais du Japon éventuellement, ou volonté de s'en dédouaner ?</p>	<p>How does France position itself in relation to the strategic dialogue forums (QUAD, AUKUS) in which Japan participates? Is there a desire to integrate, possibly through Japan?</p>
<p>Pensez-vous que l'échec de la vente des sous-marins australiens traduisait-il un recul de l'influence française dans la région?</p>	<p>Do you think that the failure of the Australian submarine sale reflected a decline in French influence in the region?</p>
<p>Dans quelles mesures les partenariats bilatéraux sont-ils importants afin de mener à bien cette stratégie en IP?</p>	<p>To what extent are bilateral partnerships important to the success of the Indo-Pacific strategy?</p>
<p>La coopération France-Japon permet-elle à la France d'accroître son influence/sa place dans les forums régionaux?</p>	<p>Does France-Japan cooperation enable France to increase its influence/place in regional forums?</p>
<p>Comment le Japon et la France pourraient-ils étendre leur coopération stratégique ?</p>	<p>How could Japan and France extend their strategic cooperation?</p>
<p>Le partenariat France-Japon permet-il d'accroître l'influence de la France en IP ?</p>	<p>Does the France-Japan partnership permits France to strengthen its influence in the Indo-Pacific?</p>
<p>Suite à l'AUKUS, est-ce qu'il y a eu une réorientation de la stratégie française, de ses partenaires dans la région ?</p>	<p>Following AUKUS, has there been a reorientation of France's strategy and that of its partners in the region?</p>
<p>Quels sont les obstacles qui empêchent une collaboration plus étroite entre les deux pays ?</p>	<p>What are the obstacles to a closer collaboration between the two countries?</p>

<p>Etes vous satisfait des moyens alloués aux outre mer avec la nouvelle LPM 2024-2030 ? Ces moyens militaires permettront-ils de concilier avec le désir français de jouer le rôle d'une puissance d'équilibre ?</p>	<p>Are you satisfied with the resources allocated to the overseas territories under the new 2024-2030 LPM? Will these military resources make it possible to reconcile France's desire to play the role of a balancing power?</p>
<p>Quel est le rôle de la diplomatie, du multilatéralisme pour contribuer à l'influence française dans la zone, est-ce que ce sont des moyens pertinents ?</p>	<p>What is the role of diplomacy and multilateralism in contributing to France's influence in the region, and are these the appropriate means?</p>
<p>Diriez-vous que le Japon s'oriente vers une politique indo-pacifique davantage axée sur la défense qu'il y a dix ans ? Avez-vous constaté un changement dans leur politique ?</p>	<p>Would you say that Japan is moving towards an Indo-Pacific policy more oriented towards defence rather than 10 years ago? Have you seen a shift in their policy?</p>
<p>Pensez-vous que le Japon cherche à renforcer son partenariat avec l'Europe ou qu'il se concentre principalement sur des partenariats régionaux, comme l'Australie ou les pays d'Asie du Sud-Est ?</p>	<p>Do you think that Japan is looking and working in increasing its partnership with Europe or is it mainly focusing on regional partnerships, like Australia, South-East Asian countries?</p>
<p>Le Japon entretient-il un partenariat solide avec l'UE dans l'Indo-Pacifique ? Quels sont les domaines particulièrement importants pour ce partenariat ?</p>	<p>Does Japan entertain a strong partnership with the EU for the IP region? Which domains are particularly important to this partnership?</p>
<p>Quel rôle la France a-t-elle joué dans la formulation d'une stratégie européenne en Indo-Pacifique ? Quels ont été les domaines mis en avant dans la formulation de la stratégie ?</p>	<p>What role did France play in the formulation of an EU strategy for IP? What were the domains enhanced in the formulation of the strategy?</p>
<p>Comment l'Europe combine-t-elle sa position non conflictuelle à l'égard de la Chine et le désir du Japon de développer ses capacités sécuritaires ?</p>	<p>How does Europe combine its non-confrontational stance regarding China and Japan's desire to develop its countering capabilities?</p>
<p>À l'heure actuelle, pensez-vous que l'aspect sécurité et défense des partenariats est le plus dominant dans l'Indo-Pacifique ?</p>	<p>As of today, do you think the security and defence aspect of partnerships is the most dominant one in IP?</p>

Appendix 2: Data collection sample composition

This table summaries all the interviewees composing the sample for our data collection. Their name, position and area of expertise is listed. Two interviewees (1 and 6) requested to anonymise their name.

Interviewee	Interview 1 Mr. R (anonymised)	Interview 2 Mrs. PERON- DOISE	Interview 3 Mr. KIM	Interview 4 Mr. PERRIN	Interview 5 D. FIOTT	Interview 6 Mr. F (anonymised)
Position	Mr R. is an official at the French Ministry of the Armed Forces. He specializes in Indo-Pacific and strategic affairs. He is also a researcher at the IRSEM (Institut de Recherche Stratégique de l'Ecole Militaire).	Researcher at IRIS (Institut de Relations Internationales et Stratégiques). She specialises in the Indo-Pacific, security issues and more particularly in North-East Asia (Japan and the Korean peninsula). She has long held positions at the French Ministry of the Armed Forces, regarding security issues in the Asia-Pacific region.	Professor at the Centre for Security, Diplomacy and Strategy (CSDS) of the Brussels School of Governance at VUB (Vrije Universiteit Brussel). He specialises in the Indo-Pacific, Korean peninsula and Japanese foreign policy.	French senator of Belfort (France). He is Vice-President of the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Armed Forces Committee at the French Senate. He is co-rapporteur of the report "La stratégie française pour l'Indopacifique: des ambitions à la réalité" published in January 2023.	Researcher at the VUB and Head of the Defence and Statecraft Programme at the Centre for Security, Diplomacy and Strategy (CSDS). He specializes in European defence and security issues. He notably published "Centre of Gravity: Security and Defence in the Indo-Pacific - What Role for the European Union".	Mr. F is an official at the <i>Secrétariat Général de la Défense et de la Sécurité Nationale</i> (SGDSN), the interministerial body reporting to the French Prime Minister. He was previously an official at the French Ministry of the Armed Forces. His area of expertise is the Indo-Pacific.
Area of expertise	France and Indo-Pacific	France, Japan and Indo-Pacific	Indo-Pacific, Japan	Indo-pacific, France	Europe, security and defence, Indo-Pacific	France, security and defence, Indo-Pacific

Appendix 3: A summary of the thematic analysis

Included in this table is a summary of the main themes and responses obtained through the data collection.

Themes	Interview 1 REGAUD	Interview 2 PERON DOISE	Interview 3 KIM	Interview 4 PERRIN	Interview 5 FIOTT	Interview 6 FERNANDE Z
French Strategy in the Indo-Pacific	Critical view of the French strategy. Not enough means and a focus on security aspect when we should also include other domains: economical, financial. Also a need of administration reorganisation.	It started as defence and security-focused, but since AUKUS, it has shifted with a focus on partnerships and diplomacy of influence.	-	Focus on military means. Not enough means allocated but the LPM 2024-2030 permitted some progress. Also need more soft power and focus on France's sovereign territories in the Pacific.	France relying on the EU: France played an important role in the formulation of EU strategy in the IP.	Definitely has acquired the credibility and legitimacy through its sovereign territories. Involvement in security and defence, but also environment, development and multilateral platforms.
Projection of <i>puissance</i> in the area	There are means in place and we have the asset of being a resident power. But still critics.	There has been a shift from a policy/ diplomacy of <i>puissance</i> to a policy of influence since AUKUS.	-	Not an improvement of the <i>puissance</i> in the future. Reform of diplomacy will not help.	-	Definitely projection of <i>puissance</i> . Increase in budget, resources, visits shows it. Means allocated for getting <i>puissance</i> in the region. (we underline that <i>puissance</i> is not only seen as military, but also diplomatic).
Military and security partnership with Japan	Focusing on the military is not enough. We need to focus on other domains, that's what countries are interested in.	Shift of nature. Strong partnership but reevaluation after AUKUS.	Not a strong security relationship, distant, but it is changing.	-	There are collaboration on space technologies. Emphasis on defence cooperation projects.	Joint exercises are done it's good, security interests regarding North Korea. Nothing major in other security fields.

Importance of bilateral partnerships for France and/or Japan	Important yes, but in the end if we do not support them on the Taiwan issue, we will disappoint them.	Importance in some issues (north Korea).	Stronger importance of multilateral diplomacy for political influence, notably in NATO and related to China	Need to tie stronger partnerships so France is not 'left out' in the future. Importance of diplomacy, multilateralism.	Partnerships in the IP in general is important, driver for the EU strategy. But in reality how successful? Growing interest in not security properly but more norms and rules on digital economy for ex.	There's a big importance for France, which wants to deepen its partnerships with other countries (singapore, indonesia) and Japan is a way to enhance those partnerships.
Perspective on how to improve the partnership	Need an interministerial organization for the Indo-Pacific.	-	Not a primary partner but increase of cooperation with EU.	Increase military means and improve relations with sovereign territories.	Accent on defence cooperation projects.	Need an object, a cooperation subject to make the bilateral relationship to go from dialogue to cooperation. But no solution yet.

Appendix 4: Military spending 2005-2015 (in millions of US dollars and using constant 2014 prices).

Table 1
Military spending 2005–2015 (in millions of US dollars and using constant 2014 prices)

Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Cambodia	123	124	119	99,5	169	202	213	232	252	278*	n.a.
Indonesia	3,179	3,228	3,882	3,621	3,784	4,444	5,095	5,850	7,865	6,929	8,071
Malaysia	4,549	4,451	4,970	5,082	4,798	4,191	4,697	4,480	4,881	4,919	5,300
Myanmar	716	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	2,969#	3,169#	3,276#	3,187#
Philippines	2,507	2,592	2,839	2,840	2,731	2,869	2,916	2,957	3,362	3,103	3,893*
Singapore	9,278	9,356	9,718	9,794	10,120	9,928	9,574	9,355	9,323	9,668	10,213
Thailand	3,161	3,502	4,502	5,223	5,826	5,390	5,551	5,472	5,688	5,730	6,101
Vietnam	1,845	2,172	2,800	2,759	3,030	3,378	3,154	3,672#	3,840#	4,256#	4,581#

n.a. = no data available, * = estimated, # = very uncertain data

Source: "SIPRI Military Expenditure Database 1988–2015", SIPRI (online), <http://www.sipri.org/databases/milex> (accessed 5 May 2017).

Source: Heiduck, F.(2017), « An arms race in Southeast Asia? Changing arms dynamics, regional security and the role of European arms exports », *SWP Research Paper*, p.8.

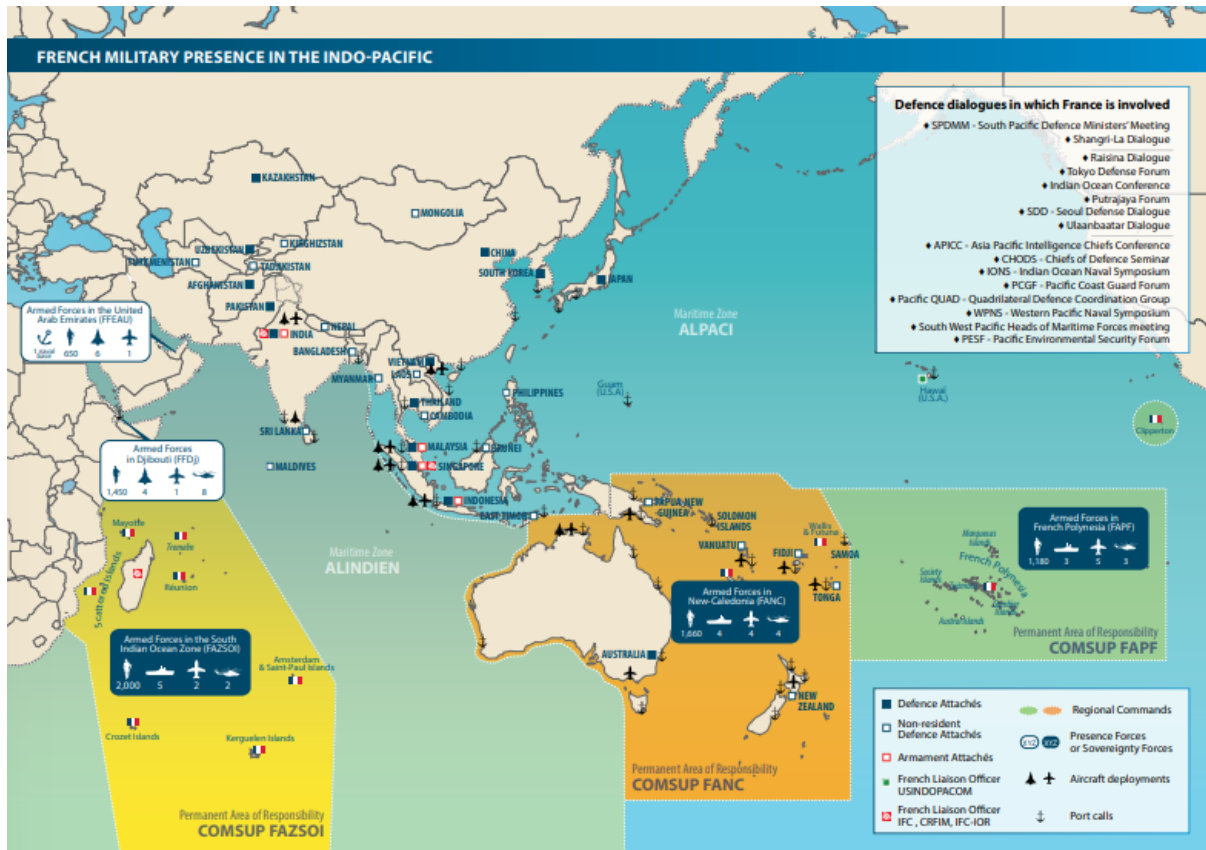
Appendix 5: French Navy's Capital Ships deployed in the Indian and Pacific Oceans (2012-2019)

Table 1. French Navy's Capital Ships Deployed in the Indian and Pacific Oceans, 2012–2019.

Name of Ship	Type and Description of Ship	Missions Involved
Charles de Gaulle	Aircraft carrier	2014: Bois Belleau; 2015: Operation Chammal; 2015: Mission Arromanches; 2016: Operation Chammal; 2019: Mission Clemenceau
BPC Tonnerre	Amphibious assault helicopter carrier	2013: Mission Jeanne D'Arc; 2016: Mission Jeanne D'Arc; 2018: Bois Belleau 100; 2019: Bois Belleau 100; 2019: Mission Jeanne D'Arc
Dixmude	Amphibious assault helicopter carrier	2012: Operation Atalante; 2012: EAOM; 2015: Jeanne D'Arc; 2018: Jeanne D'Arc
Mistral	Amphibious assault ship and helicopter carrier	2017: Jeanne D'Arc
Auvergne Cassard	FREMM multipurpose frigate Anti-aircraft frigate	2017: Surveillance Maritime; 2017: Deploiement De Longue Duree 2012: Operation Enduring Freedom; 2015: CTF 150; 2015: Operation Chammal; 2018: Surveillance Maritime; 2018: TF 55; 2019: TF 150
Chevalier Paul	Frigate, Escort and protection of a carrier strike group	2013: Operation Enduring Freedom; 2013: Deploiement; 2015: Operation Chammal; 2015: Mission Arromanches; 2016: Operation Chammal; 2018: Bois Belleau
Forbin	Anti-air frigate	2014: Bois Belleau; 2016: TF 150; 2017: Preparation Operationelle; 2017: Operation Chammal; 2019: Mission Clemenceau
Jean Bart	Anti-air frigate	2014: Operation Enduring Freedom; 2015: NA; 2015: Operation Enduring Freedom; 2017: Soutien A La TF 150; 2019: Surveillance Maritime
Jean de Vienne La Fayette	Anti-submarine frigate Multi-mission stealth frigate	2014: Bois Belleau; 2018: Surveillance Maritime; 2018: TF 150 2016: Preparation Operationelle; 2016: TF 465; 2018: TF 150; 2019: Jeanne D'Arc
Motte Picquet Provence	Anti-submarine frigate FREMM Anti-submarine frigate	2012: Operation Enduring Freedom; 2016: Operation Chammal 2016: Operation Chammal; 2016: TF 150; 2016: Surveillance Maritime; 2019: Mission Clemenceau

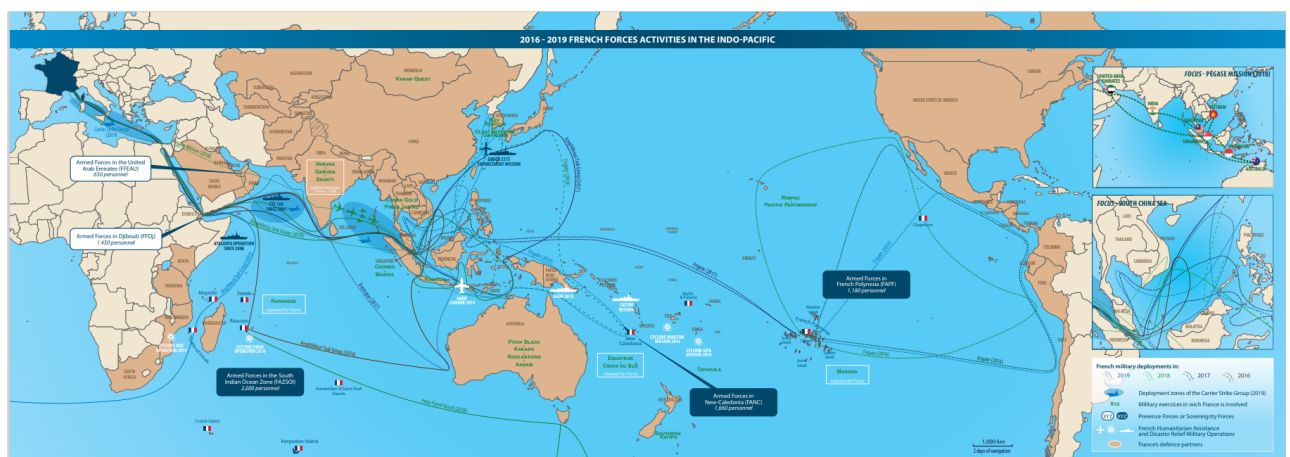
Source: Meijer, H. (2021), "Pulled east. The rise of china, europe and french security policy in the asia-pacific", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, p. 22.

Appendix 6: The French military presence in the Indo-Pacific in 2019



Source: Ministère des Armées (2019), *La France et la sécurité en IndoPacifique* [France and Security in the Indo-Pacific], Ministère des Armées, p.8.

Appendix 7: French forces activities in the Indo-Pacific (2016 - 2019)



Source: Ministère des Armées (2019), *La France et la sécurité en IndoPacifique* [France and Security in the Indo-Pacific], Ministère des Armées, p.11.

Appendix 8: Deployments of French Navy’s capital ships in the Indian and Pacific Oceans (2012-2019)

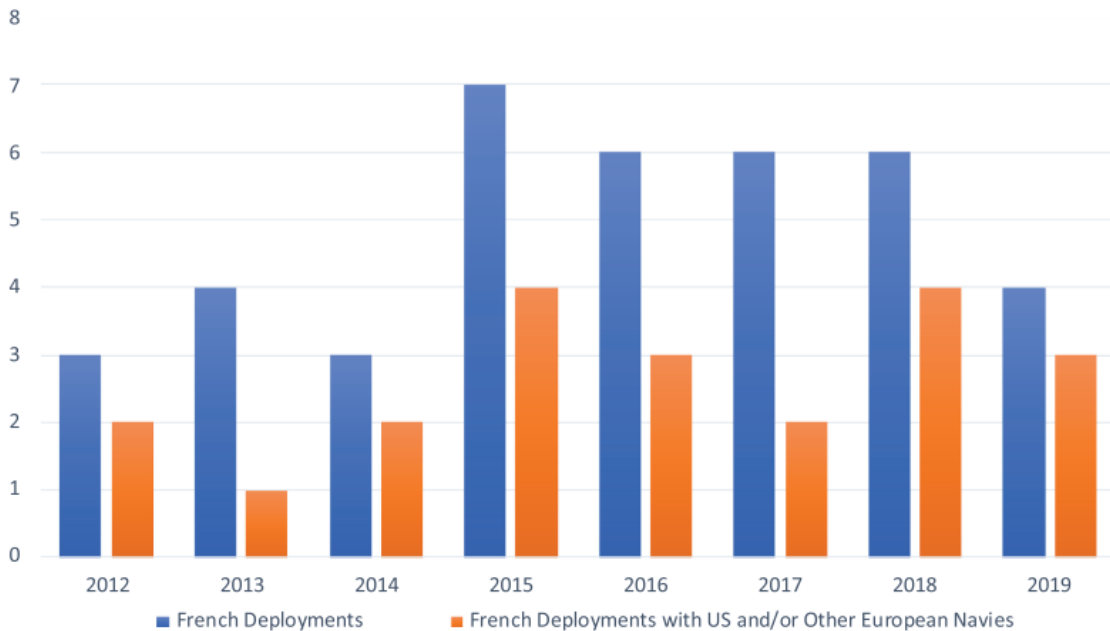


Figure 1. Deployments of French Navy’s Capital Ships in the Indian and Pacific Oceans, 2012–2019. Source: French Navy, *Cols Bleus*, 2012–2019 (for details, see the Online Appendix).

Source: Marine Nationale, *Cols Bleus*, 2012-2019.

Appendix 9: Transcripts of all the interviews conducted.

When addressing a particular information in one of the interviews, please refer to the number of the interview directly (e.g “see interview 6” refers to the transcript of the interview 6 located in Appendix 9.)

Interview 1: Mr. R - official at the French Ministry of the Armed Forces.

Estelle : Dans le cadre de mon mémoire de fin d’année je travaille sur la stratégie française en IP et plus spécifiquement le rôle du Japon dans cette stratégie. Je sais que ce n’est pas votre domaine spécifique mais -

Mr. R : Je vous arrête tout de suite je ne suis plus dans la stratégie FR en Indo-Pacifique (IP) depuis que j'ai pris les fonctions de conseiller au climat du Major il y a un an et demi mais naturellement ce fut le fil conducteur de ma vie professionnelle depuis 40 ans donc je connais un petit peu. Mais je ne peux pas vous parler aujourd'hui en tant que praticien des derniers 18 mois.

E : Ce qui m'intéresse plus particulièrement dans votre position, ce sont les changements que vous avez vu. J'ai l'impression que ça a été des années marquantes pour le début de la construction de cette stratégie. Au ministère de la défense le premier rapport étant publié en 2019-

R : Oui d'accord mais si on fait l'histoire ça va être compliqué de le faire en quelques minutes, il y a un certain nombre de choses qui ont été dites dessus. Bien sur c'était des années charnières, un certain nombre de choses ont été préparées en interne a été développé au niveau politique et aussi des éléments de nature extérieure qui ont accéléré cette prise de conscience. Mais si la France s'est bien positionnée par rapport à d'autres et a été parmi les premiers à s'engager dans une vraie stratégie en IP, en tout cas dans les mots, et après il y a réalité. C'est parce qu'il y avait déjà, d'abord nous étions présents, même si la prise de conscience de notre présence au niveau politique a été tardive, et en fait il y a une sorte de satori politique, prise de conscience qu'on était déjà un acteur engagé en terme de défense et sécurité et qu'on pouvait faire fond la dessus. Sauf qu'on a fait trop à fond sur la partie défense et le reste n'a pas suivi. On n'est quand même pas non plus une superpuissance, tout ça est fragile. Les années 2015, 2014 je dirais car en fait, euh.. il y a beaucoup de littérature dessus, je vous engage à lire les articles de Hugo Meijer qui m'a beaucoup interrogé. Ils parlent plutôt d'engagement français lié à la prise de conscience du problème chinois. Là-dessus il y a des éléments qui donne les principales étapes de notre montée puissance dans la région.

E : Vous avez parlé, je reviens sur vos propos, « la France a établi une stratégie mais en réalité ça n'a pas suivi », la réalité n'a pas suivi au niveau des moyens, de l'investissement ? Qu'est ce que vous entendez par là ?

R : J'ai aujourd'hui dans le monde dans lequel nous sommes , la décence (?) à partir du moment où elle est globale. Et où elle engage l'ensemble des acteurs ministériels, aussi des acteurs privés importants, et on n'a pas embarqué tout le monde. L'approche interministérielle est une enveloppe qui existe mais son contenu est limité. Et c'est ça la faiblesse de l'approche française (FR) comme UK, c'est qu'on a beau rassembler les pièces de choses que nous faisons sur le plan politique, militaire, économique, financier, ce n'est pas ça qui fait sens. Ce qui fait sens c'est quand on a une action conjuguée pour faire pièce a des actions d'acteurs plus ou moins hostiles et on a une réponse globale. Le Japon s'est organisé en fonction et a créé auprès du premier ministre le 'National Security Council' (NSC) et la 'National Security Strategy' (NSS) qui coordonnent et catalysent l'effort inter-agences interministériels du pays. Et ça, ça donne une grande force. Les US ont le NSC aussi et ont bâti leur stratégie en IP comme ça, c'est ce qu'on appelle aussi la ... je sais plus mais ils parlent de dissuasion car c'est un moyen de développer des moyens d'actions pour dissuader l'adversaire. Et puis les britanniques d'une certaine mesure mais d'une manière moins organisée. Peu d'Etats ont des capacités d'actions fortes au niveau interministériel capable d'embarquer l'ensemble des acteurs. Je ne dis pas

qu'on fait pas grand-chose, je dis qu'on fait les choses désordonnées. Et intégré avec des moyens qui sont limités, nous sommes loin, les priorités de la France sont multiples et que c'est ça qui fait la différence entre notre action dans la région et un l'action d'un acteur régional. Prenons comme comparaison un acteur comme l'Australie. L'Australie est présente, elle déploie sa stratégie dans son espace, environnement immédiat, et rayonnant. Nous il y a ça, le moyen orient, puis l'Afrique subsaharienne, puis il y a l'Europe, la Russie. Vous voyez c'est ça la différence. Ça donne un effet d'émiettement des moyens et c'est pour ça aussi que la France, comprenant le problème de la ressource, en essayant de maximiser ses avantages, a tout fait pour européaniser l'approche IP. Pour donner du poids, sur des aspects économiques, financiers, en termes d'investissement, commerciaux. C'est ça qu'attendent les acteurs de la région. Ils se moquent éperdument de savoir si nous allons envoyer une frégate ou pas. Part contre ce sont des pays qui sont désireux de se développer et de maintenir des équilibres avec des partenaires extérieurs, notamment la Chine. Et la dégringolade des parts de marché US qui se sont effondrer au cours des 15 dernières années, et le léger réfrètement des positions européennes fait que les pays de la région, Asie du Sud Est, Asie du Sud, ou de la façade orientale de l'Afrique, voient une augmentation régulière de la présence chinoise en terme de commerce et investissement. Et c'est ça la réalité. Ils veulent se dev et ne vont pas faire la fine bouche. C'est ça leur grande stratégie c'est le développement c'est leur priorité stratégique. La partie sécuritaire et défense vient derrière. C'est une faiblesse de la France car nos atouts sont de nature militaire et très peu de nature économique.

E: Et du coup si on superpose ça avec le partenariat JAP-FR, c'est un partenariat qui se développe énormément de manière économique et financière mais je vois énormément de sujet sur le partenariat stratégique et militaire. Selon vous ce n'est pas pertinent ? Pas pertinent d'investir dans des stratégies communes ?

R : Si c'est très important mais disons que ce que l'on fait dans le domaine de la défense au sens large, c'est très bien. Une grande stratégie en IP ne peut pas reposer que sur le pilier sécuritaire. C'est tout ce que je dis. Donc le rôle de l'AFD devrait être plus important, celui des entreprises doit être plus important pour être plus présent dans la région. Tout ça marche ensemble. On ne peut pas faire reposer tout sur le pilier défense et sécurité. C'est ce que font malheureusement, largement, les Américains, par inertie et car ce sont des outils, voilà ils ont laissé se dégrader leur position économique et financière et d'investissement, même si elle reste importante, n'allez pas me faire dire ce que je n'ai pas dit. Mais aujourd'hui on est obligé d'additionner les positions américaines, japonaises, australiennes et patati pour se dire ah oui quand même les Chinois sont forts. Mais avant, c'était les US qui étaient la principale puissance éco et financière de la région. Jusqu'en 2000 ça ne se posait pas la question ? Or tout s'est effondré plus vite qu'imaginer. Donc les Européens et les Français ont des positions qui sont faibles. Et d'un point de vue asiatique, les pays de l'IP, on doit bien comprendre que l'Europe a du mal à exister parce que même si c'est l'Europe qui négocie les accords de libre-échange, l'Europe reste une construction encore toujours mal comprise par nos partenaires. Nous on tient aussi un langage trompeur, on a tendance à dire 'les positions économiques allemandes plus française plus italiennes ça fait tant', non ça ne marche pas comme ça. Les parts de marché européennes c'est d'abord des concurrents qui se tiennent la peau toute la journée. Ce que je veux dire par là, quand on négocie un deal, on le négocie, avec la France, avec l'Allemagne mais pas avec l'Europe. Donc notre poids est très limité. Les parts de marché françaises sont de

l'ordre de 2%, l'Allemagne fait 4%. Voilà tout ça renvoie à la vraie place des européens, une place limitée. Bien sur on est tous bienvenus, l'Europe est reconnue comme une puissance politique, diplomatique, tout à fait bienvenue. Le Japon est dans la même situation. Leur poids économique s'est dilué depuis l'effondrement de la bulle et la montée en puissance phénoménale de la Chine. Donc elle cherche des partenaires. Comme le partenaire américain s'est révélé non-fiable jusqu'à Biden si vous voulez. Pourquoi car il a entraîné dans des guerres improbables en Afghanistan Irak, et après négligeant complètement la Chine et l'Asie, laissant ses positions s'effriter dans la région, refusant des accords de libre-échanges qui était la véritable attente politique dans la région. Donc pour les Japonais c'est un cauchemar sans fin. Ils sont enfin sous oxygène car l'administration Biden est intelligente, cohérente, pour la première fois depuis longtemps elle poursuit une politique très cohérente sur le plan stratégique, éco, financier. Elle est totalement en face avec la politique japonaise mais les européens sont aussi les bienvenus sur ce jeu là. Malheureusement la France ne semble pas avoir compris comment ça marche, on avait tout pour gagner, il y a eu des signaux qui nous ont été adressés sur Taiwan et puis sur le bureau de l'OTAN à Tokyo. Ce qu'il faut comprendre, si j'insiste sur la fragilité des positions américaines c'est que nous sommes dans un moment charnière. Tout se joue dans les prochaines 10 années. Soit les US disparaissent en tant que superpuissance mondiale et laissent leur place à la Chine qui leur laissera que des miettes dans le Pacifique orientale et ça sera la fin du statut américain. Tout se joue autour de Taiwan. Perdre Taiwan c'est laisser les autres en première ligne, la Corée du Sud, le Japon, l'Australie. Ça serait la fin d'un imperium bâti à l'issue de la WWI. Il assurait prospérité, stabilité donc ça convenait à tout le monde. Tout ça est très fragile et contesté par la Chine. L'objectif premier est l'expulsion des US en tant que principale puissance stratégique en IP. Si on garde ça en tête on comprend toute la politique chinoise. C'est ce que je dis dans le désert depuis très longtemps. J'en reviens aux européens et aux Français, évidemment, ce qui se joue c'est la dissuasion de la Chine pour éviter qu'elle ne s'engage dans un conflit à Taiwan. Qu'elle pourrait gagner car elle va concentrer l'ensemble de ses forces pour prendre le contrôle de l'île. Elle en a à peu près les moyens. C'est ça qui explique AUKUS, tout ça est important. Si vous voulez la dissuasion de la Chine c'est bien comprendre que pour nous européens, si les US perdent leur statut en IP à cause de Taiwan. Alors on peut douter de leur engagement en Europe. C'est un enjeu historique voir vital pour eux, si l'aspect nucléaire rentre en jeu. Si nous n'avons pas compris qu'ils jouent qq d'essentiel, et bien ils nous le feront payer. Comme une sorte de trahison historique. Donc cette absence de compréhension par certains de cet enjeu fait que on a des déclarations incompréhensibles et des choses qui font douter les US de notre compréhension des enjeux stratégiques.

E: Comment expliquez-vous que la France n'a pas une position aussi ferme face à la Chine ?

R : Quand vous prenez le logiciel français, très particulier sur la défense européenne, la logique était que les européens ont besoin de construire leur autonomie stratégique. Bien sur mais là on considère que cette autonomie stratégique est en bonne voie, et là certains disent qu'on va se faire embarquer dans la rivalité sino-américaine. C'est une façon de voir le problème. Mais cette 3^e voie est incompréhensible par nos partenaires, aussi bien en Europe qu'en Asie, elle manque totalement de crédibilité. L'autonomie stratégique peut se construire tout en étant les alliés des US et ceux qui nous attendent, les Japonais et Australiens. Mais cela plus notre absence de moyens fait que notre crédibilité est relativement écornée.

E: Comment la France essaie de se donner une crédibilité face à ses partenaires dans la région, est-ce que l'intensification des partenariats bilatéraux, faire des visites, augmenter nos moyens militaires sont des moyens pour plus de crédibilité ?

R : Oui mais restons raisonnables, je l'ai écrit dans quelques papiers, que la valeur ajoutée européenne en cas d'effritement de la région, Taiwan, tout se jouera dans l'océan Indien pour nous. Ça libèrerait les Américains sur ce théâtre, où ils sont assez peu présents, et leur permettant de concentrer leur moyens sur l'extrême orient. Et nous tenant les verrous pour peser sur la chine. C'est là où nous pouvons jouer un rôle majeur en temps de paix, de crises et de conflits, pas au-delà. Si vous voulez envoyer des avions dans le pacifique, c'est très bien mais ça sert juste à montrer qu'on sait faire, qu'il n'y a pas beaucoup qui savent faire. Et comme vous le savez ces avions ont des capacités duales comme vous le savez, ça renvoie un signal à la chine. Mais ce n'est pas ça qui va faire la différence dans la crise. Ce qui compte c'est que nous sommes encore des acteurs qui comptent (FR et EU), nous avons encore un poids économique, militaire significatif et nous pouvons peser. Pour les Chinois le positionnement de l'Europe est une donnée. Ils essaient d'encourager les discours des européens d'un entre-deux. Bien sur qu'on compte, bien sur que si on montre et dit qu'en cas de nécessité t de défi essentiel nous serons fermement à coté des US, ça peut avoir un effet dissuasif. Evidemment ls chinois montrent aussi qu'ils ont des dents et des griffes, ils ont des moyens de rétorsions, économiques, commerciaux, et nous sommes malheureusement assez dépendants sur beaucoup d'aspects. S'agissant du Japon, je peux dire que le Japon a été très déçu, de ces derniers évènement, mais en même temps je pense que le japon considère que parmi les européens de l'UE, nous sommes les plus engagés, les plus sérieux. Maintenant tout est bon à prendre et la présence éco allemande est importante, et l'aspect économique est aussi important que l'aspect militaire. Mais les UK font ce qu'il faut faire. Ils coopèrent, ils essaient de dev la coopération dans l'industrie d'armement.

E: Une dernière question, comment le Japon pourrait-il aller plus loin dans leur coopération bilatérale ?

R : J'ai peut-être une vision datée, mais de ma compréhension c'est si nous avions une organisation interministérielle plus robuste. Cela nous permettrait beaucoup plus de choses avec nos partenaires japonais sur un spectre large. Or ce n'est pas comme ça que ça marche. Notre SGDSN est un service un peu croupion, j'y ai travaillé 8 ans donc je sais de quoi je parle, ce n'est pas équivalent à NSC qui est capable de donner une impulsion. C'est un véritable relais du PM japonais. Nous, quand certains ont imaginé en 2007, au moment de l'élaboration du plan défense et sécu nationale, lorsqu'on a imaginé un équivalent à NSC, les grands ministères se sont employés à démontrer que ce n'était pas une bonne idée car ils ne veulent pas perdre une certaine autonomie. Donc c'est ça pour moi la révolution pour moi qui permettrait de changer de braquet et de faire des coups et qu'on ait une véritable organisation qui permette de générer dans la durée et sans avoir besoin de visite d'autorité mais une capacité d'action conjointe et d'un pilotage, ou du moins d'une coordination entre pilotes. Aujrd, il y a pas mal de pilotes et d'acteurs mais chacun fait son truc dans son coin, avec de la concertation certes mais c'est un sacré bazar.

Fin de l'entretien

Estelle : Pourquoi la France s'investit-elle autant en Indo-Pacifique depuis ces dernières années ?

Mme Péron-Doise : Avec la présidence française il y a 2 ans ça correspondait avec une doctrine stratégique assez axée sur la puissance, les capacités de la marine nationale. D'où cet effort en 2021, on a multiplié les présences et points morts dans la zone. Ça demande un énorme effort, quand l'Etat major de la marine a fait ses comptes, il a dit écoutez, on va pas pouvoir envoyer le porte-avion, le sous-marin tous les ans voilà. Il y a la guerre en Ukraine entre temps. D'après les derniers discours, notamment avec le discours aux ambassadeurs de Macron, qu'on est davantage de mettre l'accent sur une politique d'influence, sur la participation aux grandes organisations internationales, et bien sur il y a la composante partenariat extrêmement important au delà du Japon, qui n'est plus peut être le partenaire privilégié de la France. Le Japon a tendance de mettre l'accent sur une politique de puissance qui n'était pas le cas auparavant. Quand on voit le Japon qui veut des missiles Tomahawk, qui augmente son budget de défense, qui va de l'avant et qui s'intègre en terme opérationnel aux Etats-Unis. En fait le paradoxe c'est que le Japon, qui paraissait être des alliés privilégiés de la France dans la zone IP est en train d'évoluer d'une politique d'influence à une politique de puissance et essaie de s'en donner les moyens, et la France qui avait un accent porté sur une pol de puissance, en mettant en avant sa marine, est en train de réaliser qu'il faudrait calibrer davantage son discours et sa stratégie avec la réalité de ses moyens. Ses moyens sont plutôt diplomatiques, et elle est en train d'évoluer en mettant davantage l'accent sur une politique d'influence. Je trouve que le discours du Président et ses déplacements cet été dans l'IP, Nouméa, ou le fait qu'il se soit rapproché des Etats micro-insulaires, alors que la France n'avait jamais fait l'effort en dehors de l'Australie et de l'Inde envers les Etats micro insulaires. Il y a un réajustement de la diplomatie. Ce qui est intéressant dans le concept IP français c'est qu'il se réajuste. L'adoption de la stratégie officielle, avec les premiers documents, il y a déjà un premier document en 2019 qui a été modifié en 2022, c'est déjà en insistant celui là sur les partenariats. C'est la preuve que la France comprend bien qu'elle doit calibrer son discours pour qu'il sonne juste. C'est très intéressant, le problème étant que l'AUKUS a été une claque pour la diplomatie de puissance de la France, puisqu'en perdant ce partenariat très inclusif avec l'Australie, on a quand même perdu un pilier important de la politique de puissance française dans le Pacifique sud. La France a des intérêts particuliers de souveraineté à défendre. Elle a perdu à la fois sur le plan d'une stratégie de nature nationale, qui est la protection de ses territoires, et à la fois son assise dans la région vis-à-vis de ses proches voisins, et elle a perdue en termes de capacité stratégique car elle ne peut pas pallier sur l'interopérabilité avec les forces sous-marines, australiennes, et qui dit sous-marins, partages d'informations, maîtrise de la présence ne surface. Ça intégrait énormément d'éléments. Est-ce qu'on a perdu du temps, oui, mais en même temps c'est vrai que c'était très bien pensé de développer une politique IP avec un pilier australien sachant que c'est en 2018 qu'on a signé ce contrat. Ça nous permettait de réellement développer un discours de puissance à ce moment-là. On avait un partenariat fort avec l'Inde, dans l'océan Indien, dans le pacifique occidental il y avait le Japon, et dans le pacifique sud il y avait l'Australie. Dans l'ensemble de notre cartographie nationale IP, on pouvait appuyer sur un discours d'Etat riverains, on est présent et on a d'excellentes relations avec nos voisins, le voisin indien, japonais, australiens, l'essentiel du discours FR au début, et du moins quand j'étais responsable du secteur Asie-Pacifique, c'était d'avoir une diplomatie de défense, pour affirmer notre présence dans la zone. Elle était beaucoup axée sur les contrats industriels, et on continue d'avoir cette spécificité, qu'on met jamais vraiment en avant, et qui est un élément fondamental de la stratégie FR en IP . Récemment, on s'est rapproché de l'Indonésie, car il y avait un énorme contrat Rafale à la clé, qu'on espère toujours vendre des sous-marins. Il faut bien voir que la construction des partenariats FR se base sur ça aussi.

Estelle : Vous parlez d'un passage d'une politique de puissance à une politique d'influence, quel a été l'élément central de ce changement, AUKUS ?

MPD : Oui on a bien vu cette échec, et la façon dont ça s'est monté, la claque quand même pour la diplomatie française. Aussi à ce moment là on a perdu un pilier essentiel de notre stratégie IP, et que là, il fallait vraiment relancer. Et, bien entendu je pense qu'il y a beaucoup de chose dans ce retrait australien, sachant qu'on avait un gouvernement conservateur, et actuellement travailliste, qui a peu être un langage beaucoup plus rond. Le précédent gouvernement a vraiment abimé la relation avec la France, et qui veut repartir en ayant des relations restaurées, qu'ils restent sur la ligne. Et pour eux c'est vraiment une appréciation de ce que représente la menace chinoise et nous avons toujours ce même problème, qui est aussi cette façon du Japon de percevoir l'évolution de ses relations avec la France. Pour ces partenaires on ne prend pas assez au sérieux, dans les discours qu'on a, la menace chinoise. Ça avec le dernier discours, très étrange, du président lors de la conférence des ambassadeurs, où il dit que la chine est quand même un partenaire important, il est presque en train de contredire le discours qu'il a tenu au Vanuatu ou même à Nouméa où il parlait de l'ingérence et de l'hégémonie et du respect de la souveraineté des peuples que la France avait. Et si on voudrait pousse l'ambiguïté du discours français et les critiques qui lui sont adressées, on a presque l'impression qu'il met dans le même sac et les US et la Chine, alors qu'effectivement, avec son discours il redit l'importance d'une bonne relation stable avec la France, et il repart en réutilisant la France comme puissance d'équilibre et sur le fait qu'on proposait une alternative. Et quand vous dites 'je propose une alternative' cela veut dire que vous vous inscrivez comme une 3^e voie, la première c'est ou les US/Chine, la 2^e c'est ou les US/Chine, et pof, une 3^e voie. D'abord c'est un discours qui ne fait pas plaisir aux Japonais, qui ne fait pas plaisir aux Indiens, qui sont quand même très soucieux de leur rang et de leur influence dans la région, pas aux Australiens non plus car on a l'impression qu'il y a un bloc allié, Inde, Japon, Australie et quelques autres comme l'ASEAN, qui n'ont aucune politique IP propre, et les deux grands, et hop il y a la France qui miraculeusement qui propose une 3^e voie. Le Japon ne peut pas adhérer à cette vision qui le met en porte-à-faux vis-à-vis de son alliance, d'où les efforts du Japon, pour rester très proche de la France qui est une puissance diplomatique, historiquement nous avons des liens, nous ne pouvons pas nous ignorer, mais je pense que sur le plan stratégique, le Japon tend à s'aligner de plus en plus étroitement sur les US, et on voit des composantes US-Japon-Australie qui tendent à se développer. Et le Japon fait aussi partie du QUAD, et donc la France tend à s'isoler davantage avec son discours, sachant qu'elle n'a pas les moyens militaires de ses ambitions. Donc elle a un discours IP qui ne peut tenir que sil elle s'appuie sur l'Union Européenne. La crédibilité française c'est d'avoir une politique de partenariat plus ouverte, vis-à-vis des Etats micro-insulaires, en réalisant que la France, c'est pas la métropole, c'est la réunion, c'est la Polynésie française, la nouvelle Calédonie... Je dirais qu'il y a un violent rappel à la réalité française que la polynésie française ou le caillou comme on dit, n'est pa plus grand le la Papouasie nouvelle guinée, mais enfin plus grand que le Vanuatu et Fidji. Donc un rappel de la réalité et une carte géopolitique qui est la dimension française et que le fait l'essentiel des moyens militaires ne sont pas vraiment suffisant, que la France doit avoir une politique de projection de puissance, qu'elle essaie d'avoir régulièrement en envoyant le porte-avion, les sous-marins et de plus en plus les Rafale avec la mission Pégase, pour montrer qu'en cas de crise, elle est capable de régir, de remplir des certaines obligations vis-à-vis de ses partenaires. Mais en fin de compte, elle est surtout obligée pour continuer d'être crédible dans sa politique IP, de comprendre que 'c'est un Etat micro-insulaire et de comprendre que la France doit s'adapter à ses principaux partenaires, d'où cette diplomatie, qui est plus insulaire qui est tournée vers les questions d'environnement, la gouvernance des océans, et en effet elle met son poids dans la balance en tant qu'acteur international, en tant qu'être capable d'influencer dans les grandes discussions, et ça elle peut le faire également en ayant une action, langage commun avec l'union européenne.

La France est toujours très investie en Asie-Pacifique, et donc on a toujours eu une stratégie pour l'Asie-Pacifique, très élaborée qui s'est appuyé sur un réseau diplomatique et surtout un réseau d'attachés de défense très important. Et, une coopération de défense à dominante industrielle, avec toutes les exportations d'armement, qui sont très anciennes en fait. Dès les années 80, on avait déjà des coopérations, les sous-marins à la Malaisie, programme de frégates, les programmes d'avions avec Singapour, avec l'Inde on a commencé dès les années 90', les exercices Baruda avec le porte-avion Charles de Gaulle c'était déjà en 1983. La France a eu du mal de faire reconnaître son statut de puissance riveraine car pendant longtemps ce statut lui était dénié sur le prétexte que c'était une puissance coloniale. Donc, c'est vrai qu'elle avait un discours très prudent, même vis-à-vis de l'Inde qui considérait que la Réunion était une colonie française. Bien entendu même l'Australie vis-à-vis de la présence française et notamment avec les difficultés et les maladroites vis-à-vis de la nouvelle Calédonie. A partir des accords de Matignon, les relations ont commencé à se stabiliser avec l'Australie, mais on était toujours sur l'affaire des essais nucléaires, et pendant longtemps on était *persona non grata*. La présence FR était déjà établie sur la base de ces possessions mais le discours FR n'était pas audible car la France était très critiquée, et donc elle ne mettait pas en avant son statut de puissance riveraine comme elle le fait en IP, au début elle mettait l'accent sur ses partenariats et sur le fait que elle était par le biais de ses partenariats, par le biais des exercices qu'elle faisait, par le biais de ses exportations d'armements, qu'elle était un acteur de la sécurité de l'IP, enfin de l'Asie-Pacifique. Je dirais que pendant longtemps, son point d'appui dans la région, a été Singapour. Après la Malaisie, donc ça a quand même commencé avec l'Asie du sud-est et puis finalement avec ce programme d'armement massif, des scorpènes (sous-marins) indiens, paradoxalement, ça fonctionnait bien avec l'Inde et à ce moment-là, dans les années 90, le Japon avait énormément besoin de partenariats, pour lui s'affirmer comme acteur de la sécurité paradoxalement, pour se légitimer. Donc la France, elle avait une stratégie Asie Pacifique avec les bureaux Asie du ministère de la défense qui avait un fascicule 'la France et la sécurité en Asie-pacifique' qui a été édité jusque dans les années 2016, et en fait, quand, en 2018 le Président de la République a parlé dans son discours à Garden Island, de puissance d'IP, le ministère de la défense ont juste changé la formulation. La France est partie avec comme inspiratrice de sa politique IP, le ministère de la défense, devenue des forces armées, enfin les cercles militaires, qui s'appuyaient sur une notion de la présence française basé sur la sécurité et sur la diplomatie de défense et sur la France puissante. Et ce discours aurait très bien pu fonctionner jusqu'à l'AUKUS. L'AUKUS a quand même été un coup de revers, une mise en échec du discours que la France avait construit et qui fonctionnait. A partir de là, il y a eu des réactions très émotives, sur la trahison, mais ce discours très réactif, il a fallu trouver une contre stratégie et réfléchir à la recalibration. Et donc une politique IP qui ne pouvait plus fonctionner sans ce pilier australien qui ajoutait du poids au discours de la France puissance. Là, si vous voulez, la France puissance paraissait très diminuée et le discours est apparu je dirais, je ne dirais pas frappé d'illégitimité, mais tout d'un coup il s'est affaibli. Il a perdu sa portée. Il y a eu un tâtonnement, puis, la France a assumé à partir de 2021 la présidence de l'UE et elle en a beaucoup profité à la fois pour influencer l'UE et faire en sorte que l'UE adopte une politique IP. La France s'est présente et a appuyé sa légitimité en tant que la France puissance riveraine et la France seul état membre de l'UE présent en IP et possédant effectivement des outils diplomatiques et militaires, politiques, et donc à ce moment-là elle a changé de discours tout en comprenant qu'il fallait qu'elle diversifie ses partenariats. Si vous voulez il y a avait toujours ce discours du président 'France puissance d'équilibre' et ce discours il pouvait se comprendre dans la mesure où il fallait trouver une issue au coup de revers australien, et plutôt de rester dans un discours de victimisation et il fallait s'inscrire en faux contre quelque chose qu'on avait tendance de présenter comme une forte alignement, un durcissement de la compétition de puissance entre US et Chine avec Trump et Biden qui avaient un discours de plus en plus confrontationnel. Et donc leurs partenaires pouvaient s'inquiéter comme l'Inde et l'ASEAN. Donc ce discours de puissance d'équilibre en s'appuyant sur l'UE, pouvait être audible et

crédible car il y a quand même les moyens diplomatiques et moyens financiers, que l'Europe s'est engagée dans des projets de construction d'infrastructure, de développement, de dev de la connectivité, donc était capable de proposer quelque chose qui pouvait se présenter comme une alternative à la BRI, tout en se présentant pas trop comme une puissance militaire. Cette séquence-là qui a été une parenthèse et qui a permis à la France de sortir et gagner du temps après l'AUKUS pour ne pas perdre sa visibilité diplomatique et sa capacité d'influence, et là nous étions dans une phase transitoire, et là on est dans une phase où finalement le président ajoute une dimension insulaire qui permet d'élargir les partenariats, élargir la surface internationale de la France en mettant en avant cette étiquette indopacifique dans le cadre des grandes discussions, qui sont très importantes sur le dev durable et la biodiversité où la dimension maritime est prépondérante. La France a activement discuté sur le traité de la haute mer, le ministre des pôles (Olivier ?) qui prépare la conférence qui va se tenir à Nice, Conférence Internationale sur les Océans, où la France va essayer de présenter ou du moins avancer du traité international sur l'interdiction du plastique. On est clairement dans une diplomatie IP environnementale, car c'est vraiment la zone qui concentre tout un ensemble de problématique sur l'environnement, c'est une zone maritime où la biodiversité marine est extrêmement importante, donc vous voyez on a un autre discours qui est davantage un discours d'influence, sachant que le pilier européen est toujours là et aide beaucoup. Les partenariats traditionnels continuent, et donc il y a un discours et un affichage où on reste proche du Japon, mais le Japon entre temps, lui, a extrêmement dev ses capacités militaires, sa marine est devenue beaucoup plus importante que la marine française sauf qu'il n'a pas de sous-marins et pas de capacité nucléaire, donc pas de dissuasion nucléaire.

Vous voyez, il y a donc 3 temps dans la pol IP de la France : le temps de discours de projection de puissance, où la France finalement, s'est saisie du concept d'IP car justement ça lui permet d'affirmer de façon très forte sa présence, son statut d'Etat riverain, de mettre en valeur et d'avoir un discours de projection de puissance en mettant en avant des partenariats, le fait qu'elle a toujours contribué à la sécurité en IP, mais sur la base quand même d'une politique d'exportation d'armement. Il y a le partenariat qui se construit et ce contrat qui a été signé avec l'Australie, la France se sent en ascension et se sent légitime dans le déroulement de ce discours France PUISSANCE ; Bon, l'AUKUS, il y a eu un désaveu extérieur apporté au discours français, qui est devenu d'un coup moins crédible. Et donc il y a eu une période de transition où la France s'appuie énormément sur l'UE, et sur sa capacité à rester une puissance maritime. Elle insiste quand même sur le fait qu'elle est à la fois présente dans l'océan indien, avec des bases navales à Abou Dabi et Djibouti. Ce sont des points d'appui et c'est pour ça à mon avis que le Japon est beaucoup plus intéressé par ce que la France peut apporter, par les réseaux et la capacité de présence militaire FR dans l'océan Indien que dans le Pacifique. En effet dans le Pacifique occidental, la France n'a pas de forces prépositionnées, c'est une zone extrêmement compliquée, où la on est dans la conférence. Je pense que c'est tout à fait normal qu'on soit parti avec une pol de puissance quand la France a commencé à conceptualiser sa stratégie IP, car en fait c'est le ministère de la défense qui avait déjà projeté une politique effectivement à dominante sécuritaire pour l'Asie pacifique, pour présenter l'action fr à ses partenaires et le convaincre à renforcer leurs liens. Face à l'Inde, on expliquait que la France était présente, on insistait pas trop dessus, mais elle avait un réseau de diplomatie d'influence et de diplomatie de défense, et qu'elle avait un réseau industriel avec des capacités de défense avec des propositions en matière de sous-marins, avions de chasse, en termes d'équipement militaires. La France a eu ce discours qui lui a permis de développer des partenariats en Asie du sud est et notamment Singapour a été un partenaire historiquement très important pour la crédibilité de la présence française en Asie, et l'Inde a très vite été cet autre partenaire important. Et en fait, le MEAE a entériné la notion d'IP après, et parce que le président de la République l'a lancé en 2018. Donc on a eu une première stratégie en 2019, officielle, et elle n'était pas très aboutie et reprenait les grandes lignes de la stratégie de la défense, en insistant sur le multilatéralisme. Même la

dimension environnementale, c'est la défense qui l'a mise en avant d'abord. Et en fait en février 2022, il y a eu de nouveau un document MEAE qui insistait cette fois sur les partenariats, parce que la France était dans le contrecoup de l'après AUKUS, et il fallait qu'elle reste crédible. Donc il y a eu le pilier partenariat et le pilier UE qui est assez visible dans ce travail. Il fallait donc réagir. Le MEAE avait du mal à accepter un IP tel que le Japon le présentait, qui est 'libre et ouvert' (FOIP) et cet IP pour la diplomatie française c'était un IP anti-chinois. Parce que quand Abe a convaincu très vite Trump et les US, qui avait déjà une stratégie en IP mais là il y avait un habillage conceptuel très intéressant, l'Inde qui commençait à avoir beaucoup de difficultés depuis 2013 avec la BRI qui se déployait dans l'océan Indien. L'Inde se sentait de plus en plus sous pression avec la marine chinoise qui est de plus en plus visible depuis 2008 à cause de la lutte contre la piraterie. Déjà les bateaux chinois sont devenus visibles sous le prétexte de la lutte contre la piraterie et de la protection du trafic commercial. Cette présence elle est allée croissante et par la force des choses, elle est appelée à se développer et donc l'Inde va devoir s'habituer. En plus de cette légitimité qu'à tout Etat à protéger ses bâtiments de commerce, il y a évidemment l'expansion de la marine chinoise et l'affirmation de droits souverains sur certains territoires qui prennent un tour très agressif notamment en Mer de Chine du sud, et aussi dans le pacifique occidental, où ça a commencé face au Japon avec les îles Senkaku, et puis là depuis 3 ans on a un discours plus agressif vis-à-vis de Taiwan. On a ce poids et cette incertitude dans le détroit de Taiwan. Déjà quand Shinzo Abe a commencé à parler de l'IP en 2006, 2007, mais déjà l'Inde avait commencé à retenir le concept, mais à partir de 2012, Abe revient aux affaires et là la politique étrangère du Japon 'c'est l'IP libre et ouvert. L'Australie avec les think tank l'australien trouvait ce concept intéressant c'est une île c'est normal donc le côté maritime et un indo-pacifique c'est à dire les mers, donc l'océan indien et le pacifique libre et ouvert ça parlait effectivement. Mais le ministère des Affaires étrangères français était très réticent à chaque fois que le Japon venait pour un exercice que ce soit un exercice diplomatique ou un exercice un dialogue stratégique entre ministère des de la défense dans le communiqué final vous avez est toujours quand même un langage commun sur le partenaire pour la défense du multilatéralisme vous avez toujours quand même un langage commun sur le partenariat mis en œuvre pour la défense du multilatéralisme la liberté de navigation mais quand il fallait ajouter un indo-pacifique libre et ouvert, le ministère était très réticent donc voilà euh alors que la défense trouvait justement un intérêt à reprendre ces éléments de langage pour mettre en valeur la présence militaire française en indo pacifique qui est quand même essentiellement maritime et on a pas des Rafale déployées en permanence en indo-pacifique. On a on a les bateaux on a effectivement de l'armée de terre enfin pas en nombre suffisant donc l'essentiel je dirais de la présence militaire française en indo-pacifique ça reste quand même la Marine. Donc ça ça répondait à quelque chose. Là on est on est revenu avec un discours où effectivement on met toujours en avance la maritime mais c'est une maritimité moins stratégique qui est beaucoup plus diluée et qui est une maritimité où on est tout sur une gouvernance maritime globale c'est-à-dire la défense de l'économie bleue, la lutte contre le changement climatique, la lutte contre la pêche illégale. Entre temps il y a des gens intelligents hein on a Anthony Blinken c'est quelqu'un de très subtil qui se sont rendu compte que finalement le côté très confrontationnel des États-Unis en Asie un peu mal à l'aise et un certain nombre de partenaires. Le Japon, l'Australie, l'Inde, avec les ambiguïtés de la position indienne qui sont à fond derrière. L'Indonésie, la Corée du sud, enfin avec son nouveau président ça va. Mais la stratégie IP de la Corée du Sud est toute neuve. ET même les US se sont rendus compte qu'il fallait avoir un discours beaucoup plus dilué et donc ils évitent de parler de la compétition de puissance mais de l'aide à lutter contre la pêche inégale et la pêche illégale c'est vrai que derrière ils peuvent mettre en avant les activités des bâtiments de pêche chinois, et quand ils parlent de la défense de l'environnement, ils veulent montrer qu'ils ont des moyens qu'ils mettent à disposition des états micro insulaires au même niveau que la Chine. Donc quand les US organisent des grands exercices, qui rentrent dans le cadre d'alliances bilatérales, avec les Philippines, le Japon, la Corée du Sud, et d'autres partenaires, la Thaïlande, il a des traités de

sécurité. Mais ils font de plus en plus d'exercices axés sur l'assistance humanitaire en cas de crise. Donc comment réagir, il y a eu par exemple quelque semaine cet exercice qui s'appelle SEA CAT, où vous avez toutes les marines de l'Asie du sud est qui sont présentes, et en fait c'était un exercice qui vise à travailler l'interopérabilité et le scénario c'est la mise en œuvre de secours d'urgence en cas de crise humanitaire. Même les américains comprennent que s'ils veulent la présence des indonésiens, malaisiens, des marines régionales en Asie du sud est il faut que leur approche ne soit pas trop ouvertement antichinoise. Même si ils ont ce genre de discours, dans le cadre de relations bilatérales, au côté des philippines par exemple.

E : Pensez-vous par conséquent qu'il y a un affaiblissement du partenariat France-Japon ?

MDP : Oui en tout cas il change de nature. Je pense que le Japon ne considère plus que la France est un partenaire stratégique fort. C'est un partenaire stratégique non négligeable mais elle n'est plus parmi les partenariats prioritaires. Elle est passée derrière un certain nombre de partenaires. Je pense qu'il y a quelques années l'Australie était derrière la France par exemple.

E: Quand ce changement s'est-il opéré ? A partir d'AUKUS ?

MDP : Oui à partir d'AUKUS. Avec l'AUKUS, les australiens ont fait un choix, ils ont estimé que la garantie de sécurité américaine était de plus en plus nécessaire et il ne fallait pas la relativiser en construisant quelque chose de trop spécifique avec la France. Implicitement, le Japon a fait la même chose. Le Japon a aussi réévalué la nature de sa relation avec la France. Et ça vaut aussi pour le RU, je pense que le RU nous a passé devant. Même le Japon dans son évaluation de partenariats stratégiques, et en terme d'interopérabilité, ils ont réalisé qu'ils devaient travailler en priorité, toujours avec les US, mais derrière il y a l'Australie, le RU, la Corée du sud est en train de remonter, l'Inde est là mais c'est davantage une puissance qui est importante pour une diplomatie de caractère diplomatique et politique que militaire, pour des projets à dominante développement. L'Inde est un peu réticente au sein du QUAD donc leur nature est différente. Je pense donc qu'il y a une réévaluation de notre partenariat sous l'aspect soutien strictement militaire, stratégique-militaire de la part du Japon.

E: Y a-t-il peut être un partenariat dans d'autres domaines de coopération stratégiques entre le Japon et la France ? Partage d'information, piraterie etc...

MDP : Alors au niveau du partage d'information on n'a pas d'accord suffisant dans ce domaine. Le partenariat contre la piraterie, on fait des exercices mais on s'arrête à un certain niveau. On n'a pas d'accord de partage d'informations classifiés. Cela n'empêche pas de donner des positions, s'il y a une attaque et qu'il y a un bâtiment japonais, on communique l'information. Après, quand vous voulez identifier les pirates, dans des types de renseignement plus précis comme des noms de chefs de groupes criminels il faut quand même des accords spécifiques. Il faut de la protection, des accords d'échanges de renseignement donc il faut avoir confiance en votre partenaire. Ce n'est pas le cas avec le Japon donc ça reste très limité. Le partenariat militaire je trouve qu'il n'a pas une substance aussi profonde alors que ça fait des années qu'on travaille, on a très vite eu un exercice 2+2, partenariat d'exception. Ce partenariat depuis AUKUS piétine, en termes militaires. Alors mes collègues au ministère de la défense me disent non, regarde on a eu en 2021 La Pérouse, aussi les exercices de débarquement amphibie dans les îles japonaises dans le sud, détachement de légionnaire hélicoptère... Oui on a pris beaucoup de photos mais bon

E : Est-ce que tous ces exercices militaires conjoints prouvent réellement un partenariat florissant ou derrière il n'y a rien de concret ?

MDP : je pense que le partenariat FR-JAP est peut être davantage intéressant quand il s'agit de la Corée du nord, qu'autre chose. Il faut voir que la France a des obligations suivant la guerre de Corée et notamment l'engagement d'intervenir militairement sur la péninsule coréenne en cas de crise. Donc on peut concevoir que la France s'entraîne avec le Japon s'il y a un conflit qui éclate sur la péninsule coréenne où le Japon est une base arrière où on recueille des réfugiés, ambassades etc. C'est important qu'on coopère dans ce cadre de crise, qui est régulièrement évoqué. Est-ce qu'on coopère réellement dans le cas d'une crise dans le détroit de Taiwan ou les îles Senkaku ? Ben non, on a pas vocation à le faire on a pas signer d'engagement alors que c'est ça que recherche le Japon. Donc finalement, dans l'échange de renseignement on va avoir un échange concernant les tirs de missiles de Corée du nord, sur les avancées de leur programme nucléaire, et aussi on a appliqué des sanctions contre la Corée du nord. Donc très souvent on fait des exercices avec des partenaires, dont le Japon, dans le cadre de s'entraîner pour des embargos. Donc, l'arbre cache la forêt. On a des engagements dans le cas d'une crise en Corée du nord, on coopère. Mais sur le détroit de Taiwan, ou une crise dans les Senkaku bah on n'a pas vocation à travailler avec eux sauf sur le plan international à réaffirmer le primat de la convention Montego Bay, le primat des frontières maritimes et à répéter c'est le dialogue comme solution. On ne prend pas parti. Donc notre coopération opérationnelle, quelle est sa nature réelle ? Quel est le scénario ? Le Japon aimerait avoir plus de précision. On travaille en effet la lutte contre la piraterie dans l'océan indien. Mais le reste, qui intéresse beaucoup plus le Japon, et à priori on ne s'entraîne pas pour ça.

E: La coopération France-Japon permet-elle à la France d'accroître son influence/sa place dans les forums régionaux ?

MDP : Nous on défend une politique de cavalier seul, on veut être membre de l'ADMM+, on veut faire partie aussi du comité de chefs d'Etat major de l'ASEAN, toujours à titre bilatéral. Voilà on n'aide pas vraiment le Japon, on est même un peu en compétition. On dit prudemment, oui on travaille avec le QUAD, exercices maritimes quelques fois, mais on ne veut pas formellement faire partie du QUAD. On préfère une politique plus souple, de choix. Au sein du G7, G20, au BRICS, par rapport à l'environnement et au UNSC, on est sur un soutien de diplomatie classique, on se soutient mutuellement. Notamment quand il faut prendre des décisions sur l'Afrique. On reste très prudent quand il s'agit de communiquer sur le droit de la mer en IP. On est très proche et on compte sur le Japon mais on est sur des formats multilatéraux qui restent très classiques.

Et bien entendu les exercices militaires, bien ils continuent car la France doit tenir son rang et elle doit rester crédible mais en même temps ça lui demande beaucoup d'effort, mais elle est capable de le faire, le porte avion vient, un bâtiment de soutien de commandement vient, on peut planifier l'envoi de moyens à partir de la métropole quand ce sont des entretiens avec une forte valeur ajoutée stratégique. Elle n'a pas de sous-marins sur zone, pas de chasseur ni d'avions de combat en Nouvelle Calédonie. Elle doit le faire mais ça lui demande un gros effort. C'est le cas aussi du Royaume Uni.

Fin de l'entretien

Interview 3: Mr Kim - Professor at the Centre for Security, Diplomacy and Strategy (CSDS) of the Brussels School of Governance at VUB

Estelle : Why are bilateral partnerships important for Japan, specifically in the field of military, and do you know how valued is the French-Japanese partnership?

Mr. KIM : I'm not an expert on the relationship between France and Japan, but France is definitely considered to be one of the major partners for Japan. For Japanese foreign policy, the most important partner is the US. For economics and security. In Asia it's more complicated, South Korea, well their relationship is quite complicated but getting better lately. And China is also problematic. In Europe, it's changing but the security relationship was not really considered an important factor in Japan's relationship with European countries for a long time. Usually it was in relation to multilateral diplomacy for political influence, for example even when Japan wants to advance its interest vis a vis North Korea for example. It's still used for the political support from European countries, for NATO. So that, it has the backing of the 'international society', not only the US-Japan or Japanese interests. I think having the support from European countries, especially countries like UK, Germany, France, these things are considered to be very important, diplomatic I mean. In terms of economic relationships, Europe is advanced, economy and that makes all these European measures that countries take to be quite important. But, I think not as important as China or the US. So, it's a bit of a very respected but distant partner. I think the geographical distance makes the security relations with substantial and economics are also effected by the geographics. Having said that, I think the security cooperation between Japan and European states have increased in the last 10 years, and I think after the 2014 annexion of Crimea by Russia, that was already.. I mean at that time PM Abe was still, not down with his ambitions to neutralize Russia in the context of the competition with China. After February 2022 they completely gave up on that idea. It's important for Japan to support Europe and US on Ukraine because as the PM has been saying many many times these days, Ukraine today, might be east asia tomorrow. They worry about the consequence of letting a country change their territorial status by force by such manners, so it's not that Japan will be sending troops in Europe but it's interested in supporting Europe and deepening cooperation with European partners, especially in the Chinese aggression against Taiwan.

E: What field is most important for Japan when seeking bilateral relationship: economic, financial, military, diplomatic?

K: There, I think it depends on who you ask. Different ministries have different interests. Traditionally, the security aspect was not prominent but it has become a lot more consequential, especially after Russian aggression in Ukraine, the security relations have become more important. When it comes to France, the Japanese side also that France has a unique position in the transatlantic relationship. For example, this year, NATO announced the opening of an office in Tokyo, and then France opposed. So, the Japanese side was very perplex, why would they oppose it? France has this tendency to make things difficult for the US. It has a principle of not being taken for granted. Whereas many NATO members would let it go and go on with US initiative, France opposes. Sometimes it's quite important, like France's opposition to the invasion of Iraq, it also had a lot of consequence. But even small things, even then France often opposes things that it's not in full agreement with. For Japan it's also important to have the cooperation with the French side to make sure that Europe broadly speaking will not be blocked by France in some sort of cooperation with Japan or the US. In that sense, France has more of diplomatic weight than other countries that have equivalent or even more capabilities like Germany. When it comes to the Asia pacific, or Indo-pacific security, since France is present, France and UK are definitely important partners when it comes to Indo-Pacific security. But I'm not sure how much their security presence in the region from the perspective of Japan. They may make a difference in contingencies for example in Taiwan, but these countries, doing exercises with Japan or doing freedom of navigation exercises with Japan, and so on, it sends signals to China that these countries are sending signal to China, that they are aligning with the US. If they are doing these things, it also signals overall cooperative relationship with Japan and the US. For example, if France is doing a certain security policy that is in conflict with

Chinese interests, China can also assume that France is likely to join economic sanctions against China if China were to invade Taiwan. So, even if the hard military power that France can project to the region is rather limited, that signal of alignment with Japan extends to other political and economic areas, and that matters a lot. If you look at economic sanctions against Russia, even if it hurt them in 2022, there are a lot of countries that are not complying with it, and it makes it a lot ineffective. In terms of the general deterrence, it's important for Japan to make it clear through these signals that China should be opposed by the wider international society, and in that regards, the support of France would be important.

E: Would you say that Japan is moving towards an Indo-Pacific policy more oriented towards defence rather than 10 years ago? Have you seen a shift in their policy?

K: I think what you describe applies to many countries, but I'm not sure it applies to Japan. Simply because Japan has been an early balancer against China. Japan has been balancing the rise of China quite early, already from 2007, Japan has been talking about IP security. I also say this because Japan's perception of the threat of China peaked before others. The Obama administration was still under the assumption that they could positively influence China's overall directional foreign policy. Japan had territorial disputes in September 2010 first and 2012. Because Japan has been sensitive to the Chinese threat a long time ago, even though this threat of China is becoming globally important now it is more developed in some ways in Japan as well, I'm not confident this threat from China increased. In the late 2000's, Japan started to have a discussion of Japan's threat. They were already concerned about China's rise but they were reluctant to speak about it publicly but it changed after 2010.

E: Do you think that Japan is looking and working in increasing its partnership with Europe or is it mainly focusing on regional partnerships, like Australia, South-East Asian countries?

K: I think when it comes to the actual practical cooperation for contingencies in the near future with the US, Australia, and South Korea. These are definitely more important than other countries far away. But, for example south-east Asia (SEA), people talk about the centrality of ASEAN, it's just being polite. I think a lot are doubting the capabilities of ASEAN, it's also not united. Cambodia, and Laos, these countries are close to China. SEA is important in economic engagement is considered an important part of IP strategy for the US, Japan and South Korea, but I think it's more about the overall influence of these countries. The South China Sea is also considered important because Chinese submarines are moving around. With Europe, Japan is definitely interested in joint technological development when it comes to defence technologies. Japan has for example the three-nation project with Italy and the UK on fighter jets. Europe has important military industry firms, so industrial cooperation for defence technology would be important with European partners.

Fin de l'entretien

Interview 4 : French senator of Belfort.

Estelle : Etes-vous satisfait des moyens alloués aux outre-mer avec la nouvelle LPM 2024-2030 ? Ces moyens militaires permettront-ils de concilier avec le désir français de jouer le rôle d'une puissance d'équilibre ?

Mr Perrin : On part de très loin. Donc fatalement notre demande c'était de permettre aux unités prépositionnées dans ces terrains-là de disposer de matériel pour pouvoir intervenir et pour

pouvoir exister un peu plus notamment en terme d'avion, voilà quand on a besoin d'un A400M il faut le faire décoller de Paris pour qu'il puisse intervenir à Nouméa. Donc ça posait des difficultés. On a fait des demandes, au début quand on a eu quelques échos on a eu l'impression que la marine a été plus privilégiée et que ça allait permettre de monter en puissance puis au final on se rend compte que c'est pas si évident que ça. Il y a des améliorations significatives sur des matériels qui vont arriver etc. Je n'ai plus le détail en tête mais oui il y a quelques efforts de fait. C'est cependant insuffisant, notamment à l'égard de la ZEE qu'on a à défendre, pour l'instant j'ai envie de dire que sur le secteur Indo-Pacifique sud, Nouvelle-Calédonie, on n'a pas trop de difficultés car la présence chinoise n'est pas trop importante. Les choses sont différentes sur le secteur Polynésie, où il y a une présence assez importante. Je pense déjà que la nomination de Jean-Baptiste Jeangène Vilmer au Vanuatu c'est aussi un signe. Après des sujets sur la gouvernance qu'on a mis en avant dans ce rapport qui doivent être pris en considération qui pour l'instant ne le sont pas. Evidemment c'est une zone extrêmement vaste, donc forcément ça nécessite des moyens que malheureusement pour l'instant nous n'avons pas. Donc on a des moyens échantillonnaires pour intervenir sur une zone extrêmement vaste. Donc oui il y a des améliorations mais de mon point de vue pas suffisantes, mais il faut saluer le fait qu'il y ait quelques bâtiments complémentaires.

Estelle : Je n'ai pas vu de mentionner sur les partenariats bilatéraux, pensez-vous que le renforcement de partenariat est un vecteur de crédibilisation de la France ?

P : un des paradoxe c'est qu'on est le seul pays européens à avoir des interets dans ce secteur là. Et que dans les forums qui se déroulent notamment dans le Pacifique, on est souvent représentés par les pouvoirs en place et notamment en Nouvelle Calédonies par les indépendantistes. Donc la France n'est pas représentée en tant que telle. Donc forcément ça pose des difficultés. On a mis en avant dans ce rapport qu'il était nécessaire et urgent de mieux prendre en considérations les revendications des besoins des populations. Ne pas les mettre devant le fait accompli. Les associer aux décisions. Ce qu'on a beaucoup entendu des présidents des indépendantistes c'est que quand la réflexion de Macron a été mise en œuvre sur la stratégie IP, ils n'ont jamais été consultés. Il faut pas qu'on se plaigne derrière. On a besoin de les consulter davantage car au final c'est eux qui dans les statuts qui représentent la France. Après on est présents dans les forums mais que la reforme de la diplomatie récente ne va pas dans le sens d'une amélioration de l'influence française dans le pacifique parce que, je pense, que le dernier rempart avant la guerre c'est la diplomatie. Et la FR qui est une puissance diplomatique importante, elle perd de son influence pour des problèmes de restrictions budgétaires et dilution de nos moyens diplomatiques. C'est pour la raison pour laquelle qu'on a proposé que cette zone soit diffusé et qu'il y a davantage de prise en compte de la nécessité d'influer, qu'il y ait un soft power plus puissant. C'est pour ça que je saluait l'arrivée de Jeangène Vilmer car c'est déjà un bon signe. Sur les coopérations avec des pays il y en a, il y a des pays avec lesquels on doit mettre beaucoup plus de moyen, l'Indonésie en est un, le Japon en est un, je pense qu'il y a beaucoup de choses à faire avec le Japon. Il faut montrer à ces pays là l'intérêt qu'on leur porte. Si on va en Indonésie une fois tous les 60 ans voila. Je pense que l'influence française pourrait être bien meilleure si on était beaucoup plus réactif. Je prend un exemple qui n'a rien à voir en Amérique du Sud. On a des pays qui sont en progression considérables avec la découverte de richesses, de terres rares, la France a malheureusement la fâcheuse habitude d'aller les voir quand on a besoin d'eux. Peut être qu'aujourd'hui, si on activait notre influence chez, eux, demain quand ils seront plus puissant et plus mure on aura plus de faciliter à nouer des alliances avec eux. Or, on ne le fait pas bien au contraire regardez ce qu'il s'est passé aux iles Salomon, c'est assez révélateur.

[ce qui s'est passé aux îles Salomon : Le Premier ministre, Manasseh Sogavare a signé cette semaine, lors d'une visite en Chine, une série d'accords avec Pékin notamment un accord de coopération dans le domaine de la police. Ce plan permet à Pékin d'étendre sa présence policière dans ce pays en développement jusqu'en 2025.]

On décide que finalement il n'y a plus d'enjeux, on s'en va et la Chine arrive et on se précipite. C'est trop tard. Dans l'Indo-Pacifique c'est un peu pareil, il faut montrer aux pays avec lesquels on veut travailler de l'intérêt et pas que de l'intérêt quand on a besoin d'eux.

E : Donc vous pensez qu'on a pas porté assez d'intérêts pour les pays de la zone Indopacifique ? Même si on y est investi depuis plusieurs années, on ne les a pas délaissés.

P : Pas délaissé mais on a pas été hyper présent alors que paradoxalement on y détenait une bonne partie de notre ZEE. Compte tenu d'enjeux mondiaux en terme géostratégiques, il y a beaucoup de gens qui lorgnent sur nos territoires et il faut qu'on puisse les défendre. Alors des exercices comme Pégase par exemple, ce sont des exercices extrêmement intéressants qui permettent de déployer des forces assez rapidement, qui sont je pense insuffisamment connus. Chacun pense qu'en 10h d'avion, il est au bout du monde, alors qu'en 72h on a déployé des rafales, des A400 etc jusqu'en Nouvelle Calédonie, nous on y va en 10h alors que c'est assez extraordinaire comme manipulation. Mais c'est pas vendu comme ça alors que c'est dommage.

E: Quel est le rôle de la diplomatie, du multilatéralisme pour contribuer à l'influence française dans la zone, est-ce que ce sont des moyens pertinents ?

P : Oui évidemment, de toute façon la France est dans cette stratégie multilatérale, dont veulent ce sortir les chinois, les américains, bon moins depuis Biden. Mais évidemment que la question du multilatéralisme est au cœur des sujets. La France a été un acteur majeur de différentes structures multilatérales, ONU, OTAN, on ne peut évidemment pas se priver de ça, c'est capital pour nous. On est un pays qui a une taille insuffisante pour pouvoir être influent tout seul donc on a besoin des autres. Pour pouvoir travailler avec les autres il faut qu'on développe des partenariats. Sur le Japon par exemple il y a un vrai sujet, je pense qu'on a besoin de travailler avec eux c'est absolument capital.

Fin de l'entretien

Interview 5: Mr Fiott - Researcher at the VUB.

Estelle: Does Japan entertain a strong partnership with the EU for the IP region? Which domains are particularly important to this partnership?

Mr Fiott: I think we have to differentiate French policy and EU policy towards the IP. The 2 are related but we can't deny that the EU has its own level of agency in the IP, especially with Japan. I think very early on, the idea of a closer Japan-EU ties was put on the table. I would say on why the context with the EU wanted to develop ties with South Korea, to some extent Australia although that this was slightly disrupted because of AUKUS. And of course, the EU engagement with regional organizations, like ASEAN. If you stand back, that the EU is playing multiple different levels. It is the whole mark of the IP. The US do it also. It's a mixture of bilateralism, minilateralism and then multilateralism. You have those different levels of engagements. Japan was always important for the EU, I think. If you go back in the past when

there was no formal relationship, there was already relationship 1980' on the tech revolution, when Japan was becoming a leader in the high tech domain, EU was looking towards Japan not just as a partner but as an inspiration also. In diplomatic terms, the EU and Japan share a lot of the same values and interest. In a funny kind of way, they both share similarities when it comes to geopolitical interest. For ex, as a consequence of the WWII in Europe, there has been a strong strain of pacifism within the continent, Japan has followed the same. That kind of commitment to peace and pacifism is prevalent. Today, there's a slight difficulty to adjust in the world we live in. I would also say that one of the great similarities is their position vis a vis the US. Both actors are highly dependent on the US, but they both resent it. That comes out in the eye-to-eye level understanding of world politics between the EU and Japan. I say this, not just for generalization, but on the Japan side, there has been a strong impetus to have close relations with EU. Simply because they do not want to be left alone with the US in the IP and the China problem. It's a little bit of hedging from the Japanese side, to say that the more partners we have, the more stronger our position can be in the IP especially if we need to somehow control the more hawkish impulses of the US, vis a vis china, the EU can be our partner in that. In recent months, it probably explains why Japan has been so supportive of efforts in Ukraine. In more progressional terms, we have the EU-Japan strategic partnership agreement and that should be seen part of the bigger package: economic and strategic partnership agreement. On paper, they are 2 separate documents, but they are quite embedded with each other. It's quite telling I would say that we went as the EU beyond the economic dimension, to include strategic questions, whatever that means in practice. I think for Japan, and for the EU, the most obvious area for cooperation is in the maritime dimension. You see this is terms of naval past exercises that Japan and EU ships sailing together, showing the flag. But even in general, Japan being a huge maritime nation, the EU being a maritime region. Also, this emphasis on keeping the international order open, essentially that means keeping sea lanes communications open and secure. The push back on trends, with the rise of China, that challenge those concepts of free secure and open sea lanes. So the Japanese and EU have a shared common interest. What you said in your question about the defense industry is also important, but I think from the Japan side in reality, maybe in an ideal world they would prefer an EU-Japan cooperation, but in practice, it is much more bilateral. So, it's the Japanese dealing with the British, Italians, French. They want to keep it as practical and concrete as possible. They want to keep it on a realistic, bilateral and manageable basis I would say. But then there are other areas, such as space. Japan has a well-established space program, and it looks at the EU, which of course itself has an important spec program and presence, as really building that partnership. If you want to be critical, the SPA (strategic partnership agreement) includes pretty much everything on the agenda. They try to put everything in there, and it can be understandable as a first document. It's certainly much more precise in the other SPA with Canada, much more focused on results in the security dimension. But, you see issues such as climate change, support multilateralist institutions, I mean it is a very liberal document. It tries to support a liberal world order, and Japan and the EU are certainly on the same page there I would say.

E: about the EU-Japan collaboration on space, could you tell me more about that? Because I saw that there was collaboration with France, but I did not know there was also a collaboration with the EU.

F: Again, we have to be careful here. It's very much, at least on the industrial and concrete side, it tends to be bilateral. So you're correct in saying largely speaking, Japan's bilateral relationship with France when it comes with the development of space cooperation. That's pretty much understandable since France is the union's space superpower. However, what I would say is that we shouldn't see our space cooperation just in terms of launching, of technology, it is also about the rules of the game. Of how to ensure the safe and secure use of space. In this regard, both EU and Japan have publicly stated that they don't feel that space is

secure anymore. They have to try to invest in technology not only where they can monitor space, which the EU is certainly doing and Japan is developing, but it's also about the norms that govern space. Now, both the EU and Japan are moving in the same stream with the us in developing rules, norms in using anti-satellite weapons for example. Japanese and European union are pushing that normative dimension.

E: What role did France play in the formulation of an EU strategy for IP? What were the domains enhanced in the formulation of the strategy?

F: Yes, I think it's very obvious that France played a huge role. I would say *the* role. We have to even be a bit more precise here. To say that in Brussels at least, the French diplomatic permanent mission to the EU, played a huge role in showing that interests developed in Paris were then reflected in EU policy.

E: As it's almost a reflection of the French strategy?

F: yes, whenever there is a big portfolio, when one or more member state have invested interest, they try to insure that the member state reflect the national strategy. That was the case in terms of the IP strategy. What I would also say that we should not forget that the people working in the EU institutions, on the strategy, on the EU document, a lot of them are seconded French nationals, diplomats to the services as well. So socially it has also helped in terms of developing this. We should also say that it was not an easy endeavor, because a lot of member states did not see the relevance if the IP for the EU policy. France is of course in a very unique position. It is the IP country in the EU, it has territories there. So for France it's a very different discussion with a Poland or Estonian. Clearly, I would say that French fingerprints are everywhere on the document. And there are a great deal of similarities. There is nothing in the EU strategy that contradicts the French strategy. The one big difference are on what resources are available and mobilizable. Because a French strategy is able to unite political objective with resources. In the EU context, that has been harder. You can write the strategy, but having the resources in place, such as naval vessels, that is much harder in the EU. But if you look at what the EU has been doing in maritime security, it has developed in the last few years new concepts such as the coordinated EU maritime presence which is an EU mouthful but means a naval surveillance capacity, which the EU did not have in the past. Also, if you look at operation "Atalanta" [initiated by France] which at the beginning was set up as an anti-piracy naval operation, today its mandate has changed considerable and is doing free and secure access, showing the flag, operation in northwest Indian ocean. And that kind of marries with the coordinated maritime presence. We use our surveillance capacities to monitor a much larger area, that is of significance to the IP. On top of that you have non-EU initiatives, led by the French such as mission Agenor. In practical terms the French have also tried to mobilize resources.

E: Do you have any insights on the security partnership between France and Japan?

F: Not specifically, I haven't studied that in much detail. But, again, if the question is how similar is that relationship between France and Japan and the EU and Japan, I would say that there are a lot of similarities in broad brushstrokes terms. But in the case of France-Japan relation would put more emphasis on defense cooperation projects. For example, when it comes to new technologies, AI, quantum, defence innovation, that is somewhere the French and Japanese are cooperating a lot. Even if they don't have a program like the GCAP, they still try to cooperate on defence innovation matters. Japan is a somewhat strange country in the sense that many western European countries, even the US, what they're trying to do in their defence industry is to bring the civil domain more into the defence industrial domain. Because they

believe that will stimulate innovation. The Japanese, for many years have downplayed their defence industrial industry, and relied on the civilian industry. So, they start from the opposite ends, and the hope is that they meet in the middle. So yes, and Japan has also done a kind of 360° turn on its security policy as well. So it has become much more open to the idea of cooperation on defence technologies, and in particular where it is perceived to have an added advantage compared to Europeans. The one thing I can say that is the one obstacle to more cooperation in this Japanese-France is the lack of Japanese presence in Europe. You could argue in the same way that there is a similar lack of European presence in Japan as well which would also be true. But it's very different compared to say the US. The US have companies that are here, they have defence and civil companies which are here in the EU. And I know this has been raised by the Japanese themselves, in conversations, that one of the big things they need to change is to have more of a presence of their companies in the EU market before it becomes easier to do these kinds of transactions. Also, culture has accounted on all of this. It's even significant within countries, academics, that's one culture, the defence culture, that's very different. So if you broaden that to France and Japan they have different ways of working, different business culture. These are all obstacles but there is definitely a political ambition to get past them.

E: How does Europe combine its non-confrontational stance regarding China and Japan's desire to develop its countering capabilities?

F: That's a really good question, I think that what I said earlier still stands. We have to be a little bit careful with Japan, in the sense that it's true that they're increasing defence and investments technologies but have a look at defence technologies. It's for example missile defence. The Japanese can always say that their investments are about self-defence, which in itself is not in contradiction to the self-defence posture and forces. Of course, Japan is extremely wary of china but we have to be careful in the sense that the Japanese themselves have huge economic exposure and interests with china. For example the Koreans less so, but Japanese have significant economic interdependence. So, even the Japanese, in their national conversation, they're a bit wary on going full American. Which is to say that china is the greatest evil etc. Japanese have to hedge a bit saying listen we have legitimate right to enhance or national defence, but on the other hand we don't want to force an antagonist relationship with the Chinese. The us has a very different conversation with China. This in a funny way puts Japan and the EU in the similar bracket. You see that the Japanese are using the EU a bit as well, and the EU also use Japan in this purpose, to tone down the hawkish impulse of the us, and china, both of them are hawkish impulses. So it comes from the same philosophy, of not pocking china too much, of understanding that any kind of war with china would be destroying the world economy. And the Europeans and Japanese are moving similar steps in this regard. For Japan it's important to have this backup from the EU.

E: As of today, do you think the security and defence aspect of partnerships is the most dominant one in the IP?

F: Well yes I guess in a sense it has to be if you want to take along the other European states. If it was a sort of 'avant garde' of a few member states led by France, I think the policy would look very different. The EU had to sell the idea of the IP especially to those who have no historical links or geopolitical interests in the IP, **have sold the importance of partnerships**. And if you sell it under the umbrella of supporting the liberal international order it makes it much more easier to partner with korea, Australia, korea. It makes it tricky to deal with countries like India, that's been clear that it's not sure how liberal they are, in the same context that the Japanese and European see it. The partnerships have been a very important window under which not just in the IP strategy but even other strategic documents, partnerships have been

seen as the most important aspect of it. However, this is when the dot dot dot comes, in reality **we have to question how successful that has been**. I'm not sure that the EU has reached its full potential as partnerships and what that means in practice. We can do few naval exercises, but in practice what does that really add to partnerships. I think one area where there will be growing interest, I wouldn't say security proper but **critical infrastructure connections, between different countries in IP, norms and rules on how the digital economy should be structured, there the EU has a really large power and stake in these areas compared to defence**. One final point, the EU needs tailored partnerships. The EU has been criticized for looking at a region, can be Africa or IP, and say okay we need partnerships and therefore you treat everyone the same. Which is complete nonsense, if you have partners you should treat them in unique and tailored ways. The EU finds that very difficult to do, even if it has understood the problem of 'one size fits all'. It's very challenging for the EU, hence the reason that the economic and strategic partnership with Japan is such a big thing, because it's probably one of the most articulated of partnerships.

Fin de l'entretien

Interview 6: Mr F. - official at the Secrétariat Général de la Défense et de la Sécurité Nationale (SGDSN)

E : Quels sont les principaux objectifs stratégiques qui poussent la France à renforcer son partenariat avec le Japon ? Quelle plus-value apporte-t-il à la stratégie ?

Mr F. : Pourquoi le Japon ? Déjà il faut prendre la zone telle qu'elle est et telle qu'elle existe. Le Japon est un pays qui a des attributs de puissance assez poussés en termes d'aspect économique, en termes d'influence également. Quand on regarde la zone du Japon dans la région, c'est assez bien développé. Que ça soit des ambassades, ou que ça soit aussi des autres opérateurs qui concernent le Japon, je pense à la JICA notamment. Paradoxalement, sur l'aspect défense, le fait que les forces d'autodéfense japonaises commencent à s'ouvrir, à s'intéresser à l'extérieur, s'ouvrir aux coopérations internationales c'est assez neuf chez eux. Donc sur l'aspect défense c'est plutôt de voir comment on peut s'insérer avec un partenaire qui est en tâtonnement dans cette nouvelle posture là. Mais en même temps qui a des moyens, des capacités modernes, donc un partenariat avec lequel il peut être intéressant de coopérer, notamment sur les plateformes du haut du spectre, on pense aux F35 notamment. En termes de capacité navale du Japon, elle est assez intéressante, avec aussi une unité d'action qui peut être intéressante également. Notamment les porte-hélicoptères japonais, le Japon est intéressant car il a une capacité de rayonnement et d'influence assez large, qu'on retrouve dans tous les domaines. Et bien entendu, cela est fondé, car il y a d'autres pays qui ont de capacités comme ça, après le fait est que sur des fondamentaux, en termes de valeurs, d'intérêt et de vision pour la zone, il y a aussi des très grandes convergences entre nos deux pays.

E : Est-ce que cela permet d'avoir un appui après pour avoir d'autres partenariats dans la zone ?

F : Exactement. En fait, tout l'intérêt à terme de réfléchir à une coopération du Japon c'est notamment aux pays tiers. Ce qu'on peut faire ensemble pour mutualiser des bonnes idées, de projets en cours, de développement, de biodiversité, de changement contre le climat. Aussi des aspects technologiques, mais bon c'est dans une moindre mesure, car dans cette équation avec les Japonais il y a forcément à prendre en compte l'alliance du Japon avec les Américains. Qui est un peu la priorité des priorités. Dans ce contexte-là, quelle est la marge de manœuvre pour

une croissance du partenariat franco-japonais, mais il y a des choses à faire. Finalement, sur les attributs et capacités de rayonnement et d'influence il y a beaucoup de similarités. Alors j'essaie de trouver des synergies. Il y a ces idées de coopération avec des pays tiers, il y a des idées de coopération dans les eaux internationales. Il y a du vécu japonais qui est intéressant, notamment dans sa relation avec la chine, dont on connaît les complications mais en même temps la résilience japonaise face à la croissance des ambitions et de la posture agressive de la chine.

E: Cela est un point qui est important pour la France ?

F : D'intérêt oui. C'est finalement aux premières loges et en prise directe avec tout ce que la chine a pu faire en termes de coercition, et notamment depuis l'arrivée de Xi Jinping. Sur les aspects sécuritaires il y a quand même un fort intérêt avec les enjeux liées à la Corée du nord. Par rapport à toute la dimension crise de prolifération, les Japonais ont beaucoup de renseignements, forcément ça fait partie de leurs principales menaces.

C'est également une situation qu'on suit de près, on fait partie des dispositifs de mis en œuvre des fonctions, conduisant une capacité aérienne et navale. Alors l'élongation étant ce qu'elle est, on n'est pas en permanence présents sur zone, mais tous les ans, il y a des exercices Pégase français, des avions, des patrouilles maritimes, qui participent à cette mission de mise en œuvre des résolutions de l'ONU.

E: C'était aussi ma prochaine question, le partenariat France-Japon, au niveau de la défense et de la sécurité, est très important notamment par des exercices militaires, mais quels sont les autres domaines dans lequel il y a une coopération ? Je pense aussi au niveau du renseignement, spatial...

F : Alors, forcément la coopération défense elle a tous les volets, certains plus ou moins poussés. Sur l'aspect de la préparation opérationnelle, donc tout ce qui est exercices et escales. On est dans une logique d'accompagnement, d'ouverture à l'internationale des forces d'autodéfense japonaise, c'est assez nouveau, donc le fait qu'ils destinent leurs forces armées à des missions d'influence et de présence en dehors du Japon. Ils s'ouvrent à la coopération internationale, avec le déploiement aussi loin de leurs côtes, ça créé des opportunités pour faire des exercices dans les eaux internationales on pense notamment aux formats d'exercices La Pérouse, qui est une initiative française. Concrètement c'est des déploiements de la mission Jeanne d'Arc, c'est le déploiement annuel des élèves officiers à travers les plateformes qui sont le porte hélicoptères français et des frégates de premier rang. Et donc La Pérouse c'est un exercice, de haut du spectre avec des capacités assez importantes avec des autres pays membres du QUAD de l'IP, donc le Japon est dedans. Après les exercices au Japon c'est assez nouveau. Lors d'une mission Jeanne d'arc qui est passé au Japon il y a deux ans, il y a eu cet exercice ARC 21, avec des troupes de l'armée de terre française sur le sol du japon, donc ça c'était la première fois que ça arrivait. Et aussi des escales Pégase qui sont des projections d'un dispositif aérien d'envergure français dans la zone IP. Ils ont fait escale au Japon cet été, cela a permis des exercices bilatéraux. Généralement, on se retrouve épaules contre épaules dans les grands exercices multilatéraux dans la zone, et on essaie de voir en fonction des opportunités comment peuvent se créer de opportunités bilatérales. C'est plus compliqué forcément parce que, il y a à la fois, la capacité d'accueil disponible, avec encore une fois cette capacité américaine très importante qui fait que ce n'est pas toujours simple de trouver des créneaux et la disponibilité des forces de défense pour faire des exercices avec nous. Mais voilà au sein du système japonais entre les forces d'autodéfense, qui sont de bonnes volontés, et qui cherchent à savoir ce qu'ils peuvent faire en plus, et en même temps, tout cet enjeu d'équilibre avec la constitution japonaise, du coup qui ont besoin d'un feu vert. Après en R&D je n'ai pas le détail il faudra plus voir, de manière sécuritaire et militaire, il faudrait plus voir avec le ministère des armées, c'est leur enjeu premier. Mais sur technologie et équipement c'est plutôt la DGA qui gère. J'ai le souvenir qu'il

y avait des coopérations sur certaines technologies et certaines capacités notamment dans les parties sous-marines et autres. Mais grosso modo il n'y a rien d'une envergure conséquente. On en reparlera sur les limites de la relation bilatérale. Moi mon constat c'est que on a identifié le Japon comme un partenaire de premier plan par rapport à cette similarité d'attribut, de valeur, de vision mais bilatéralement il manque un premier étage d'une fusée si je peu me permettre ce dessin, il manque quelque chose de substantiel qui ancre l'attachement au niveau politique, à la fois du cotés français et japonais, pour aller plus loin dans la relation bilatérale. C'est ce qu'on a eu avec l'Australie avant le contrat des sous marins, chose qu'il y a avec l'Inde mais sans commune mesure puisque les contrats d'armement sont multiples, les contrats stratégiques le sont également et il y a une synergie, une convergence diplomatique assez conséquente avec l'Inde. Il manque dans la relation franco-japonaise ce trigger qui permet de faire passer un cap des seuils et de briser des plafonds de verre institutionnels, légaux ou d'ordre des priorités diplomatiques.

E: Pour revenir sur cette question, c'est quelque chose qui revient dans tous mes entretiens, il y a énormément d'engagement sur le papier mais j'ai toujours remarqué ce manque de substance

F : ce n'est pas un manque de substance, il y a quand même de nombreux dialogues thématiques, où les enjeux sont très forts, le partage d'informations et d'expériences est intéressant mais en fait c'est comment on déplace cette relation bilatérale de dialogue qui est extrêmement forte, à une relation bilatérale de coopération.

E : Quels sont les éléments qui pourraient passer de cette relation de dialogue à une relation de coopération ?

F : ah ça il faudrait plutôt interroger l'ambassade de France à Tokyo, s'il y avait des solutions toutes trouvées, on les aurait mises en œuvre. Mais pour l'instant je n'ai pas la solution. L'enjeu c'est de trouver un cadre, un objet, un sujet de coopération qui font que les états d'esprit changent. Mais je n'ai pas la solution là.

E : Oui c'est quelque chose qui se construit.

F : Oui à force de suivi, et de réseaux bilatéraux franco-japonais, on a une information sur des ambitions japonaises très fortes dans un domaine, qui nous intéresse tout autant. C'est comment l'opportunité monte finalement. Pour revenir à votre déroulé de questions préparatoires, nous au SDGSN, on ne remplace pas les ministères sur la stratégie Indopacifique. On coordonne. On fait office de coordination très haute interministérielle à la fois pour s'assurer que les orientations décidées et écrites soient bien suivies de faits. Quand il y a des idées qui émergent, dire oui, non, peut-être. Faire remonter les informations aussi, voilà parce qu'on n'est pas au jour le jour en prise avec les différentes coopérations qu'il peut y avoir dans la région. A un moment donné ce sont les administrations qui font ressortir certains objets un peu emblématiques de la stratégie, qui peuvent devenir des porte-étendard de la stratégie de la France. Donc voilà toutes ces questions de détail des coopérations bilatérales en matière de défense ça va se trouver à l'échelle du ministère, nous on s'assure de la cohérence d'ensemble, à la fois des thématiques, des pays partenaires, et est-ce que les intérêts français tels qu'établis dans la stratégie s'y retrouvent. C'est une autre ampleur par exemple au Minarm [ministère des armées], je n'étais pas sur le Japon même si les Japonais étaient intéressés par pas mal de sujets, au Minarm la DGRIS coordonne à l'intérieur le MA, la DGA, par rapport aux objectifs internationaux de la France. Nous on coordonne au niveau interministériel, avec une dizaine de ministères. Donc forcément, on ne va pas se familiariser et avoir l'intuition immédiate sur un signaux faible sur telle coopération à un niveau structurant. Même si voilà ça peut prendre différentes formes, des contrats, la forme d'instituts de coopération de recherche. Je pense que

sur un point culturel, après je ne suis pas expert de la culture nipponne, il y a une grande attraction pour les Japonais de la culture française et de la France pour la culture japonaise. Peut-être qu'il y a un objet culture à former, pour que ça soit plus conséquent ça je n'en sais rien, c'est des pistes. L'intérêt de cette relation c'est de trouver cet objet qui fera changer le partenariat.

E: Puisque vous êtes dans une position où vous voyez tout ce qui se passe, dans les différents ministères à propos de l'Indopacifique, est-ce que vous voyez que les partenariats font une différence dans la stratégie ?

F : Il faut bien entendu se replonger dans les textes qui fixent les objectifs, moi ma vision de la trajectoire de l'indopacifique c'est que pour la France, il est important d'exister dans une région du monde où on a des attributs souverains, très.. non pas modeste par rapport à leur qualité que ça soit les ZEE, les territoires, mais finalement, il y avait une problématique de logique de confettis dans cet espace de confrontation de puissances. Pour devenir, voir même actuel, quand on a fait la stratégie, quand on a conçu les premiers éléments de la stratégies, il y avait déjà la structuration de la compétition sino-américaine était évidente mais ce n'était pas aussi poussé que aujourd'hui donc il y avait cette intuition-là. Il y avait aussi je pense, vis à vis des outre-mer, de formaliser une valorisation par l'hexagone de ces territoires qui s'inscrivaient dans cet ensemble géopolitique. Je ne suis pas un expert de la sociologie des administrations outre-mer, souvent la façon dont les outre-mer sont présentés, qui n'est pas nécessairement, très valorisante ou très positive. Là il y avait une idée de montrer un peu que c'est grâce ça ces territoires là qu'on est une puissance de l'indo pacifique. Et que ces territoires sont au cœur des intérêts stratégiques de la France. Chose qui initialement n'était pas évidente quand on pense à tous les problèmes qui peuvent y avoir sur le territoire européen, à un moment donné dans la liste des priorités de politique étrangère de la France, a un énorme tropisme africain, avec des opérations sur le continent. Même si là il y a un contrecoup, depuis quelques mois mais là qui est de plus en plus depuis cet été. Il y a eu aussi l'idée de constituer une cohérence et une légitimité de la France dans la région, et la légitimité était trouvé par rapport à ces territoires, cette présence et les actions déjà mises en œuvre. Juste d'assembler une visibilité et d'en faire un outil à la fois de mobilisation interne des administrations, d'information des opinions publiques françaises et internationaux pour ancrer le fait qu'on fait partie du paysage, et d'une autre manière d'un support un peu transparent vis-à-vis des partenaires dans la région.

E: Cet engagement est pris depuis le début de la stratégie, au niveau des outre-mer ?

F : Attention je ne suis pas en train de dire que ce n'était pas le cas avant, juste ça ne s'inscrivait pas dans une ambition géopolitique de la France. Ça s'inscrivait dans des logiques très intérieures en fait. La relation de la France avec le territoire hexagonal avec les outre-mer, c'est une question du Ministère de l'Intérieur. C'est des préfets, commissaires, il y a un énorme prisme affaire intérieure dans cette relation-là. L'idée c'est de les inscrire dans une ambition géostratégique de la France. Et intérieur et très segmenté, c'est-à-dire que quand Paris parle avec la Réunion, elle parle différemment avec la nouvelle Calédonie, la Polynésie française. Voilà c'était vraiment de donner du sens à une masse française dans la région. Même s'il ne faut pas perdre de vue que chaque territoire a sa spécificité et que la bonne intégration de ces territoires dans la stratégie IP passe par ces singularités, mais sur l'approche haute il fallait donner un peu de corps et de masse à cette présence souveraine de la France. Notamment, le plus éloquent c'est la part de ZEE dans la région.

E: Oui il y a vraiment une dimension souveraine à la stratégie

F : souveraine oui et d'engagement par rapport à ses intérêts souverains, qui ne sont pas forcément imperméable à son environnement, comment la France en tant que puissance globale, globale dans le sens qu'elle est membre fondatrice de l'UE qui a des leviers et des moyens, elle

est au P5 du UNSC, et après d'autres attributs derrière, et donc comment cette notion de puissance qui est dirigée depuis Paris peut être utile pour préserver ou en tout cas refréner tous les impacts négatifs qu'il peut y avoir dans la région, en terme de risque et de menace avec et depuis nos territoires.

E: Pour revenir à cette notion de puissance, est-ce que vous pensez que la valeur de la France en tant que puissance peut être développée à travers la stratégie en Indopacifique ?

F : Bien sûr, bien sûr. C'est aussi pour ça qu'une stratégie est faite. C'est pour que derrière les administrations comprennent notre signal que c'est une priorité, au plus haut niveau. Alors le temps politique et le temps administratif ne sont pas toujours dans le même rythme, mais il y a une valeur de signal. Et par rapport aux premières formulations c'est le discours présidentiel en Inde et en Australie en 2018, concrètement c'est les premiers jasons officiels pour une stratégie française dans l'IP. Après les affaires étrangères et la défense ont travaillé en parallèle et ont élaborés des stratégies écrites. La stratégie de défense est sortie en 2019, la stratégie portée par le MEAE avec une communication publique mais il y avait déjà des éléments de coordination qui étaient déjà existants. Et donc augmenter les moyens, les ressources, on le retrouve. Dans l'actualité récente, je vous invite à regarder les annonces qui ont été faites au corps diplomatiques après les états généraux. Il y a une augmentation des moyens, des ETP et du budget. Très clairement ça avait déjà un peu commencé, mais très clairement l'IP en termes de réseau projeté diplomatique va être gagnant. Puisque les ambassades ont déjà commencé à croître, en termes d'effectif, et ça continue avec des nouveaux postes qui sont créés. Là vous regardez en détail des textes budgétaires, mais il doit y avoir des taux de croissance qui sont accessibles en ligne. Aussi, les armées. Donc là notamment la LPM consacre pas mal de nouveaux moyens et de nouveaux crédits aux outre-mer. Principalement dans la zone IP, mais pas que, il y a aussi dans les caraïbes. Et on a vu un début de renouvellement de nos capacités dans les outre-mer, capacités militaires, avec les patrouilleurs outre-mer qui ont arrivés en Nouvelle Calédonie et qui vont petit à petit remplacer tous les classe P400. Et après sur le reste des autres moyens, l'AFD commence aussi à prendre pas mal d'ampleur dans la région. Là il y a eu le déplacement présidentiel dans le pacifique sud avec l'annonce de création d'antennes de l'AFD, je crois au Vanuatu et au Fiji, il faut reprendre le détail des déclarations. Notamment à l'occasion de ce déplacement a été annoncé l'ouverture d'une ambassade au Samoa. Voilà on est clairement sur des illustrations des ressources et moyens en plus. Donc l'AFD qui petit à petit prend un peu plus d'empreinte dans la région. L'AFD c'est aussi, je suis pas pour opposer les priorités diplomatiques mais c'est vrai que l'AFD a une forte empreinte africaine. L'enjeu pour eux c'est, par rapport à la stratégie française, de voir comment élargir le portefeuille des opérations d'activités et de réseaux dans la zone IP. De manière générale c'est une problématique qui s'est retrouvée au cœur des administrations. Pas que l'AFD, mais il y a aussi la DCSD. Elle gère tous les coopérants qu'ils soient militaires, policiers, gendarmes... placés dans des projets ou administrations d'états étrangers. Et ça pareil l'empreinte africaine était très forte et petit à petit ils diversifient en augmentant leur présence dans la zone IP. Et toute cette augmentation de réseau, ce déploiement, cette nouvelle disponibilité de ressources vont permettre d'identifier qu'est-ce qu'on peut faire de plus avec de grands partenaires ou des pays tiers.

E: Donc il y a vraiment une volonté de diversification des partenariats ? Il y a des partenaires traditionnels comme l'Australie, maintenant ça a changé, le Japon, mais est-ce qu'il y a une volonté de diversifier les partenariats ?

F : Moi ma vision de la stratégie, avec cette interrogation qu'est le futur de la relation franco-australienne post-AUKUS, ça c'est un cas un peu à part parce qu'il s'agit de faire un reset et de recréer quelque chose d'ambitieux entre nous deux et c'est pas forcément ça.

E : Mais il y a une volonté d'améliorer la relation ?

F : Oui il y a une volonté, notamment le premier ministre a changé depuis l'AUKUS, on ne les tient pas responsables de l'AUKUS, même s'ils peuvent pas revenir dessus avec tout ce que ça a en terme de symbolique et de stratégique. Mais on ne leur tient pas directement la responsabilité d'AUKUS. Donc voilà, sachant que c'est le domaine d'information où je suis le spécialiste de longue date, il y a un intérêt partagé qui est extrêmement concret. On est voisin immédiat de l'Australie, avec la nouvelle Calédonie et l'Antarctique notamment. L'Australie est indispensable en fait pour le soutien de nos missions scientifiques en Antarctique. Avec le ravitaillement de nos bases, qui se fait par un patrouiller tous les étés australs. Aussi sur le lien entre la métropole et les outre-mer dans le Pacifique, on voit bien l'importance de l'Australie pour passer d'un bassin océanique à un autre. Donc les intérêts conjoints sont là. Pareil il faut trouvé la substance, la dynamique, la confiance, c'est pas si simple après le camouflet qu'a été l'AUKUS pour la France c'est pas évident. Voilà après il y a l'Inde, qui est le partenariat qui a le vent en poupe à tous les niveaux, avec beaucoup d'ambition, beaucoup de visites croisées entre le président de la république et Modi, beaucoup de ministres de premier plan, portés par ces contrats rafales et autres. Donc là très clairement l'Inde est aujourd'hui la priorité. Donc le Japon on en parlait et on en reviendra. Après moi selon ma vision des choses, si on devait compléter, il y a Singapour également. Par rapport à un positionnement géostratégique, c'est une plaque financière, d'échange de flux, dans la région et entre l'Europe et cette région. Si on prend en matière de défense, ils ont des capacités modernes et fluides. Et le dernier, qui est plus une promesse si j'ose dire, en terme géographique, économique, c'est l'Indonésie. Avec pareil son positionnement géostratégique, qui est quand même au contrôle de détroit, des enjeux de bascule d'un bassin à un autre. Et une promesse par rapport au fait, que c'est déjà un géant démographique, mais ça va devenir une puissance économique aussi. Après il y a sur le plan bilatéral pas mal d'ambition notamment sur les contrats d'armement. De manière générale, un des enjeux pour la stratégie française, notamment dans des cas de figure AUKUS, c'est de diversifier la nature des relations, des enjeux, des dossiers d'action de coopération. C'est-à-dire que le ministère des armées fait déjà beaucoup en terme de déploiement, de projection de moyens, d'exercices, de suivi et d'engagement. Après par rapport aux ambitions de la France en matière de diplomatie climatique, par rapport aux enjeux de positionnement de grosses entreprises dans les infrastructures, on voit tout le terreau des possibles dans la région. En rapport avec le changement climatique on a la décarbonisation de l'énergie mais aussi la protection de la biodiversité, intéressant à préserver dans la région, avec tout l'impact du changement climatique couplé à la pression démographique, on voit bien l'étendue des dégâts potentiels en Asie.

E: L'aspect environnemental n'est pas présent depuis le début de la stratégie, mais il y a de plus en plus de poids récemment ?

F : Pour moi, dans tous les plans d'action de nos relations bilatérales avec les pays dans la région, il y a souvent eu, je pense, des chapitres de coopération en matière de changement climatique et de préservation de l'environnement et de la biodiversité. Après dans quelle mesure il y a eu une attention politique élevé de ce côté là je ne sais pas. Je pense que le vrai trigger pour la France a été la COP21, et la mobilisation diplomatique et donc humaine pour la COP21. Depuis cela on se sent un peu comme, des garants que l'Accord de Paris sera respecté et mis en œuvre. Donc du coup, forcément, le Quai d'Orsay s'est structuré en conséquence pour cet exercice de la COP21 et pour son héritage, avec une place conséquente prise dans le système

institutionnel qui font que ces coopérations en matière du climat se sont enrichies. Dans les discours, ça a toujours été présent, si on reprend les discours notamment de Garden Island, il y avait ce volet-là. Après le problème c'est ça dans quelle mesure c'est présent le discours et dans quel cadre il a été prononcé. Garden Island c'est une base militaire, le message n'était pas celui-là mais ça a toujours fait partie de l'approche cohérente. C'est un sujet qui devient de plus en plus prégnant dans la région et pour nos intérêts aussi. Là-dessus aussi, quand on parle de partenariats possibles en pays tiers, il y a à la fois des synergies de réseaux à trouver, parce que l'AFD n'a pas forcément des bureaux partout comme la JICA dans la région. Mais des synergies financières aussi. Le fait est que les enjeux d'influence derrière il y a, à la fois normatifs mais aussi d'influence politique vis-à-vis des pays bénéficiaires. Face à une compétition d'influence qu'il y a dans la région, les logiques de synergies sont indispensables.

E: Est-ce que le partenariat France-Japon pourrait aider à développer cela ?

F : Bien sûr, pour moi les Japonais sont extrêmement compétents et ont les moyens de leur coopération dans le développement. Après il faut matcher les priorités thématiques et pays entre les deux homologues franco-japonaises, trouver le bon objet, avoir l'accord du pays tiers, plus on élargit un cercle d'acteurs sur un projet plus c'est compliqué. Mais oui il y a du potentiel identifié.

E : pour revenir, à l'AUKUS, vous aviez parlé d'une volonté de reconstruction, est-ce qu'il y a eu une réorientation des partenariats ? Est-ce qu'il y a eu une intensification du partenariat France-Japon post-AUKUS ?

F : France-Japon, je n'aurais pas ce détail là et ça me semble pas être le cas, dans la mesure où les Japonais ont pas eu ce problème dans AUKUS. Pourquoi je dis ça, il faut se souvenir aussi que quand Naval group a été choisi, il était en compétition avec une offre japonaise sur des sous-marins. Voir même, les Japonais pensaient avoir le contrat de fait, c'était un deal entre Abbott et Shinzo Abe au début des années 2010. Mais il a été contraint de passer par un appel d'offre un peu plus transparent. Donc les Japonais avait le partenariat fait mais n'ont pas été retenus par la suite. Donc il y a eu une brouille entre australiens et japonais là-dessus. Le fait qu'on perde ce contrat là ça ne leur a fait ni chaud ni froid. Et accessoirement ça renforce la main de l'allié américain dans la région. Le partenariat nippo-australien finalement avec leur relation avec les US, donc ça ancre les US de manière plus durable dans la région donc AUKUS je vois pas le problème. Donc on n'a pas poussé tout feu tout flamme avec les Japonais. Par contre tout s'est retrouvé attaché à faire avancer les jalons identifiés pour le partenariat bilatéral. On a eu des conversations assez intéressantes, avec Singapour, l'Indonésie. Mais je ne dirais pas que le Japon a été une priorité de rebond à l'immédiat de l'AUKUS.

E: Quels sont les obstacles qui empêchent une collaboration plus étroite entre les deux pays ? Notamment la position de la France vis-à-vis de la Chine ?

F : Alors il est vrai que la sortie présidentielle autour de Pékin a été très mal prise par les Japonais. Il faut comprendre la psychologie sécuritaire du Japon. Si j'avais été japonais, moi aussi je l'aurais mal pris. Après, je pense qu'on est suffisamment présents ensemble dans des réunions multilatérales, ou le contenu de nos dialogues bilatéraux sont aussi suffisamment substantiels et clairs sur certains sujets pour, je veux dire, si les Japonais s'interrogent sur la robustesse de ce qu'on pense et de notre positionnement, c'est peut-être un peu facile sachant qu'il y a tout un tas de formats, de discussions stratégiques, militaires, dans lesquels la France et le Japon sont avec d'autres pays et les discussions sont très claires. Après oui il y a forcément, même si on a les mêmes variables on n'est pas forcément au même curseur au sein de ces variables, notamment sur le rôle et les actions des US dans la région. Pour en venir aux contraintes par rapport à ce problème de positionnement, je pense que c'est un faux problème,

même si les sorties comme celles qu'on a connu après la visite du président en Chine ça créé du doute, et forcément une mobilisation qui s'est un peu dilatée de la part des Japonais pour faire avancer la relation bilatérale, mais de façon très ponctuelle. Quelques semaines, à pas trop savoir quoi en penser et comment se positionner. Non, les obstacles, il y a une logique de cercle vertueux. Tant qu'on n'a pas cet objet, cette substance, qui font que l'attachement est du très haut politique et que derrière la mise en branle des administrations suivent, ça ne sera jamais simple. Et en même temps, pour trouver cette substance, matière c'est difficile, on n'a pas réussi à enclencher vraiment ce cycle développement d'un partenariat stratégique de grande ampleur. Les limites sont aussi à retrouver au niveau des ressources, de façon différente entre nous et eux. Eux, c'est par rapport à la priorité de leurs relations avec les US, forcément qui consomme beaucoup de temps disponible dans les administrations japonaises, c'est ce que je vois, ce que je comprends. Nous, c'est par rapport à l'immensité de la zone aussi. On parle d'élongation de la France et l'IP, pour aller au Japon, c'est poussé à un niveau, c'est le plus loin possible. Donc pas toujours simple d'aller jusque-là bas, pas simple d'allier les planifications de présence, de se retrouver. Donc voilà après il y a des limitations d'ordre légal, constitutionnel au Japon. On parlait de l'ouverture des forces d'autodéfense, à avoir une empreinte, visibilité extérieure plus développée, le problème c'est que le déplacement des dispositions constitutionnelles initiales sont en cours mais ça se fait par petits pas on va dire. Et ça, on l'a dit, c'est les forces d'autodéfense qui attendent l'autorisation des diplomates, voilà c'est le fonctionnement interne. Comme en France on a nos propres difficultés de mobilisation et les Japonais ont leur propre problèmes la dessus. Voilà je pense que ça fait partie des limites à prendre en compte et dont il faut avoir conscience pour faire avancer la relation bilatérale.

E: Comment voyez-vous la stratégie française évoluer en Indo-Pacifique, éventuellement vis-à-vis du partenariat avec le Japon, comment voyez-vous tout ça évoluer dans les prochaines années ?

F : Il y a beaucoup de choses qui ne dépendent pas de nous. Aujourd'hui, on fait partie du paysage, on est établi dans le paysage. La France nation de l'IP a été quand même bien martelée, et là-dessus il y a plus trop de problème de légitimité on va dire. Le problème principal pour nous, on parlait de la croissance des moyens et des ressources, qui sont certes présents d'un point de vue organique, mais le problème c'est que quand on compare, est-ce que c'est au bon niveau. Est-ce que c'est dans la bonne proportion, est-ce que ça va assez vite par rapport à ce que font les grandes puissances de la zone, donc Japon, Australie, Inde, mais aussi la Chine, les US. On voit qu'il y a tout le monde qui muscle son jeu dans la région, est-ce que nous on le fait suffisamment et assez rapidement, ça c'est la grande interrogation. Finalement, des efforts de croissance de moyens et de ressources si c'est pour être dilué par rapport à ce que font les autres, il peut y avoir le sentiment que relativement on reste en retard, voir on recule. En termes d'influence, de présence, de visibilité. Je pense, mais on n'a pas encore trouvé le bon équilibre, la bonne formule et la bonne alchimie. Pour nous le vrai enjeu démultiplicateur ça va être l'UE. Mais la stratégie de l'UE pour la zone est encore très jeune. La réponse au comment mettre en œuvre la stratégie et atteindre les ambitions fixées, comment tout ça peut se faire c'est pas forcément clair entre les Etats membres. Le véritable enjeu pour nous ça va être d'augmenter cette présence, ces ressources, mobilisés dans la région avec les états membres et les institutions européennes. On se rend compte finalement que c'est l'échelle qui nous permet de faire la différence, et de se prémunir sur des logiques qu'on a parfois connu par le passé qui étaient des, enfin qui n'a rien avoir avec des rivalités stratégiques mais quand même une petite rivalité d'influence et de présence entre Etats européens. Ce n'est pas qu'on se marche sur les pieds, on se dit juste qu'il n'y a pas beaucoup de place pour de nouveaux acteurs, de nouveaux entrants,

et on a un peu peur d'être mis en compétition par d'autres pays de la zone, je sais pas moi, on s'imagine entre la France et l'Allemagne ne serait-ce sur le marché chinois. Le secteur automobile français et allemand était en concurrence en Chine. Il y a toujours ce risque de se tirer dans les pattes entre Européens lors que l'enjeu c'est de changer d'échelle ensemble en tant qu'Européen. Comment je vois aussi la zone, alors il y a des grandes inconnues. Pas qu'on va réussir en tant que seule France à peser et influencer sur la dynamique que prend la compétition sino-américaine. Disons que tout le monde a intérêt, quand bien même il y a de la compétition technologique, commerce, de système et de valeurs ça ne dérape pas, dans un conflit qui prend une forme diplomatique et militaire. Parce que sinon je pense que la zone, et le monde, seraient bien transformés. Et se projeter dans ce cas de figure là et dans l'après est extrêmement compliqué. Nous on a aussi des enjeux d'avenir institutionnel de nos territoires dans la région. Ça c'est une vigilance qui est présente dans les esprits à Paris et dans la région. Si on résonne dans des scénarios extrême, ça va être beaucoup plus compliqué de vendre une légitimité et aussi du coup un rayonnement et déploiement d'action. Ça c'est un enjeu d'ordre intérieur mais qui est quand même dimensionnant pour la stratégie. Il faut aussi que les gains soient partagés et comment on a une inclusivité intelligente et mutuellement bénéfique avec les territoires pour avancer dans le développement de la mise en œuvre de la stratégie. On a commencé à le voir, avec la visite dans le Pacifique sud du président était assez intelligente pour ça. Le président a emmené au Vanuatu et Papouasie Nouvelle Guinée les présidents de Polynésie française et de Nouvelle Calédonie. Il y a, au très haut niveau, et au niveau de travail aussi, comment conjuguer ça. Par rapport aux thématiques identifiées par la stratégie, que les objectifs stratégiques soient remplis, et je crois que là la stabilité de la région est essentielle pour l'économie mondiale mais plus particulièrement l'économie européenne et nationale. On a vu toutes les perturbations qu'ont pu engendrer le Covid. C'est un vrai enjeu sur un autre aspect. Pareil pour des ambitions climatiques et de biodiversité on voit bien qu'on ne peut pas raisonner par segment, notamment géographique.

E : Comment se positionne la France par rapport aux instances de dialogue stratégiques (QUAD, AUKUS) ? Il y a une volonté d'intégrer ?

F : On ne veut pas être membre, en fait on ne veut pas se trouver dans des dynamiques et des cadres polarisants. Par contre, s'il y a des développements en terme de cadre de coopération, qui sont développés dans ces cadres là et qui sont comme potentiellement pour nous et pour la région et ce qu'on veut y faire, on s'interdit pas de s'associer, en tout cas de chercher à s'associer à certaines initiatives qui naissent dans ces cadres-là. On peut imaginer en termes de sécurité maritime, ça va dans notre sens. S'il y a des trucs au niveau des infrastructures. Si on pense que ça va dans le bon sens, oui. On veut éviter d'être dans une logique de polarisation de façon générale. Plutôt privilégier du multilatéralisme. Nous on va privilégier deux formes de multilatéralisme. Les cadres multilatéraux larges et non-discriminatoires, comme des organisations régionales comme l'IOA dans l'océan indien, l'ASEAN, voilà des formats comme ça. On parlait notamment est-ce que le Japon peut être facilitateur oui. Typiquement j'ai un exemple. Une forme de cadre multilatéral qu'ils ont créé qui est en fait le réseau des gardes côtes en IP. Le HACGAM, dont on est membre. On peut le retrouver dans d'autres exemples, la bienveillance et le soutien du Japon pour renforcer nos positions dans ces cadres multilatéraux a été présent. Et après, ça qui est une logique d'appartenance, de visibilité, et aussi de compréhension au sens large, de ce que veulent les pays de la région et comment ils le veulent. Il y a également l'autre volet, qu'on pousse pas mal c'est des dialogues, consultations trilatérales. Donc il y avait la première France-Inde-Australie, qui a pris un petit coup avec

l'AUKUS mais qui est en train de remonter, aussi France-Inde-EAU. Voilà ce genre de dialogue trilatéraux qui peuvent être intéressant dans la mesure où, leurs objectifs c'est, au-delà d'entretenir les convergences, c'est de trouver à 3 des objets de coopération concrètes. Et ces formats là on n'est pas les seuls à les développer. Voilà donc finalement c'est assez complémentaire, et le poids des formes de logiques similaires même si ils sont plus que 3. Cette problématique, pourquoi il y a deux axes qui sont poursuivis ? On ne peut pas faire sans les organisations régionales, qui sont créées et qui donnent une légitimité et qui finalement se retrouvent à être peu opérantes. Et en même temps le besoin d'avancer concrètement. Un des grands problèmes de l'IP, contrairement à l'Europe, il n'y a pas une architecture de défense et de sécurité claire, établie, par tous, et légitimisée par tous. Ce qui est problématique quand on pense à des sujets comme la Corée du Nord ou la mer de Chine.

Fin de l'entretien

Appendix 10 : One-page summary (required by ULB)

This thesis investigates whether France leverages its strategic partnership with Japan to strengthen its position as a power in the Indo-Pacific region. The analysis focuses on the period from 2018-2023 and is based on a theoretical framework combining neorealism and liberalism. Our research outline is divided into two sections, the first one provides a contextualisation of the research, focusing on examining France's pivot to the Indo-Pacific and its strategy, along with an overview of the theoretical framework, hypotheses of the research, and the data collection methodology. The second section assesses and operationalises our hypotheses. The first hypothesis, suggesting that Japan enhances France's military capabilities and power projection, has been confirmed supported by evidence of intensified military exercises, naval cooperation, and defence partnerships. However, obstacles exist due to differing approaches to China. The second hypothesis explored the possibility of Japan bolstering France's regional influence through diplomacy and joint initiatives. This hypothesis is only partially validated. While the two countries entertain diplomatic ties, our interviews revealed that France's strategy has shifted from power to influence, impacting the partnership. France now prioritises climate, biodiversity and partnerships with island states. We observed through our interviews that several obstacles hinder a strengthened France-Japan partnership and focused on this aspect in the last chapter. The differing stances regarding China is an obstacle when Japan's cautious approach, focusing on security and defence measures, contrasts with France's "Third way" policy. Additionally, internal challenges such as geographic distance, limited military means, as well as the need for a more efficient interministerial body, further hinder the partnership's development. Also, Japan's shift towards a more military-oriented approach in the Indo-Pacific presents another hurdle. In conclusion, France partially leveraged its partnership with Japan to strengthen its position as a power in the Indo-Pacific. Japan did strengthen France's power through their cooperation in the military and defence sphere, but modestly through diplomatic ties. What became evident is that France has redirected its attention within the region and decreased its dependence on Japan when looking to enhance its position as a power in the Indo-Pacific.

Appendix 11: Fifteen-pages summary (required by LUISS)

Introduction

The Indo-Pacific has rapidly emerged as the dominant economic, political and strategic region shaping global affairs in the 21st century. The term Indo-Pacific is a relevantly new term that geographically encompasses the region from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean, interconnecting the maritime space stretching from the west coast of the United States to the eastern shores of Africa and from Japan down to Australia. It is mostly understood in a geopolitical sense, perceived as an ideological concept aimed at restraining China's expansionism, established by the country's economic, political and military development. Our analysis will focus on two main actors in the Indo-Pacific, Japan and France. Firstly, Japan is a prominent player in the region due to its economic weight but also as the first to conceptualise and promote the term Indo-Pacific (*Indo-Pacific*) in 2017. This promotion is articulated by its “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” (FOIP) strategy, which relies on economic connectivity, the protection of the rule of law and freedom of navigation, and a commitment to peace and stability in the region³¹⁵. France is also an important component of the region. Drawing on its sovereign presence, it has established itself as a legitimate power in the region.

This paper seeks to provide an academic evaluation and analysis of France's strategy in the Indo-Pacific, with a specific focus on the role played by its key partner in the region, Japan. Our work will investigate the following research question,

Does France leverage its strategic partnership with Japan to strengthen its position as a power in the Indo-Pacific?

Our hypotheses are twofold and both respond positively to the question. The first hypothesis suggests that Japan, as a prominent security and military partner in the region, permits France to enhance its military capabilities and therefore strengthens its position as a power. The second hypothesis suggests that Japan's key position in the region benefits the perception of France amongst other actors through joint initiatives and diplomatic means. This could ultimately reinforce the narrative of France as a significant power in the region. For the purpose of our analysis, we will focus on the time period extending from 2018 to 2023. We consider President Macron's speech in 2018 at Garden Island naval base in Australia as the launch of France's Indo-Pacific strategy. We will mark off our analysis to today, September 2023, in order to include every event in a moving and evolving strategy. It is also important to underline that our

³¹⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2023), *Free and Open Indo-Pacific Basic Thinking Material*, MOFA.

work aims solely at investigating the French point of view. We will not be incorporating or analysing in detail the Japanese foreign policy aspect. In order to respond to our research question and test our hypotheses, we will base our analysis on qualitative data collection, interviews mostly, which we will detail the collection methodology further. Our research outline is divided into two sections, the first one providing a contextualisation of the research along with its theoretical framework. The second section will assess and operationalise our hypotheses.

SECTION 1 : THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND CONTEXTUALISATION OF THE RESEARCH

CHAPTER 1: Theoretical framework and methodology of data collection

1.1 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework most appropriate for our subject combines two preeminent theories of International Relations (IR)³¹⁶, neorealism and liberalism, both integrating essential aspects to grasp the challenges of our study. Our analysis will be based on a mixed approach of liberal realism³¹⁷. This mixed approach is embedded on a realism base, more specifically neorealism, emphasising the central role of the state, driven by self-interest, survival and security. It is combined with the objectives of liberalism, putting forward the importance of cooperation and the promotion of shared values. This mixed approach framework is essential to our analysis. The realist perspective emphasises the driving aspects of national interests, security, and power in France's Indo-Pacific strategy. Meanwhile, the principle of cooperation central to liberalism is also crucial in examining Japan's role and the importance of partnerships in France's Indo-Pacific strategy.

1.2 State of the art and relevance of the work

The concept of Indo-Pacific being relevantly recent, the literature is still in its early stages. We have mentioned several authors working on establishing the concept of Indo-Pacific in *From Asia-pacific to Indo-pacific : Diplomacy in a contested region*³¹⁸. To explore strategic matters in the Indo-Pacific, we have studied Rory Medcalf, a leading expert in the region. We then narrowed our research to the French point of view and the French strategy in the Indo-

³¹⁶The term 'International Relations' (IR) here refers to the academic discipline of international relations, whereas the term 'international relations' refers to inter-state relations.

³¹⁷ Jeangène Vilmer, J. (2020), "Chapitre VII. Les approches mixtes", *Théories des relations internationales*, PUF, pp. 101-120.

³¹⁸ Goh, E., Bollard, A. et al. (2021), *From Asia-pacific to Indo-pacific : Diplomacy in a contested region* (R. G. Patman, P. Köllner, & B. Kiglics, Éd.s.). Springer Singapore.

Pacific. On this aspect, we can mention the expertise of Milhiet, Meijer and Bondaz as insightful to grasp the main challenges. Moreover, articles published by Pajon, and Péron-Doise also incorporates specific views on the partnership between France and Japan. We underline that the lack of a French point of view on the Asia-Pacific region has been regretted by several authors. This work therefore aims at contributing to the literature on the French strategy in the Indo-Pacific. We attempt to provide valuable insight into the role of Japan, an underexplored aspect of the field.

1.3 Key concepts

We found it paramount to define the key concepts of our research. The first key concept defined is the Indo-Pacific, a concept difficult to define concretely because of its diverse definition from country to country but also by its complexities. It is indeed understood geographically but mostly geopolitically. Moreover, the second concept defined was the concept of “power”, or *puissance* in French. We focused on a definition by researcher Argounès³¹⁹ articulated through an aggregative, relational and structural approach to power. Finally, we defined our third concept of “strategic partnership”. This concept is essential to our research. It combines the notion of partnership, an association of two countries working together and strategic, which indicates “issues relating to defence, civil nuclear energy, space and security”³²⁰.

1.4 Methodology of data collection

Our qualitative data collection method includes individual interviews, which we have conducted with six different people. The interviews were semi-directive, allowing the interviewee to express himself/herself freely on questions or themes set out in advance in our grid of questions. complementing our findings with the analysis of publicly available data. After the collection of data, we analysed it according to our research question and hypotheses. We relied on *verbatim* transcripts of the interviews and drew up a thematic analysis, which consists of extracting the main themes in each interview and cross-analysing them with the other interviews. In addition to this method, we also supported our analysis with another qualitative method, the analysis of public data, such as official documents, speeches, and press releases. This additional method provided contextual information to our interviews.

³¹⁹ Argounès, F. (2018), *Théories de la puissance*, CNRS Editions.

³²⁰ Ministère de l’Europe et des Affaires étrangères, *The Indo-French Strategic Partnership in 4 questions*, [Web Page].

CHAPTER 2: The French strategy in Indo-Pacific : a quest for strategic influence

2.1 The global pivot towards the Indo-Pacific, where does France stand?

A global pivot is occurring towards the Indo-Pacific, drawing growing attention to this new geographical and strategic concept. We put forward that the rise of the term Indo-Pacific coincides with the growing concern regarding China, which justifies the view of the concept as strategic. Just as the states' attention toward this region is intensifying, the research on the Indo-Pacific is also intensifying. In this section, we investigated the main actors that 'pivoted' towards the Indo-Pacific. The first actor to mention is the United States (US), a prominent actor through the tight alliances they have formed but mostly through their assertive and containing stance regarding China. Moreover, Japan is also a primary spokesperson when it comes to the Indo-Pacific. As one of the first countries to formulate the term, and promote it since 2007, Japan is one of the leading faces of the Indo-Pacific. Its FOIP strategy is a founding component to grasp the dynamics of the region. We also underline the notable position of India, another leading face in the promotion of the Indo-Pacific, adopting it in 2012 and formulating a comprehensive strategy in 2018. Moreover, Australia was also among the most proactive countries in advocating for the Indo-Pacific concept when it adopted it in 2013 and has been strengthening its regional partnerships ever since. Finally, we carried out an overview of the French pivot towards Asia, which timidly started in 2008 but was officialised in 2018 with Macron's speech outlining a French Indo-Pacific strategy. We also provided an overview of France's most significant bilateral relationships in the region.

2.2 Legitimation of France's presence in Indo-Pacific and redefinition of the strategy through time (2018-2023)

France has expressed a growing interest and involvement in the Indo-Pacific region and was the first European nation to have formulated a specific Indo-Pacific strategy, a decision incited by its sovereign presence in the region. One of France's primary interests in the Indo-Pacific is the security of its overseas territories located in the Pacific and Indian Oceans. These territories are inhabited by 1.6 million French citizens and France is committed to safeguarding their security and well-being. Another vital interest is the protection of France's exclusive economic zones (EEZs), which cover over nine million square kilometres in the Indo-Pacific, constituting more than 90% of France's EEZs worldwide. These zones provide access to essential resources, including fisheries and ore resources. Furthermore, France maintains a strong military presence in the region to ensure the security of its citizens, protect its sovereignty, and respond to various risks, including natural disasters and external threats. The

military aspect is paramount for France's national sovereignty and security. The French overseas territories occupy a pivotal role within France's Indo-Pacific strategy, as they enable France to assert its presence as a resident power in the region, thus bolstering its legitimacy. Additionally, France's involvement in the Indo-Pacific aligns with its broader strategy to project power and assert its influence on the global stage. France seeks to establish itself in the Indo-Pacific, recognizing the region's growing geopolitical significance. Key events, such as President Macron's speech in Australia in 2018 and the publication of strategic documents, have shaped France's approach to the region. France's strategy emphasised at first highly the security and defence aspects. It diversified its strategy later including its attachment to maritime and air security, the rule of law, multilateralism, climate security, and regional stability. France's strategy also relies significantly on partnerships and multilateral cooperation with regional players, such as India and Japan, to enhance its presence and contribute to regional stability. Despite diplomatic challenges, like the submarine crisis with Australia in 2021, France continues to deepen and diversify its involvement in the Indo-Pacific, underlining its commitment to being recognized as a resident power in the region and promoting stability.

2.3 Japan, a key actor in the Indo-Pacific

Japan holds a significant role in the Indo-Pacific due to its position as the world's third-largest economy. Its economic prowess, driven by innovation and foreign direct investments, grants it influence in multilateral negotiations and global forums like the G7. Japan's post-World War II pacifist stance, enshrined in Article 9 of its constitution, oriented a Japanese foreign policy based on diplomacy. Japan relies on the US as a main guarantor of its security. Japan actively promotes multilateralism and cooperation, even though it has complex relationships with neighbouring countries, notably China, and North Korea. Japan still seeks to uphold international law, regional stability, and cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, making it a key actor in defining and promoting the Indo-Pacific concept. Japan's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)" policy, initiated in 2016, focuses on economic connectivity, the rule of law, freedom of navigation, and regional stability, aiming to counterbalance Chinese influence. The FOIP aligns with France's Indo-Pacific strategy, but the specificity of countering China sets it apart. France and Japan share a long-standing strategic partnership, elevated to the rank of "exceptional partnership" in 2014 with 2+2 dialogues. The partnership is also strengthened by multiple agreements, including a "Roadmap for Franco-Japanese cooperation" in 2013 and 2019. Both countries have a similar vision for the Indo-Pacific, emphasising a free and open region, respect for international law, and multilateralism. Their collaboration extends across

various domains, from security and defence to research, culture, and education, making them key partners for promoting peace, prosperity, and stability in the Indo-Pacific.

SECTION 2: OPERATIONALISATION OF HYPOTHESES

CHAPTER 3: Japan as a military partner in France's *politique de puissance*

3.1 The rising militarisation in the region: a stimulus for enhanced partnerships

The Indo-Pacific region has witnessed a growing escalation of geopolitical tensions characterized by military buildups, alliances, and strategic rivalries among major powers. This trend is indicative of the gradual militarisation of the Indo-Pacific, marked by increased military spending and the modernisation of regional armed forces. The shift from the term "Asia-Pacific" to "Indo-Pacific" reflects the evolving dynamics in the region, focusing more on strategic and defence challenges rather than an economic point of view. China's rise as a dominant political, economic, and military power has raised concerns about shifts in the balance of power and stirred anxieties in the region. Territorial disputes involving China, Taiwan, Japan, and India, as well as China's assertive "nine-dash line" claim in the South China Sea, have heightened anxieties. China's behaviour has become increasingly confrontational, driven by its growing military capabilities and budget. Other than China, North Korea is also continuing nuclear and missile programs, fueling the growing fear and anxieties of the region. The complex duality between cooperation and competition with China defines the militarisation dynamics at play. While Indo-Pacific states seek the benefits of connectivity, they also strengthen defence ties to safeguard against destabilization in the region. Japan, in particular, has expanded its military capabilities in response to regional security challenges, shifting away from its historical stance and investing more in security and defence. Japan's increasing defence spending and alliance integration, particularly with the US, demonstrate its commitment to regional security. South-East Asian countries like Indonesia, Cambodia, and Vietnam have also witnessed rising military spending and arms imports. This arms build-up reflects the modernisation of naval and air forces operating in the region. Moreover, trilateral and multilateral security dialogues, such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) and minilateral formats, have emerged to address shared security concerns and strengthen regional cooperation. The militarisation of the region is also translated by increasing partnerships between countries, highly oriented towards security and defence matters. All in all, the Indo-Pacific region is experiencing a process of militarisation driven by various factors, including

China's assertiveness, external dynamics, and the need for collective security measures. France, among other actors, is actively increasing its military presence and alliances in response to these evolving challenges.

3.2 France's military apparatus in the Indo-Pacific as a tool to pursue a *politique de puissance*, with the support of its security partners

The literature on France's strategy in the Asia-Pacific region over recent decades presents conflicting views. Some argue that France only began showing significant interest in the region recently, with a political awakening in 2019. Others contend that France has maintained a strong presence in the Asia-Pacific, with a well-elaborated strategy based on diplomatic and defence networks. While the political level of engagement might have been late to develop, France has had an active military presence in the region for some time. This military engagement was initially driven by the need to protect its sovereign territories in the area. France intensified naval deployments and missions in the 2010s, even before the Indo-Pacific concept gained prominence. The early French strategy in the region focused heavily on defence aspects, including military deployments and military-industrial contracts. As the Indo-Pacific concept evolved from the previous Asia-Pacific framework, France continued to prioritize defence matters. The country sought to assert itself as a security actor in the region by emphasizing its military posture and capabilities. Since 2018, France has increased its military presence, with 7,000 permanent military personnel stationed in the Indo-Pacific as of 2021³²¹. France also maintains two permanent French military stations, one in the United Arab Emirates and one in Djibouti, equipped with combat aircraft and other assets. These stations support operational deployments, bilateral military cooperation, and regional collaboration, serving as crucial elements of France's Indo-Pacific presence. In addition to its permanent presence, France conducts rotational deployments, including aircraft carrier strike groups, submarines, and maritime security patrols. These deployments involve multiple joint exercises with regional partners, such as Australia, the US, and Japan, aiming to enhance knowledge-sharing, techniques, and interoperability among military forces. France also places a significant emphasis on naval capabilities, considering the maritime dimension playing a crucial role in the Indo-Pacific region. The French Navy deploys capital ships and conducts rotational naval deployments, demonstrating its commitment to maritime security and cooperation. We can underline notably the *Jeanne d'Arc* mission in this aspect. The annual presence of the *Charles*

³²¹ Ministère des Armées (2022) "Indopacifique: la France renforce sa présence aux avants-postes".

de Gaulle nuclear-powered aircraft carrier and its air-sea force further underlines France's power projection capabilities in the region. France's naval and air forces have been deployed in the Indo-Pacific on various missions, reinforcing its role as a regional power. The Ministry of the Armed Forces has played a leading role in shaping France's Indo-Pacific strategy, with a focus on military power and puissance. The government has allocated increased resources and attention to the military aspect, emphasising the importance of maritime and naval forces in the region. Overall, France's Indo-Pacific strategy is characterised by its military engagement and power projection capabilities, with an emphasis on maintaining a strong presence in the maritime domain to address regional challenges and assert its role as a resident regional power.

3.3 The security and military aspects as the guiding principles of the France-Japan partnership

The French-Japanese relationship initially centred on economic, technological, and cultural ties evolved by putting the defence and security aspect at the core since the 2010s. France and Japan intensified their collaboration. This point is illustrated firstly by their strategic dialogues and the first "2+2 meeting" in 2014, signalling an exceptional level of cooperation in political, security, and defence equipment matters. France's desire to play a bigger role in the Indo-Pacific coincided with Japan's desire to open up to international cooperation, and presence outside of Japan. The most significant illustration of this point is the increasing number of joint military exercises they take part in. It became an important part of their partnership, enhancing interoperability and building capacity. France's substantial naval power, overseas territories, and permanent naval presence in Djibouti and the UAE make it a valuable maritime partner for Japan. They both focus on maritime capacity-building activities and engage in numerous joint naval exercises, including quadrilateral drills with the US and UK, to strengthen maritime security cooperation. This point illustrates and confirms our first hypothesis considering that engaging in joint military exercises enhances France's position as a power in the Indo-Pacific. Military exercises are an accurate tool for power projection, a fact highlighted by the Ministry of the Armed Forces³²². It also contributes to the development of France's interoperability capacities, considered as a significant component of any power³²³. Finally, it also contributes to France's legitimacy in the region. Moreover, while France's role in Japan's arms exports remains limited, they also collaborate on defence innovation, space technology, intelligence

³²² Ministère des Armées (2019), *La France et la sécurité en IndoPacifique* [France and Security in the Indo-Pacific], Ministère des Armées.

³²³ Courmont, B. et al. (2004), *Quelle évolution de la notion de puissance et de ses modes d'action à l'horizon 2030, appliquée aux Etats-Unis, à l'Europe et à la Chine?*, Etude pour Délégation aux Affaires Stratégiques, p.19.

sharing, and combating piracy and illegal trafficking. They also aim to conclude a Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA) to reinforce interoperability and bilateral cooperation further. In conclusion, France and Japan have considerably strengthened their military partnership in response to the Indo-Pacific's changing dynamics. It confirms our first hypothesis considering Japan enhances France's power projection in the Indo-Pacific.

CHAPTER 4: The promotion of multilateralism and the evolution of France's Indo-Pacific strategy (3p)

4.1 The France-Japan partnership fostering multilateralism in the Indo-Pacific

The Franco-Japanese partnership places significant emphasis on multilateralism and cooperation, both as a means to achieve stability in the Indo-Pacific region and as an ultimate objective. Multilateralism, defined³²⁴ as cooperation between multiple international actors, particularly through international organizations (IOs), is regarded as a peaceful approach to conflict resolution and diplomacy. France's Indo-Pacific strategy, as outlined in official strategy documents, highlights the importance of multilateralism. It aims to strengthen regional cooperation, prevent conflicts, and provide platforms for diplomatic engagement to reduce tensions in a region marked by high tensions, notably between the US and China. France actively participates in regional security dialogues and cooperation forums in the Indo-Pacific, such as the Shangri-La Dialogue and various intergovernmental organisations such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC). France's engagement in these forums contributes to its growing influence and representation in the region. Japan also places a strong emphasis on cooperation and multilateralism in its foreign policy, aiming to contribute to peace, stability, and disaster risk reduction in the region. Japan is a member of numerous regional initiatives, including the ReCAAP, ASEAN Plus Three, and East Asia Summit, promoting dialogue and cooperation as essential means to address regional challenges. We underline that through these initiatives, Japan and France uphold the need to engage in multilateral platforms in the Indo-Pacific, a point supporting our hypothesis. Our hypothesis can be further confirmed by one of our interviewees. Indeed, SGDSN official affirmed that Japan was a facilitator for France to integrate multilateral platforms³²⁵. The Franco-Japanese partnership benefits both countries by aligning their interests in international organisations and forums, such as the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and the G7, where they advocate

³²⁴ Vaïsse, M. (2007). Une invention du xix^e siècle. In: Bertrand Badie éd., *Le multilatéralisme: Nouvelles formes de l'action internationale* (pp. 11-22). Paris: La Découverte

³²⁵ See interview 6

for shared values like the rule of law, human rights, security, and peacekeeping. Japan values France's diplomatic influence on issues like North Korea and China, and France sees Japan as a vital partner in the Indo-Pacific. Indeed, France truly needs others to be influential in the region and Japan is one way to achieve that. While not all interviewees unanimously agreed on the extent of the multilateral aspect in the partnership, it is clear that France and Japan are committed to cooperation and are actively involved in various multilateral initiatives in the Indo-Pacific and beyond. In summary, the Franco-Japanese partnership prioritises multilateralism and cooperation to achieve regional stability. Both countries actively engage in international forums and organizations to promote these principles, contributing to their influence and diplomatic effectiveness in the Indo-Pacific. While we have assessed that our hypothesis can be partially validated, our interviews indicate that the multilateralism aspect was however leaning more towards different aspects of the French strategy. This suggests a re-orientation of France's strategy and leads to a shift in the nature of the Japan-France partnership.

4.2 Evolution of the French strategy after AUKUS: from a *politique de puissance* to a *politique d'influence*

The French strategy in the Indo-Pacific, initiated in 2018, has had a strong focus on defence and military cooperation, with Australia being a central partner. The highlight of this partnership was Australia's agreement to purchase twelve submarines from French constructor Naval Group, valued at 56 billion euros, which would have entailed a 25-year collaboration. However, in September 2021, Australia abruptly withdrew from the contract without prior explanation, leading to a significant setback for France. This withdrawal coincided with the announcement of the AUKUS trilateral partnership between Australia, the US, and the UK, aimed at enhancing security and defence cooperation, particularly in addressing Indo-Pacific security challenges. AUKUS has been interpreted as a move to counter China's influence in the region and has left France feeling sidelined. The Australian decision represented a double failure for France. Firstly, it was a setback in the partnership with Australia, which was a key element of France's Indo-Pacific strategy. The loss of Australia as a strategic partner had practical implications for France's ability to protect its sovereign territories in the region. Secondly, it signalled a failure of the discourse that France had constructed for the Indo-Pacific region, centred around military presence and strategic partnerships. The shift towards AUKUS undermined France's position and its discourse lost credibility. In response, France shifted its strategy from one of diplomacy of power (*puissance*) focused on military presence, to a diplomacy of influence emphasising partnerships and multilateralism. This shift aligns with a broader emphasis on partnerships in French foreign policy and the European Union's (EU)

growing role in the Indo-Pacific. Indeed, France has turned to the EU for support in the Indo-Pacific and played a significant role in promoting the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy during its presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2022. This diversification of partnerships allows France to present a more credible and legitimate Indo-Pacific discourse considering the EU's economic and political weight but also as their position to be an actor that backs France's interests when they find common interests and dialogues. In summary, the Australian withdrawal and the emergence of AUKUS prompted France to reorient its Indo-Pacific strategy from a focus on military power to one of influence through partnerships and multilateralism, with the EU playing a crucial role in this shift.

4.3 Re-orientation and diversification of the French strategy and its impact on the France-Japan partnership

Following the creation of AUKUS, a notable transition occurred in France's Indo-Pacific strategy, impacting its partnership with Japan. France shifted from projecting a diplomacy of *puissance* (power) to one focused on influence. This shift aimed to diversify the nature of relationships, issues, and areas of cooperation action. This shift was first reflected in a deeper partnership with island states. France turned its attention to island states in the South Pacific, primarily due to their geographical proximity and the need to emphasise France's presence as a resident power in the Indo-Pacific. This diversification of partnerships involved a deeper engagement with its overseas territories, incorporating them into a more comprehensive and inclusive approach. France maintained a strong security and defence aspect in the region, signing bilateral agreements in defence cooperation and increasing the budget and deployment of armed forces in its overseas territories to reinforce their protection. Moreover, France's shift also revolved around a deeper incorporation of climate change and environmental issues into its strategy. France recognises and puts forward the significance of these challenges in the Indo-Pacific region. France's strategy highlights the importance of biodiversity, sustainable management, and climate action as pillars of its objectives. It is committed to fostering actions for biodiversity protection, ocean conservation, and climate change mitigation in the region. This shift allowed France to stand out from other regional partners, by focusing on climate change and biodiversity, which was perceived as an "innovative niche"³²⁶ in the Indo-Pacific strategy. Furthermore, France leveraged its close partnership with the EU to extend its influence

³²⁶ Regaud, N. (2021), *France's Indo-Pacific strategy and its overseas territories in the Indian and Pacific oceans*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, p. 17.

through means other than military power. The EU's involvement in the Indo-Pacific allowed France to present itself as a credible international actor and advocate for climate change issues. In addition, this shift has affected the Japan-France partnership. While security and defence remained key aspects, there was an increasing focus on joint initiatives related to environmental protection and the South Pacific. Japan also intensified its engagement with South Pacific nations, opening diplomatic representations and conducting official visits. Both France and Japan collaborated on development projects in the region, addressing climate change, sustainable transportation, and disaster resilience. This shift in priorities and areas of cooperation, focused on environmental issues, reflected the evolving dynamics of the Japan-France partnership in the Indo-Pacific. Overall, France's strategy in the Indo-Pacific underwent a transformation towards emphasising influence through diversified partnerships, including a strong focus on environmental challenges. This has impacted its cooperation with Japan in the region, leading to Japan assuming a less central role as a partner. We can conclude from this analysis that our second hypothesis was partially confirmed. While the role of Japan has modestly bolstered France's Indo-Pacific position through multilateralism diplomatic means, the shift in France's approach impacted the partnership. France emphasises a diplomacy of influence and engages with island states and environmental concerns. Japan's once-central role has diminished, revealing limitations and cooperation obstacles.

CHAPTER 5: The obstacles preventing a strengthened France-Japan partnership

5.1 The French “Third way” and the concept of *puissance d’équilibre*

The main obstacle in the France-Japan partnership lies in their differing positions regarding China. Japan has been cautious about China since as early as 2007, due to territorial disputes and China's assertive policies in its immediate proximity. Japan has adopted the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" (FOIP) policy, focusing on security and taking defensive measures against China's influence, particularly through alliances and diplomacy while maintaining substantial economic ties with China. France, on the other hand, acknowledges China's growing economic and political importance but advocates a "Third way" that rejects a Sino-American dichotomy in the region. France seeks through this policy to maintain constructive ties with China, focused on economic cooperation and open communication. This approach, while pragmatic, is perceived by its partners like Japan as ambiguous and potentially risking alignment with China. The "Third way" reflects France's desire to act as a balancing power (*puissance d’équilibre*) globally, neither aligning with one side nor excluding any party. France promotes this stance to

countries that are not firmly positioned within the China-American rivalry. However, it has been negatively perceived by some partners, such as Japan, who view it as a risk to their security interests and alignment with the US. France's declination to officially endorse Japan's FOIP strategy and its reluctance to use the FOIP terminology in its document highlight the differences in their positions. Despite using similar language on multilateralism and freedom of navigation, France's nuanced approach to China raises concerns among its partners. The partnership with Japan has some obstacles and this gap in vocabulary is an indicator of that aspect. While France officially downplays the China issue in its Indo-Pacific strategy, our interviews reveal that China remains a significant concern for the region. Indeed, we have noted that China was a recurring subject and mentioned several times. Experts and scholars argue that France's "Third way" lacks clarity and may isolate France strategically, especially in the absence of a credible alternative option. In conclusion, the divergence in France and Japan's approaches to China poses a significant obstacle to deeper cooperation between the two countries in the Indo-Pacific region. The "Third way" advocated by France is viewed with scepticism by its partners like Japan, who prioritise a more robust response to China's assertiveness. This disconnect in their China strategies complicates their partnership and raises questions about the credibility and effectiveness of France's approach in the region.

5.2 Internal and national limitations to France for a stronger partnership with Japan

The limited development of the Japan-France partnership in the Indo-Pacific region is influenced by several factors, primarily of a conceptual, geographical, and material nature. Conceptually, the partnership lacks a “substantial element”³²⁷ that can elevate it from a dialogue partnership to one based on cooperation. Our interview with an SGDSN official highlighted the need for a catalytic agent to stimulate deeper political commitment on both sides. *This suggests that while discussions and agreements have taken place, a transformative element is missing to propel the partnership to a higher level.* Geographically, the significant distance between France and Japan presents a practical challenge to building a closer relationship. The elongated geographical separation makes personal communication and close ties more challenging. Cultural differences between the two countries have also been noted, contributing to the complexity of their partnership. Materially, a lack of resources and military means on the French side hinders the partnership. France's limited military resources allocated to the Indo-Pacific, as pointed out in an information report by the Senate, do not align with the ambitions of its Indo-Pacific strategy. The need for modernising military equipment, particularly in the

³²⁷ See interview 6

maritime component, is crucial for effective engagement in the region and for its partnership with Japan. The lack of military means affects Japan's expectations of France's role in regional security. While there have been some improvements, they are considered insufficient. However, we note that another interviewee argued for diversifying resource allocation beyond the military domain. He emphasises the importance of economic, financial, and investment aspects. Internal structural issues within France's strategy also impede partnership effectiveness. In organisational terms, there is a call for a more efficient interministerial body to coordinate approaches and initiatives across different domains. It could enhance France's Indo-Pacific strategy and strengthen its partnerships, including with Japan. Finally, France's relationship with its overseas territories in the Indo-Pacific also plays a significant role. The complexity of governance in these territories, particularly regarding autonomy and debates about independence, makes it challenging to adopt a coherent French strategy. Establishing coherence is seen as vital for building stronger partnerships in the region. The overseas territories act as representatives of France in regional forums and contribute to its status as a resident power in the Indo-Pacific. In conclusion, the development of the Japan-France partnership in the Indo-Pacific faces obstacles related to conceptual, geographical, material, and structural factors. While there is a desire to enhance the partnership, addressing these challenges is crucial for an enhanced French strategy in the region.

5.3 Japan, on the contrary, moving towards a *politique de puissance* ?

The obstacle to a strengthened partnership between France and Japan in the Indo-Pacific stems from differences in their strategic objectives and approaches for the region, primarily related to military and defence matters. Japan is increasingly prioritising military and defence capabilities as a means of countering China's growing influence in the region. This shift is marked by Japan's increased defence budget, modernisation of armed forces, and its desire to enhance its deterrence capacity. This is illustrated by its future acquisition of Tomahawk missiles from the US. Thus, Japan has also intensified its defence cooperation with the US and participates in strategic dialogues like QUAD, aiming to strengthen security in the Indo-Pacific. Expert in Indo-Pacific actually underlined that while France shifted from a *politique de puissance* to a *politique d'influence*, Japan did the opposite³²⁸. Japan's growing focus on military partnerships aligns with countries that share similar military commitments and objectives, especially regarding China. This shift has led Japan to reevaluate its partnerships, and prioritising relationships with countries like Australia, which share its strategic stance. While France and

³²⁸ *Ibid*

Japan maintain their military partnership, Japan expects a deeper commitment. This divergence in objectives poses an obstacle to their partnership, especially as Japan evaluates its relationships in terms of shared military commitments and strategic alignment. On the other hand, our interviews also suggested that Japan is also enhancing its partnership with Europe, due to Europe's less aggressive stance against China. Japan seeks to avoid being caught in the crossfire of escalating tensions between the US and China, given Japan's economic dependence on China. Europe's softer approach to China makes it an attractive diplomatic partner for Japan to balance the more "hawkish"³²⁹ US stance. Overall, the partnership between France and Japan faces challenges due to differing objectives and approaches in the Indo-Pacific. While Japan is emphasising military and defence cooperation, France is pursuing a more diverse set of partnerships and diplomatic relations in the region. Japan's evaluation of its partnerships with various countries reflects its need to navigate the complex dynamics of the Indo-Pacific, particularly concerning China.

Conclusion

Overall, we have seen that we brought significant elements of responses to our research question. Our first hypothesis was confirmed, considering that Japan did strengthen France's power in the Indo-Pacific through their cooperation in the military and defence sphere, thereby bolstering France's capacity to project power in the region. Furthermore, our second hypothesis was partially confirmed. Japan did enhance France's position in the Indo-Pacific through their diplomatic ties but to a modest extent. What became evident is that France has redirected its attention within the region and decreased its dependence on Japan when looking to enhance its position as a power in the Indo-Pacific. Therefore, we can conclude to our research question that indeed, France leverages Japan to strengthen its position as a power in the Indo-Pacific, through their military partnership, but that it has recently reduced its reliance on Japan and diversified its strategy.

³²⁹ See interview 5

Appendix 12: Department of Political Science regulation document on plagiarism

Règlement sur le plagiat

Jury du Département de science politique

Adopté le 6 septembre 2016

Considérant que le plagiat est une faute inacceptable sur les plans juridique, éthique et intellectuel ;

Conscient que tolérer le plagiat porterait atteinte à l'ensemble des corps étudiants, scientifiques et académiques en minant la réputation de l'institution et en mettant en péril le maintien de certaines approches pédagogiques ;

Notant que les étudiants sont sensibilisés aux questions d'intégrité intellectuelle dès leur première année d'étude universitaire et que le site web des Bibliothèques de l'ULB indique clairement comment éviter le plagiat : (www.bib.ulb.ac.be/fr/aide/eviter-le-plagiat/index.html)

Rappelant que le plagiat ne se limite pas à l'emprunt d'un texte dans son intégralité sans emploi des guillemets ou sans mention de la référence bibliographique complète, mais se rapporte également à l'emprunt de données brutes, de texte traduit librement, ou d'idées paraphrasées sans que la référence complète ne soit clairement indiquée ;

Convenant qu'aucune justification, telle que des considérations médicales, l'absence d'antécédents disciplinaires ou le niveau d'étude, ne peut constituer un facteur atténuant.

Prenant note de l'article XI.165 du Code de droit économique, de l'article 66 du *Règlement général des études* du 3 juillet 2006, du *Règlement de discipline relatif aux étudiants* du 5 octobre 1970, et de l'article 54 du *Règlement facultaire relatif à l'organisation des examens* du 9 décembre 2004 ;

Le Jury du Département de science politique recommande formellement d'attribuer au minimum aux étudiants qui commettent une faute de plagiat avérée la note de 0 pour l'ensemble du cours en question, sans possibilité de reprise en seconde session. Cette recommandation ne présage pas de la sanction finalement proposée au jury par le Doyen en fonction des détails relatifs au cas de plagiat qui lui a été transmis.

Moi _____ Estelle CORNUT-SIMBOLON _____, confirme avoir pris connaissance de ce règlement et atteste sur l'honneur ne pas avoir plagié.

Fait à _____ Paris, France _____

Le _____ 21 Septembre 2023 _____

Signature de l'étudiant _____ Estelle CORNUT-SIMBOLON _____