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France's Partnerships *in* *the Indo-Pacific*

Foreword



Because France is proud to be an Indo-Pacific nation, where more than 1.5 million of our fellow citizens of overseas communities live and where we maintain a significant military presence, and because of the growing number of geopolitical, security, environmental and trade challenges in this vast region, President Macron has decided to make strengthening our partnerships in the region one of the priorities of our international action.

Because the Indo-Pacific has become the new global strategic centre of gravity, experiencing polarized tensions, 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.

Because this region is having to act urgently to address climate change, biodiversity erosion and the pandemic crisis, we are determined to take action, along with our Indo-Pacific partners, through concrete projects, which help build the resilience of our economies and health systems, reduce the risk of natural disasters and diversify our value chains.

Our vision of the Indo-Pacific is focused on an objective of stability and development. This vision must be informed by the need to be clear-sighted. Alongside our European partners, we are considering the regional situation without being exclusive, but also without being naive. Beyond any logic of blocks, we therefore intend to champion a third path in the Indo-Pacific, for responding to today's upheavals with all well-intentioned powers.

Our strategy for an inclusive Indo-Pacific region centres on four pillars, presented by President Macron in Sydney in May 2018.

- We would like to be more involved in the resolution of regional crises, in the securing of the main shipping routes and in counter-terrorism efforts, including terrorist financing, radicalization and organized crime.
- We would like to strengthen the ties that bind the countries of the region on the basis of converging visions and shared interests, including with Australia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea and Vietnam), while deepening our relationship with China, in the strategic framework that is now that of Europeans.
- We would like to intensify our mobilization in regional organizations, starting with ASEAN, which aims to remain at the heart of the construction of a multipolar Asia, and of which we are now a development partner, as well as in the Indian Ocean Rim Association, the Indian Ocean Community, the Pacific Community, and the Pacific Islands Forum.

- We would like to take action to promote global common goods, including the climate, the environment and biodiversity, but also health, education, digital technology and quality infrastructures, by building our efforts on a stronger engagement of the European Union. Our projects also focus on maritime safety, the environment, governance of oceans and protection of marine resources, academic cooperation and research, and scaled-up connectivity.

From our Indian Ocean and Pacific communities, the regional integration of which we would like to increase, to European cooperation instruments that we are working to activate with a view to the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the first half of 2022, to our companies, which have long recognized the growth potential of the markets in the region, and of course our network of diplomatic and consular posts, agencies, higher education institutions, and research institutes, we will therefore continue to mobilize all the levers we have for developing very extensive partnerships that we have established with the great countries and major organizations of the Indo-Pacific.

This presentation is testament to that: our ties in the Indo-Pacific are extensive and noteworthy because of the tangible progress that they have already accomplished. You can count on us to keep their momentum going and deepen them with even more determination. >>>

Jean-Yves Le Drian,

Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of the French Republic



Launched by the President of the French Republic during his Garden Island speech in Sydney in May 2018, France's strategy for the Indo-Pacific has become one of its priorities for international action. Three years on, the strategy's implementation is now producing tangible results and major progress in France's commitments in the region.



1. France's strategic partnerships in the Indo-Pacific

France's actions under its Indo-Pacific strategy build on the major partnerships it has developed with like-minded countries in the region and with ASEAN, based on a shared vision of challenges and solutions.

PARTNERSHIP WITH INDIA

Bilateral relations between France and India have developed considerably since the launch of the bilateral strategic partnership in 1998. The deepening of the major thrusts of the partnership (defence, nuclear, space, etc.) has been accompanied more recently by swift growth in bilateral cooperation on in the Indo-Pacific, particularly as regards maritime security (cooperation between the two navies and joint exercises), renewable energy (the International Solar Alliance, a Franco-Indian initiative co-chaired by the two countries) and marine pollution.

Illegal fishing, the blue economy and post-disaster humanitarian assistance are themes on which France and India are also going to take joint actions, particularly within Indian Ocean regional organizations including the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC). France joined IORA in December 2020, and India has had IOC observer status since March that year.

PARTNERSHIP WITH AUSTRALIA

Australia, which has close ties with the French Pacific communities of New Caledonia and French Polynesia, is an essential Indo-Pacific partner for France. The strategic partnership with Australia draws on very strong security and defence cooperation, structured by the choice of Naval Group in 2016 for the Australian future submarine programme. The armed forces of the two countries take part in many joint military exercises to foster interoperability, and bilateral national security dialogue was established in 2019.

Joint actions in the Pacific have been stepped up, with the fight against illegal fishing within the Pacific QUAD (with New Zealand and the United States), a strengthened response to natural disasters through the FRANZ Agreement (France, Australia and New Zealand), and environmental protection efforts, including under the Kiwa Initiative (see page 12). These activities foster the regional integration of French Pacific communities.

The partnership was recently expanded to the Indian Ocean, where France and Australia work closely together in regional forums such as IORA and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS).

FRANCE-INDIA-AUSTRALIA TRILATERAL DIALOGUE

The three countries have agreed to launch cooperation in this trilateral format, which initially met at the level of senior officials of Foreign Ministries (September 2020), thus cementing one of the initiatives announced by the President of the Republic in Sydney in May 2018. Three key areas have been identified for joint action:

- **Maritime security**, with enhanced sharing of information and enhanced cooperation for humanitarian assistance and disaster response;
- **Management of marine resources and the environment**, including the fight against illegal and unreported fishing, marine pollution and plastic waste, and joint projects within the [International Solar Alliance](#);
- **Deepening of cooperation within multilateral forums**, such as ahead of the Indian G20 Presidency in 2023.

PARTNERSHIP WITH JAPAN

The Franco-Japanese relationship is one of strong political dialogue and structured cooperation in a wide range of areas. The strength of the relationship is illustrated by the bilateral strategic partnership, which was established in 1995 and elevated to a special partnership in 2013.

Enhanced Franco-Japanese cooperation in the Indo-Pacific is the main objective of the bilateral roadmap adopted in June 2019 during President Macron's visit to Japan, which established an Indo-Pacific partnership in four key areas:

- Maritime security;
- Climate, environment and biodiversity;
- Quality infrastructure;
- Health.

This agenda has given rise to joint military exercises and joint projects between French and Japanese development agencies (AFD and JICA), aimed at upgrading infrastructure and fostering climate change adaptation. In South-East Asia, France and Japan are working together on natural disasters and on water and energy supplies.

The implementation of this partnership also builds on the Franco-Japanese comprehensive maritime dialogue, the first meeting of which took place in Nouméa on 29 September 2019, and on the memorandum of cooperation adopted by AFD and JICA in June that year. •

2. The partnership with ASEAN

Given ASEAN's essential role in the Indo-Pacific, intensifying relations with it and its members is a priority of the French strategy. The strategy has also led to the forging of strategic or enhanced partnerships with three ASEAN countries: Indonesia in 2011, Singapore in 2012 and Vietnam in 2013.

FRANCE, AN ASEAN DEVELOPMENT PARTNER

With its new Development Partner status, France is committed to deepening its relationship with ASEAN. Launched officially on 4 March 2021, this partnership will cover a number of fields, including that of global public goods such as health and the environment.

This new framework will highlight the role played by all French research institutes and agencies in South-East Asia, and particularly the AFD. During the period 2015-2020, the AFD implemented 170 projects in the region, with a total value of €3.7 billion. The partnership will also open up opportunities for French companies in the sectors concerned, particularly energy, health, transport, sustainable cities, water management and the digital economy. Lastly, at institutional level, the partnership will help involve France more closely in ASEAN framework initiatives, such as the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Network (ACRF), the Initiative for ASEAN

Integration (IAI) and the Smart Cities Network (ACSN).

France has decided to step up the resources deployed and its presence in the organization by posting an international technical expert to the ASEAN Secretariat. In order to facilitate the implementation of the development partnership, the expert's role will primarily involve identifying projects and contributing to their realization, promoting them with the Secretariat and Member States, and informing French networks of initiatives where France could provide added value.

The projects and actions undertaken illustrate the diversity of France's activities in the region. These include, in addition to the fields already mentioned, the blue economy, biodiversity, vaccine research, technical and vocational training, the green and circular economy, connectivity and sustainable infrastructure, support to SMEs, security (including cyber security and the fight against cross-border crime), disaster response, human rights, tourism and culture.

THE WORK OF THE AFD IN SOUTH-EAST ASIA

Beyond bilateral cooperation with each ASEAN country, the AFD also finances regional projects. One aims to protect biodiversity hotspots in Cambodia and Laos, while another concerns epidemiological surveillance linked to climate change (the second phase was launched in 2018 for the fight against

dengue fever and leptospirosis). A further dimension has been added to the latter, to support the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Another examples is the AFD's close collaboration with the Mekong River Commission, which includes a project to create a network for the collection and transmission of hydro-meteorological measurements in real time.

The AFD is working alongside other donors in the Energy Transition Partnership programme, launched during the 2017 One Planet Summit, which aims to speed up the energy transition in South-East Asia by fostering the development of sustainable infrastructure and renewable energy sources in the region.

The AFD is also considering financing a project to improve air quality in cities and provinces of several South-East Asian countries, with a dimension focused on advocacy at ASEAN for air quality issues to be addressed in public policies at regional level.

Lastly, the AFD joined the ASEAN Catalytic Green Finance Facility (ACGF) when it was launched a year ago, an initiative by ASEAN and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) aimed at generating more than a billion dollars of investment in green infrastructure in South-East Asia.

PRIORITY TO HEALTH

Health is a priority in France's actions in South-East Asia, where it has centres of excellence in research and training concerning emerging and re-emerging

diseases, including the Pasteur Institute. A project, under the Solidarity Fund for Innovative Projects (FSPI) which is dedicated to actions with a swift benefit for local people, is being set up in the region to tackle such diseases. It applies the One Health approach, addressing human, animal and environmental health in a coordinated, integrated manner. This initiative should help understand and prevent the development of infectious diseases so as to better inform political leaders and strengthen their ability to prevent and respond to future public health crises.

This FSPI project, under the development partnership with ASEAN, will concern all regional countries. •

3. Strengthening European Union engagement in the Indo-Pacific

Ongoing transformations in the region are directly affecting the prosperity and security of EU countries and strategic interests. The EU has therefore decided to set down its own approach to the Indo-Pacific.

A EUROPEAN STRATEGY FOR THE INDO-PACIFIC

The EU is already very active in the region, particularly when it comes to trade and investment, development and humanitarian assistance, and promotion of norms. Its engagement is perceived positively, and its major partners in the region – India, Japan, Australia, ASEAN and also the United States – expect it to engage more substantially in order to contribute to peace and stability and the promotion of a multilateralism based on law.

At the instigation of France and other Member States, including Germany and the Netherlands (which adopted in 2020, on a national level, broad policy lines for the Indo-Pacific), discussions began within the EU with a view to adopting an ambitious European strategy for the Indo-Pacific, mobilizing all European instruments. These discussions outlined an inclusive European strategy, the priorities of which could include multilateralism, global issues (climate, sustainable development, ocean governance, health), security, trade, connectivity, research and innovation. This strategy could be adopted by the end of the year.

The Indo-Pacific will also be a priority of the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the first half of 2022.

THE EU STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP WITH ASEAN

On 1 December 2020, the EU and ASEAN, which will celebrate the 45th anniversary of their bilateral relations in 2022, elevated their relationship to the level of a strategic partnership.

The strategic partnership sets out a common commitment to hold regular summits at the level of leaders. Based on shared values and principles – compliance with international law, promotion of multilateralism and strengthening of cooperation between the two parties – it identifies five major priorities:

- **Health cooperation**, including on vaccination (the EU has announced a package of €800 million for ASEAN countries);
- **Promotion of rules-based trade** and a special focus on sustainable development;
- **Promotion of sustainable, rules-based connectivity** (adoption of the joint declaration on connectivity at the 23rd ministerial meeting of December 2020);
- **Promotion of an effective multilateralism** and a rules-based international order;
- **Security**, especially on non-traditional issues (maritime security, cyber security, counter-terrorism). •

4. France's actions in the Pacific

France, the only EU Member State with territories in the Pacific, has strengthened its commitment alongside Oceanian actors and partners to respond to challenges in this region. The Pacific is an essential component of cooperation developed with Australia and New Zealand. The territories of New Caledonia and French Polynesia are full members of the Pacific Island Forum, the main international organization of the Pacific, and Wallis and Futuna are associate members. The three communities participate alongside the France in other regional organizations, including the Pacific Community (SPC) and the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP).

EXPANSION OF THE AFD MANDATE

The mandate for intervention of the AFD in the Pacific was expanded for a first time in 2018 to include regional projects in the sector of adaptation to climate change and biodiversity. A new change to the mandate was decided in March 2021 to include climate mitigation in loans and/or grants. Within the framework of its new mandate, the AFD can now conduct or participate in bilateral projects, not just regional ones.

It will thus be able to significantly increase its actions in the region and better meet development needs. It could cooperate more closely with other bilateral donors, such as Australia, Japan, New Zealand or India, and multilateral donors, such as the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank and the European Union.

THE KIWA INITIATIVE

Kiwa is a multi-donor initiative, announced at the One Planet Summit of December 2017 and officially launched in February 2020. With an envelope of €35 million to be disbursed over five years, it is being implemented by the AFD and covers 19 island States and territories of the Pacific that are particularly vulnerable to climate change. The Kiwa Initiative rallies, five international donors (Australia, Canada, France, New Zealand and the European Union), two regional organizations (SPC, SPREP), an international organization (IUCN), as well as representatives of island States and territories of the Pacific around a common objective: protection of biodiversity and climate change adaptation using nature-based solutions in Oceania. The initiative also makes it possible for the first time in the region to support joint solutions implemented in French territories and island States of the Pacific.

THE FRANZ MECHANISM

France deploys military forces in the Pacific from New Caledonia and French Polynesia with the Armed Forces of New Caledonia (FANC) and the Armed Forces in French Polynesia (FAPF). In close coordination with Australia and New Zealand, the French forces are mobilized, particularly to address natural disasters that occur in the region, using the FRANZ mechanism.

This mechanism has proved its worth as an effective tool at a time when disasters are growing in number and intensity due to climate change, hitting island States of the Pacific the hardest. It has been activated many times since its creation, most recently in April 2020 after massive destruction caused by Cyclone Harold in Vanuatu and Fiji. France delivered 25 tons in humanitarian assistance in several operations carried out in record time and despite the difficulties caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and closed borders.

THE PACIFIC COMMUNITY

On 28 January 2021, France and the Pacific Community (SPC) concluded a cooperation partnership, signed by the Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs and the Director-General of the SPC. France was a founding member of the SPC, the largest intergovernmental technical and scientific organization of the Pacific. It has 26 members, including three French territorial communities which benefit from SPC support programmes, and is based in Nouméa. Its bilingual nature fosters French-language outreach, as well as

the regional integration of New Caledonia in Oceania.

This new partnership framework will scale up joint and multilateral action in the four priority areas of public health, climate change, oceans and sustainable management of natural resources, and will contribute to the promotion of common values including gender equality. It benefits from the mobilization of French expertise in the Pacific (bodies based in French territories, including the Institut Pasteur and the Institut Louis Malardé, the French Research Institute for Development (IRD), the French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development (CIRAD), the New Caledonian Agronomic Institute (IAC), and the Centre for Island Research and Environmental Observatory (CRIOBE).

The SPC is often solicited to help in the delivery of assistance to island States of the Pacific in the fight against COVID-19, with an additional €2 million grant from the AFD to the Pacific Public Health Surveillance Network (PPHSN) at the start of the health crisis. •

5. France's action in the Indian Ocean

The Indian Ocean is a growing focus of the French strategy for the Indo-Pacific, as President Macron stressed during his visit to La Réunion in October 2019 (see the "Choose La Réunion" speech). Two French territories, La Réunion and Mayotte (with one million inhabitants), are located in the region, in which France has also developed a diversified economic footprint. Deployments by the French Navy are organized there regularly.

THE INDIAN OCEAN COMMISSION (IOC)

The IOC is the only political organization of the southeast Indian Ocean and the only African organization of which France is a member. It has a great deal of political potential in terms of the development of regional actions and regional integration of overseas territories and communities. The IOC has proven to be resilient in the face of the pandemic, sticking to its institutional timetable and providing Member States assistance funded by the AFD. The Secretary-General, the French national Velayoudom Marimoutou, is responsible for implementing the reform adopted in March 2020, which aims to strengthen the IOC's role. The admission of India and Japan as observer members in 2020 should foster enhanced cooperation with these two partners.

The 2021-2022 French Presidency of the IOC comes at a good time for safeguarding regional cooperation in the Indian Ocean after a series of breaks due to the pandemic. The aim of the French Presidency is to revitalize regional cooperation, beyond its previous level, under the theme of "A Post-COVID Indian Ocean". This revitalization will take the form of combined environmental and economic action in the blue economy approach, which also addresses climate and health challenges. Finally, it will be carried out in a favourable context for France in the Indian Ocean: becoming a member of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and holding the chair of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) in 2021.

INDIAN OCEAN RIM ASSOCIATION (IORA)

France joined IORA in 2020. The Association brings together rim countries of the Indian Ocean, from South Africa to Australia, around a light structure and tangible projects, particularly focused on the environment and sustainable development. Its working groups target specific sectors such as the blue economy. La Réunion could host a session of this group, when circumstances so permit, to make the most of French expertise on biodiversity and its protection. France also works with other Member States to develop within the framework of IORA a regional project to tackle illegal fishing.

The IOC and IORA share values and objectives, and France will seek, during its

presidency of the IOC and as a member of the IORA, to promote dialogue between their secretariats and exchanges of expertise. The IOC's action can inspire the work of IORA, which also needs to rise to the challenge of cooperation in the Indian Ocean region.

Several initiatives go beyond the IOC and could interest IORA at a later date: the mobility programme, especially university exchanges, with an "Indian Ocean Erasmus" concept proposed by President Macron; the enlarged network of Indian Ocean business leaders which was another of his proposals; and the creation of a regional major disaster risk prevention system. Initially, they will include IOC and African coast countries. India could also join these initiatives. •


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