

# FRANCE INGRESS IN INDO-PACIFIC REGION: OPTIONS FOR PAKISTAN

Zafar Nawaz Jaspal\*  
Qamar Abbas Cheema\*\*

## ABSTRACT

*The Indo-Pacific region has emerged as a pivot for a strategic competition among the Great Powers since the dawn of twenty-first century. The shift in American ideational leadership and rise of China provided a strategic space for France which is a mid-size global power in Europe and global politics. France enjoys a significant position in the Indo-Pacific due to its colonial past and overseas territories in Indian and Pacific Ocean. Its Indo-Pacific strategy aimed to maximize its role in the region when United States is crafting new institutional architecture while bypassing its European partners. French involvement in the region draws attention to the fact that mini-lateralism is not a solution for the complex problems of the region. Besides, Pakistan being an Indian Ocean littoral state, cannot ignore the geo-economic and geopolitical developments in the region. That is why Pakistan is aspiring to shift from geo strategy to geo-economics as the region offers colossal opportunities to promote Blue Economy in Pakistan.*

**Keywords:** *Indo Pacific strategy, Mini-lateralism, Pivot, Territories, Sea-lanes*

---

\*Dr. Zafar Nawaz Jaspal is Professor at the School of Politics and International Relations, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad.

\*\*Mr. Qamar Abbas Cheema is a Faculty Member at Department of International Relations National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad

## INTRODUCTION

The transformation and realignment in the global strategic environment has signified the importance of Indo-Pacific in great powers' strategic calculations. The region is equally essential for the economic prosperity of the nations. That is why it is attractive for the littoral states of the Indian Ocean, including Pakistan. Besides, the Americans, Chinese, the French, and Indians have been endeavouring to maintain their decisive role in the region. They have enhanced their strategic investments in this region. Therefore, the web of institutions is being shaped, alliances are being framed, and regional countries have the anxiety to see their growing role. The United States has encouraged India to constitute and implement its Indo-Pacific strategy to counterweigh Chinese increasing influence in the region.

France's foreign and strategic policy reveals that Paris considers the Indo-Pacific region vital for its global geo-economic and geopolitical pursuits. Over 90 percent of France's maritime exclusive economic zone (EEZ) is in the Indian and Pacific Oceans.<sup>1</sup> Its colonial past and current overseas territories in the region make it an important factor in the 21<sup>st</sup> century's regional security architecture in the Indo-Pacific. Moreover, it charted an independent course on defence, space, nuclear, and strategic ties with India. Convergence of strategic interests enables India to use the French ports to monitor China's activities. France Indo-Pacific strategy aimed to maximize its role in the region.<sup>2</sup> It bypassed its transatlantic commitment for its influence in the region. It ignores American created institutional architecture and develops its regional alliance, making many countries in the region uncomfortable.

Nevertheless, an undeclared competition is visible in the region. French involvement in the region draws attention to the fact that the mini-lateral arrangement is not a solution for Indo-Pacific's complex problems.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> John Pollock, India, and France: From Strategic Partners to a Strategic Alliance, *South Asian Voices*, October 19, 2020, <https://southasianvoices.org/india-and-france-from-strategic-partners-to-a-strategic-alliance/>

<sup>2</sup> Fareed Zakaria, *The Post American World* (USA: W W Norton & Company, 2011), 115.

<sup>3</sup> According to Akshay De Alwis, "Minilateralism can be viewed as a "hybrid" form of security alignment, bringing to a given crisis more like-minded players and material resources than those normally generated by a bilateral alliance, but offering more flexibility or spontaneity than less nimble multilateral groupings that must identify

French explanation of mini-lateralism is that United States and China must not craft a disaggregated, bottom up, regional and state centric order in Indo-Pacific.<sup>4</sup> French share their views that if United States is making new institutional apparatus in Indo-Pacific then it should be like trans-Atlantic alliance during Cold War.

European powers, particularly France find themselves isolated in the Indo-Pacific region in the presence of Quadrilateral security Dialogue (QUAD) and Trilateral security pact among Australia, United Kingdom and United States of America (AUKUS). Meanwhile China is aiming for common security and comprehensive framework by making Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and encouraging others to join with terms and conditions which may not be comfortable for all. France believes such move falls in realm of mini-lateralism leaving minimum place for other players to play role in shaping emerging world order.<sup>5</sup>

Stability in the Indian Ocean Region is the foremost priority of Pakistan. Therefore, it cannot overlook the region's geopolitical and geo-economic developments. The great powers' Indo-Pacific strategies and sustained strategic cooperation between Paris and New Delhi are important areas of investigation for the Pakistani policymakers. Indeed, Pakistan have opportunities in the Indo-Pacific region if they makes unconventional political and security decisions. Pakistan's approach towards West Asia, Central Asia, and South Asia has not brought the desired results because of the heavy regional securitization and continuous conflicts.

Pakistan could use Blue Economy as a tool to engage in the Indo-Pacific region to align its interests in this substantial economic market. This study attempts to answer three interlinked questions: What is the strategic significance of the Indo-Pacific region in contemporary global politics? Why is France struggling to maintain its role in the region? What options Pakistan has in region and how the region values Pakistan's Blue Economy?

---

continued rationales for their existence once that particular crisis is defused or modified.” Minilateral groups are smaller in size.

<sup>4</sup>Akshay De Alwis, “ A New Age of Minilateralism: Potential Solutions for the South China Sea Conundrum,” *Diplomatic Courier*, June 7, 2016, <https://www.diplomaticcourier.com/posts/new-age-minilateralism-potential-solutions-south-china-sea-conundrum>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

## **INDO-PACIFIC'S GEOPOLITICAL DYNAMICS**

Indo-Pacific as "geopolitical nomenclature" has given a geographic and strategic reference to the region by replacing Asia-Pacific, which remained a dominant construct for long. For more than ten years, this term is being coined in official documents, including national security strategies and defence white papers. Academics, think tanks, and media are using this term for referring to the Indian and Pacific oceans as one contiguous area. United States, China, India, Japan, France, Australia, and Southeast Asian states see Indo-Pacific as an arena of increasing rivalry. For almost two decades, states have realized that geopolitical and geo-economic competition has started among states for dominance in the region and trade routes. This region is primarily seen from the lens of Sino-US strategic competition, but France considers itself an important factor in regional politics because of its overseas territories in Indo-Pacific.

The United States calls this region an important area for the world's future. President Barack Obama and Donald Trump have invested politically and strategically in the region, and President Joe Biden will keep that momentum as he believes in multilateralism.<sup>6</sup> President Trump called for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP), in his speech (Hanoi) in November 2017, at Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit. Whereas, President Obama had also worked for Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor (IPEC) and declared his Pivot to Asia policy. FOIP and IPEC received serious attention in the U.S. declassified foreign and strategic policy documents.<sup>7</sup>

The Indian foreign policy revolved around non-alignment and strategic autonomy, but with rising global competitions in Indo-Pacific region, it has been focusing on alliance formation. It realized that a shift is needed from Euro-Atlantic to Indo-Pacific and for this purpose India developed its "Act East" policy. Indian Maritime security strategy of 2015 spoke about changes in the region and suggested that the government

---

<sup>6</sup> Holly Ellayatt, "A Return to Multilateralism under Joe Biden is Extremely Promising," *CNBC*, december 24, 2020, <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/12/14/bidens-return-to-multilateralism-is-extremely-promising-oecd-says.html>

<sup>7</sup> "Indo-Pacific Strategy Report Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region" (Washington DC: Department of Defense, June 1, 2019), <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jul/01/2002152311/-1/-1/..>

should adopt a more robust foreign policy for Indo-Pacific.<sup>8</sup> The Indian foreign office and analysts have started using Indo-Pacific since the United States has renamed its Pacific Command to Indo-Pacific Command. Besides, India swapped its 'Look East' policy with the "Act East" policy. So it moved from South East Asia to Indo-Pacific with a changing regional strategic framework.

France publicized its Indo-Pacific strategy in 2018, which reveals Paris active ingress in both traditional and non-traditional security affairs of the region.<sup>9</sup> It underscored that French overseas territories in the Indian and Pacific oceans should be considered as active contact points by regional states. Following France, in 2020, Germany also released its Indo-Pacific strategy. France has reiterated its position to global partners for moving away from unilateralism and mini-lateralism and demanded a playing field for global players in Indo-Pacific.<sup>10</sup> France believes it is part of the region for centuries, and in future, it will promote connectivity between Africa and Asia. France supports the Western interpretation of the term Indo-Pacific starting from the East coast of Africa to the West coast of America.

China's rise and its influence in their backyard forced the regional contenders to constrain it from geopolitics and geo-economics. In 2013, China introduced a Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which contains six corridors of economic prosperity in the region. BRI aimed at creating a network of transport, aviation, port, and energy-related infrastructure projects across nations so that the Chinese supply chain could have a smooth reach. China has been engaging the Indo-Pacific nations politically, diplomatically, and economically.

## PIVOT TO INDO PACIFIC

In 2011, the Obama Administration brought up a major strategic shift in global politics and drafted its strategy for Asia-Pacific. Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton wrote an article in Foreign Policy and called it America's Pacific Century. This strategy's central theme was that

---

<sup>8</sup> "Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy" (New Delhi: Indian Ministry of Defense, October 10, 2015), <https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/sites/default/files/>.

<sup>9</sup> "Advancing a Shared Vision" (Washington DC: Department of State, November 4, 2019), <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Free-and-Open-Indo-Pacific-4Nov2019.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

the United States is a global power, and the future of American power will be decided in Asia. Obama administration was closing down its war in Iraq, to whom they called a war of choice. Whereas, war in Afghanistan which is known as the war of necessity, took much time to conclude. President Trump signed a deal with the Taliban in Doha, Qatar, in February 2020, followed by Intra Afghan Dialogue.<sup>11</sup> This shift in policy showed that America was neutralizing its engagement in Asia to counter the economic influence of China.

The Indo-Pacific region has many critical engines for the global economy as more than 60% of the world population resides and one-third of global trade passes through it.<sup>12</sup> This region is one of the largest greenhouse gas emitters, making its case for industrial growth. There are environmental, territorial, economic, and political challenges in this region with opportunities in this region.

The Asia-Pacific policy by Obama made it clear that the USA's future will not be decided in the mountains of Afghanistan and the streets of Iraq. It will be decided in the Asia-Pacific, and the USA will be playing a pivotal role in this region. There was an understanding in the Asia Pacific that the United States is preoccupied with other places. The Obama administration dispelled this impression and choreographed a strategy that, in the previous decade, USA allocated considerable resources to threats: Iraq and Afghanistan. In the coming decades, USA needs to be active by all means, systemically engage and spend its resources in the region and make it a pivot for future actions in the region.<sup>13</sup> The United States built a comprehensive and institutionalized transatlantic network after WWII, which has paid the USA many times in history. Similarly, the USA needs to have strategic investments in the Asia Pacific to be pacific power and called Asia a pivot for the future so that American statecraft could have substantial diplomatic, economic and strategic investments. Hillary Clinton said that the USA should have 'Forward Deployed Diplomacy', which means dispatching all marine and land resources in the region because the USA is an Atlantic and Pacific power.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> Kurt M Campbell, *The Pivot: The Future of American Statecraft in Asia* (New York: Twelve, 2016), 30.

<sup>14</sup> Hillary Clinton, "America's Pacific Century," *Foreign Policy*, October 11, 2011, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/10/11/americas-pacific-century/>

In the twenty-first century, strategic rebalancing and repositioning make great powers curious and insecure in uncharted regions like Indo-Pacific. France has come up with its Indo-Pacific strategy when the United States moves back from its ideational leadership under President Trump, and the United Kingdom has left the European Union (E.U.). Meanwhile, China is assertive power in Indo-Pacific Region, and world powers believe states in their backyard need to be engaged before China makes its footprints properly. France and the United States both believe that unilateralism and hegemony are not acceptable and multilateralism must be preferred political engagement in the contemporary global system.<sup>15</sup>

France wants to emerge as a European and global player in the emerging strategic environment. In 2018, French President Emmanuel Macron announced his Indo-Pacific strategy at Garden Island in Australia.<sup>16</sup> While declaring France, India, and Australia the central actors' region, he spelled out four pillars of his Indo-Pacific strategy that could establish the foundation of interdependency among all nations. The first is freedom of maritime and air navigation, the second is safety and security, the third is state, freedom of sovereignty, and the fourth is protecting the environment against predation.<sup>17</sup> He also expressed a desire to improve cooperation with other states, including Europeans. However, why such a policy has not come from Europe and from a transatlantic platform where institutional apparatus is already there, and all states work multilaterally. This raises questions that what motivates France to take such steps. French President said he believes in engaging more regional partners than giving a clear view of its policy of bypassing its allies.<sup>18</sup>

### FRANCE'S STRATEGIC ORIENTATION

According to Thomas Hobbes, states struggle to enhance and maximize their power, and there is a war of all against all.<sup>19</sup> France thinks the same way as being former colonial power in the past; it got the

<sup>15</sup> Richard Lough and Baptiste Vey, "European Leaders Press for Fairer Trade Relationship with China," *Reuters*, March 26, 2019, sec. World News, <https://www.reuters.com/article>.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> "Macron Wants Strategic Paris-Delhi-Canberra Axis amid Pacific Tension," *Reuters*, March 5, 2018, sec. World News.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

<sup>19</sup> Scott Burchill, *Theories of International Relations*, First (USA: St. Martin Press New York, 1996), 35.

opportunity to regain its lost global affairs status. Since the French perspective is that transatlantic powers are rolling back from their global role, France wants to be Indo Pacific power because of its overseas territories; eleven in the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

So France and the USA, being partners in transatlantic relations, struggle for power and ignore their alliance. Both states are promoting their national interest to acquire more power. Simultaneously, the American policy of Asia Pacific and its strategic reversal from ideational politics urged France to develop its own Indo-Pacific strategy. In the global system's anarchical nature both states have sufficient military capability to protect and promote their interests in Indo-Pacific.<sup>20</sup> Although both states have multiple and competing interests in the region, they focused on erecting security architecture in the region for acquiring state power and prestige. They could win the confidence and interest of regional states for partnerships and sustainable cooperation in the coming years.

### **FRENCH VISION OF INDO-PACIFIC**

France being a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and one of the founding members of the European Union (E.U.) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has a strategic role to play in the contemporary global environment. France being a European power has the advantage of having overseas territories and populations in the Pacific and Indian Oceans, giving it a unique place in that part of the world. These territories are active connecting points. That is why France calls itself as Indo-Pacific nation because of its overseas territories, which expand from the African coastline to America's Western shores.<sup>21</sup>

Indo-Pacific region has seen growing popularity for a decade as a geographical and strategic construct in national security strategies and foreign policies of the United States, India, France, and many Southeast Asian states. Previously, Asia-Pacific as geopolitical nomenclature was more dominant, but a new term is Indo-Pacific.<sup>22</sup> Indo-Pacific as nomenclature is linked with Sino-US rivalry and competition, and France also uses this in its official papers and strategic communication.

---

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

<sup>22</sup> Heiduk and Wacker, "From Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific Significance, Implementation and Challenges," *Schematic Scholar* 4(2020): 34-67, doi:10.18449/2020RP09.



France has expanded this region more than the USA and gives this part of the world a different territorial definition. French overseas territories in the Indian Ocean are the glorious Islands, Tomalin, Scattered Islands, Reunion, Crozet Islands, Djibouti Islands, Kerguelen Islands, Amsterdam and Saint-Paul Islands. In contrast, French overseas territories in the Pacific Ocean are New Caledonia, French Polynesia, Clipperton, and Wallis and Futuna.

France makes the case that it is seen as a mid-size regional power because of being in Europe, however, it is a global power. On June 1, 2019, French Minister of Armed Forces Florence Parly said at the 18<sup>th</sup> Asia Security Summit that France is part of the Indo-Pacific region for freedom of navigation and a rules-based order. This perception should change because France has 465,422 sq km of territory in Indo-Pacific and 9 million sq km of Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).<sup>23</sup> This EEZ is the world's second-largest economic zone and gives France a position to accelerate its economic activities. There are around 1.6 million French citizens who live and work in overseas departments and French overseas territories.

Meanwhile, 200,000 French nationals live in states of the Indo-Pacific region, so there is France's active participation in the region. Florence Parly stated five main priorities for the Indo Pacific region to protect its nationals, territories, sovereign interests, and EEZ. French sovereignty will be of paramount value. Be it in the shape of organized crime or terrorism, any sort of threat will be dealt with by five military commands, three sovereign bases, and 7000 military men.

French overseas territories are the most important strategic consideration of France for enhancing its role in the region. Overseas territories were not participating in regional policies, but now those territories will participate because of particular constitutional provisions. According to Articles 73 and 74 of the Constitution of the French Republic, Overseas territories can adjust their administrative issues according to local conditions.<sup>24</sup> Now France desires the overseas territory to work on principles of decentralization as they should have the

<sup>23</sup> Florence Parley, "18th Asia Security Summit the IISS Shangri-La Dialogue," *International Institute of Strategic Studies*, January 6, 2019, <https://www.iiss.org/events/shangri-la-dialogue/shangri-la-dialogue-2019>.

<sup>24</sup> "Constitution of Republic of France" (Constitutional Council, April 1, 1958), <https://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/en/com>.

autonomy to decide what is in the territory's interest. French territories are not welcomed in the region because regional powers believe that engaging these territories is to invite France into the region, which does not suit their interest.

So, France decided in 2019 through special laws that French territories must accept. All territories will join regional and international organizations through new legislation, and France will not micromanage them from Europe. Although this is not possible because French territories operate under international law and new guidelines for their engagement in the region are coming from Paris, they have full autonomy. However, there is more decentralization for power for enhanced influence in the region.

French overseas territories are considered remote and challenging by the regional partners of France. France says that its decentralization strategy to its overseas territories is not about countering China. However, France wants acceptance and wants to break mini-lateralism and unilateralism in Indo-Pacific. All regional states have their control and do not let other actors influence and share resources and power.<sup>25</sup>

Since the United States is moving away from ideational leadership and entering into a transnational partnership and the United Kingdom leaving the European Union.<sup>26</sup> The U.S. has moved out of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCOPA) and Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and exited from the Paris Climate Agreement. U.S. President Donald Trump came out of the agreement by claiming that this accord is supposed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This will effect American job growth, hinder manufacturing, and bring a decline in coal, mining, cement, and steel and natural gas industries.<sup>27</sup> However, President Joe Biden has reiterated this action by attending the recent COP26 summit. The American strategic retreat is a chance for France to move forward with its old colonial ambitions with its assets in the region. Strategic retreat does not mean moving military assets out of the region but

---

<sup>25</sup> Donald Johnston, "Of Multilateralism And Future To Europe Recalibration," *Modern Diplomacy*, n.d.

<sup>26</sup> Boris Toucas, "Understanding the Implications of France's Strategic Review on Defense and National Security" (Center for Strategic and International Studies, October 19, 2017), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/>.

<sup>27</sup> Rebecca Hersher, "U.S. Formally Begins To Leave The Paris Climate Agreement," *NPR*, April 11, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/11/04/773474657/>.

backtracking from ideational leadership. France's population is around 67 million people, and France has the means, and it wants to be balancing power in the region through French territories.

Since France wants to increase its visibility in the region and this identity needs to be recognized, a good cooperation network will be reinforced. Like other powers, France will not engage in arms sales in the region and will not go for an arms race and discourage armament. France will build a web of political engagement in the region between its overseas territories, France and local partners. France called it triangular relations where overseas territories are interested in such a role with the centre's help. Although France calls Australia, Japan, and India a regional partner for this triangular relation, all countries have their own bilateral and multilateral relations with US and China, and will hesitate to form such an institutional formation.<sup>28</sup>

Meanwhile, Quadrilateral Security Dialogue already exists, where USA, Australia, Japan, and India are already showing their diplomatic and military arrangements to counter the Chinese growing economic and military power. So how does France have an institutional framework with these countries in the region in the presence of earlier arrangements of coalition partners raise many questions that need to be answered. The French policy makers seem cognizant that France is thousands of kilometres away from this region, and there is no revolutionary plan but a slow pace project. French President Emmanuel Macron has proposed to all these countries that cooperation is not just a short term strategy but a long term plan for the region.

The second priority for France in the region is to contribute in regional stability through security and military cooperation. France has natural partners like India and Australia and other partners in the region, including Malaysia.<sup>29</sup> However, France encourages security architecture in a region where ASEAN will have a central position. France will work closely with ASEAN in different formations and structures.

Although France maintains its position that it will discourage arms sales in the region for making inroads in the region, but at the same time, it wants strategic stability, which needs military cooperation and military

---

<sup>28</sup> Lt Gen Thierry Marchand, "France and Indopacific Security and Defence Cooperation" (Lecture, Paris, France, June 3, 2020).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

build-up. For long China has tried to give regional states a confidence that it does not want any military competition and wants economic shared goals. How regional states, mainly ASEAN, would allow France to have security architecture when for long they did not trust China's economic engagement. China does have disputes with regional states, particularly in the South China Sea. Meanwhile, a necessary inquiry which needs an answer is that in new Indo-Pacific strategy France does not represent the EU or Transatlantic alliance. Initially, it will have to face trust issues as an individual player.

In 2017, France did a strategic review and explored the evolution of rapid and intense threats and concluded the return of rivalry and power assertiveness. This assessment also concluded that rule of law and multilateralism is getting weak, and with these challenges, there is a rise of unconventional challenges.<sup>30</sup> Looking at these developments and its Indo-Pacific strategy, France seems struggling to construct regional security architecture. For this, France is trying to work with ASEAN Defence Minister Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus), which comprises of ten ASEAN countries and Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, Russia, South Korea, and the United States. Like other extra-regional powers, France would like to be part of ADMM-Plus as this would further give France ingress in the regional mechanism. There are other multilateral forums where France is yet to be a partner or has its existence, but since the E.U. is already a member on many of these forums and has a separate identity. Therefore, raising new security architecture will be a challenging task.

Currently, France is also not among established forums other than ADMM-Plus. This is especially true in ASEAN-centred Dialogues such as East Asia Summit (EAS), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). Only the EU as a group is a member of these institutional frameworks. France has been invited to track one dialogue such as Shangri-La Dialogue, an inter-governmental security forum held annually and sponsored by the International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, where almost 28 Asia Pacific States participate. Another such forum is the Tokyo defence forum, which is held annually and contributes to Asia Pacific stability, and France is invited there to participate.

---

<sup>30</sup> “Defense and National Security Strategy Review 2017” (Permanent Representation of France to the Conference on Disarmament, 2017), <https://cd-geneve.delegfrance.org/Strategic-review>.

France adopted a policy to engage ASEAN countries in the South China Sea where large-scale land reclamation activities are happening, and massive militarization is going in contested archipelagos. This is an essential subject for ASEAN, and other traditional security threats like transnational terrorist groups including the Islamic State (I.S.) pose a threat to the region. France can play a significant role as being a permanent member of the Security Council and E.U. by participating in bilateral, trilateral, and multilateral forums for regional stability.

The third area of priority is preserving free and open access to maritime lines of communication. France is present in the Indian Ocean for four centuries and in the Pacific Ocean for two centuries.<sup>31</sup> France wants autonomy as per the United Nations' principles and believes in principles of freedom of movement and dialogue. France sails in the South China Sea for more than twice a year, despite objections and dubious manoeuvres to uphold international law principles.<sup>32</sup> President Emmanuel Macron when spoke about four pillars for French Indo Pacific policy in Australia, one of those was maritime security. For new multilateral solutions, this region will be a laboratory, and the protection of maritime zones will be necessary as this will give visibility to France. The protection of maritime zones will integrate French territories in the region and play a bridge between the Indo-Pacific and Europe. France's five-year strategy for overseas territories and Overseas Blue Book published in 2018 clearly define the French position on empowering overseas territories in the maritime context.<sup>33</sup>

The French geostrategic significance in the region is undeniable. More than 50% of states have maritime borders in the Pacific Ocean, and more than 15% of states have maritime borders in the Indian Ocean with France. Around 40% of Pacific states have maritime borders with France through overseas territories. Since France is in this region for more than 25 years and France has global assets, it can help regional states' maritime security. France needs Maritime assets from the East Coast of Africa to the West Coast of the USA, and there is more than 60% of world population in this area, and 30% of global oil sea trade passes here. France

---

<sup>31</sup> AmbJean-François Girault, France, and Indo Pacific: Perspectives and Insights, Personal Communication, April 3, 2020.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 19

<sup>33</sup> "France's Humanitarian Strategy 2018-2022", Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, Republic of France, 2018, <https://www.diplomatie.gov>.

spends 2% of its GDP on defence and has the sixth-highest military expenditure in the world. With an increase of 1.6% defence budget, France is spending US\$ 50.1 Billion in 2019 on defence to make sure its ambitions and capabilities match.<sup>34</sup>

France has five joint regional commands in the region, and total military presence in the Indian and Pacific Ocean is 7000 personnel over a 9 Million Square Kilometre Area. Four thousand one hundred are stationed in the Indian Ocean, whereas 2900 are stationed in the Pacific Ocean. These French assets will protect French territories, EEZ, conduct Humanitarian Assistance Disaster Relief (HADR) operations, and prevent human trafficking and will contribute to action of the State at Sea.

France expressed its willingness to work with other regional centres engaged in surveillance of maritime space and communication sea lanes in the region. French armed forces are actively working with the Information Fusion Centre of Singapore (IFC), Regional Centre for Fusion of Maritime information (CRFIM), Madagascar, and Information Fusion Centre (IFC) located in New Delhi. France is balancing power in the region as Madagascar has given China fishing licensing. Chinese advisors are already in the country to teach Madagascans to manage their maritime areas.<sup>35</sup> China wants to change the multilateral world order that suits it by reinterpreting law, history and destabilizing other global powers' interests.

Many states have no modern technology for surveillance of sea and air and lack satellite systems and information consolidation centres. France and Japan, and Australia have a maritime dialogue for monitoring EEZ as France cannot monitor the entire zone, but its surveillance capability prevents illegal fishing. It is a practical strategy because more than 60% of Australia's imports come through major Indo Pacific shipping channels, which are under a great heart of transnational criminal organizations.

France calls Australia a significant partner and President Macron unveiled his Indo-Pacific strategy in Australia. Australia is also interested in new economic opportunities with China's rise in the region. Although the Australian economy has been affected a lot during COVID 19, thus it

---

<sup>34</sup> Nan Tian et al., "Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2019", *SIPRI*, April 2020, <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/>.

<sup>35</sup> Mathieu Duchatel, "The Role of China and the United States in France's Vision for the Indo-Pacific", *Perspectives and Insights on Indo-Pacific Region*, Paris, France, April 3, 2020).

needs multiple partners and not just China or the United States alone. This has created rivalries among Indo-Pacific states in maritime spaces and has generated a systemic fear among regional states as Chinese capacity is increasing. However, Australia will support China's growth as long as it has complied with international law. The Chinese race for maritime spaces does not undermine international law and the principle of sovereignty.<sup>36</sup>

France needs support from Japan, which has a strategic partnership with the USA and already getting advantages from Quadrilateral Security Dialogue and may not be able to give much support. Nevertheless, in reality, positive response and engagement for France will be enough to make its footprints in the region. Since Japan is debating to amend its pacifist 1947 constitution where article 9 speaks of war renunciation, is the need of hour. Japan has more than 250,000 self-defence forces comprised of ground, air and maritime personnel and it spends more than 5 trillion yen on them. So article 9 of chapter II of the Japanese Constitution needs revision as nothing denies Japan the natural right to defend itself against threats to its existence.<sup>37</sup> In such circumstances, when Japan is changing the posture of its armed forces, it may need to think independently in establishing alliances with French armed forces in the region, particularly for fighting piracy and organized transnational crime and for providing humanitarian assistance.

The fourth priority is to contribute to strategic stability in the Indo-Pacific by multilateral actions in order to strengthen regimes like nuclear non-proliferation. France believes in verifiable and irreversible nuclear disarmament, but powerful states, have not taken any initiatives for this at an institutional level. France has its air and naval assets in Japan and the Republic of Korea to stop illegal trans-shipments. Like other Western partners, the major challenge for France is to deal with North Korea through the institutional arrangement, for which it cannot rely only on China in the region to deal with it. However, the military environment is getting tough in the region as few states possess nuclear weapons. There are transnational threats in the entire region and many states aspire to have nuclear weapons which will lead to increased nuclear proliferation.

<sup>36</sup> Captain Sean Andrews and Martin Walker, "France and Indo-Pacific Regional Strategies: The Australian Perspective", *Perspectives and Insights on Indo-Pacific Region* (Paris, France, April 3, 2020).

<sup>37</sup> "The Article 9 Debate at a Glance," *Nippon.Com*, August 31, 2016, <https://www.nippon.com>.

The fifth priority for France is to deal with catastrophic climatic events. The French Indo-Pacific strategy is inclusive and open to all regional stakeholders for their concerns. Climate disruption has impacted international security and also it is an emerging topic, which is understood from the lens of geopolitical and human security. Climate change has enormous impacts in recent years because of cyclones, heat waves, droughts, forest fires, and a few other reasons. The increasing Green House Gas (GHG) emissions and tempering of the climate systems has intensified climatic events. Although all the world regions are not affected uniformly, mainly tropical regions are vulnerable because of the magnitude of climate changes like rising sea levels, violent cyclones, and heat waves.

Similarly, islands in the Indo-Pacific Ocean are vulnerable because of coastal habitats. Some of the Indo Pacific states have little political and economic resilience and can get affected by natural calamities. Climate change is a global risk. All stakeholders, be it society, state, or individual need to come forward for making collective decisions for the shared future of humanity in Indo-Pacific and other parts of the world.

Armed forces are essential actors in the national and international security landscape. Climate change is the equal responsibility of armed forces as for other ministerial departments. Environmental security needs attention from the development sector, energy sector, foreign affairs, and agriculture.<sup>38</sup> French Army can engage and cooperate with other ministries dealing with emergencies like migrations, cyclones, food society, and other climatic emergencies.

French Ministry of Defence had contributed to various governments' environmental initiatives, particularly in 2007 when political meetings among government, NGOs businesses, and employees spoke about "Grenelle de Environment." France Ministry of Defence (MoD) adopted a Defence Sustainable Development Strategy policy in 2012 for GHG emissions, renewable energy and other areas. This strategy was updated in September 2019 and France MoD has developed a ministerial taskforce for defining energy policy for the coming years. MoD is working to reduce GHG emissions by 40% by 2030 and similarly a 40% reduction in the use of fossil fuels by 2030. All these developments in MoD will help France reduce emissions in Indo-Pacific as France has to

---

<sup>38</sup> Barry Buzan, "New Patterns of Global Security in the Twenty-First Century," *International Affairs* 67, no. 3 (July 1991): 431–51, <https://www.jstor.org/stable>.



carry on patrolling in both oceans. This will encourage other countries to invest in renewable energy in the defence sector.

France needs a new environmental risk mapping to make classical geopolitical mapping complex. It has been supporting academic research in this regard. The conference was organized in 2015 on climate security where academic specialists from climate and geopolitical issues were invited. A study was conducted for all departments. Thorough research was conducted on crisis zones as French interests are at stake. Crises zones need to be studied because France has to invest in defence infrastructure, force training, operation theatres, health security and the supply of critical material and resources.

France shared an academic research with South Pacific Defence Ministers related to implications of climate change on defence by 2030 in Humanitarian operations, maritime security, and resilience of critical infrastructure. Such a study is being finalized with Australia's support for the Indian Ocean.

France has a strong commitment to Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) as Indo-Pacific gets affected by natural disasters. France offers its supports to regional states by mobilizing Army, Navy, and Air Force. In the South Pacific, France has a strong partnership with Australia and New Zealand under FRANZ Agreement, which let three countries coordinate on humanitarian assistance in island states.<sup>39</sup>

Regional states are more concerned about the French role in HADR as many states believe that time for response in HADR is limited, and states do not have that capability to safeguard their population. Japanese believe that French presence in the region will be acceptable if humanitarian assistance is central to French policy in Indo-Pacific.<sup>40</sup>

France was the first country to respond to "State of Environmental Emergency" when a Japanese vessel, MV Wakashio, began leaking oil into a coral reef of the Indian Ocean. French Island Reunion is near Mauritius, and Prime Minister Pravin Jugnauth asked for help from France as the nation lacked skills and expertise. French President Emmanuel Macron tweeted that "When Biodiversity is in peril, there is an

---

<sup>39</sup> "France's Humanitarian Strategy 2018-2022" (Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, 2018), <https://www.diplomatie.gouv>.

<sup>40</sup> Hiroto, How Japan sees French presence in Indo Pacific, Personal Communication, June 3, 2020.

urgency to act". French military aircraft from Reunion brought pollution control equipment so that Mauritius could be helped, as thousands of animal species were at risk of drowning in a sea of pollution which would affect food security and health of people.<sup>41</sup> Such support has enhanced French relevance in the region, and the French Indo-Pacific strategy seems in action.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR PAKISTAN IN INDO-PACIFIC

The Indo-Pacific region will be a significant area for strategic competition among great powers. America, France, and China are going to set the stage, and now it depends on how regional players will respond to all major powers. Although regional powers like India, Japan, Australia and many others align with China and the United States. Pakistan is not an active member of Asia-Pacific, but it remained an active member when East Pakistan was part of Pakistan, which is now called as Bangladesh. Pakistan remained part of American regional organizations like the South East Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) and the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO).<sup>42</sup>

There are many opportunities for Pakistan in the region. Only thing which matters is how to develop a comprehensive policy including narrative in engaging with region. Prime Minister Imran Khan declared the Year 2020 as the Year of Blue Economy. Pakistan's Ministry of Maritime Affairs started emphasizing on Blue Economy in recent years. The Blue Economy encompasses several industries, including ports and shipping, energy, renewable energy, fisheries, maritime transportation, tourism, climate change, and many others. Pakistan introduced a deep-sea fishing policy to enhance Seaford exports from US\$ 450 to make it around US\$ 2.5 billion in industry.<sup>43</sup> Pakistan is strategically aligned with China. The Chinese BRI offers it a great opportunity in the shape of CPEC. Prime Minister Khan categorically stated that Pakistan's future is aligned with

---

<sup>41</sup> "MV Wakashio: Mauritius Declares Emergency as Stranded Ship Leaks Oil," *BBC*, August 8, 2020, sec. World, <https://www.bbc.com/news>.

<sup>42</sup> Abdul Sattar, *Pakistan's Foreign Policy 1947-2009*, 2nd ed. (Karachi: Oxford University Press, n.d.), 51.

<sup>43</sup> "https://www.dawn.com/news/1574639/New-Blue-Economy-Policy-to-Help-Save-Foreign-Exchange-Hopes-Pm," *Dawn*, August 16, 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1574639>.

China in the coming decades.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, Pakistan needs to chalk out a policy that advances its Blue Economic initiative without undermining Chinese interests in the Indo-Pacific region.

France dissatisfaction with the unilateral order in Indo-Pacific creates a space for France-Pakistan's multifaceted cooperation. Therefore, Islamabad needs to increase the level of diplomatic engagement with France. Currently, Pakistan has a foreign secretary-level dialogue with France, which seems insufficient to engage it effectively. Pakistan must start a political level engagement with France and for this Prime Minister should reach out to French political leadership to scale down differences and upgrade relationship with France. Improving its economic engagement with the African nations would facilitate its understanding with France and access to Indo Pacific.

Pakistan must start a fresh and open dialogue with Muslim states in Indo-Pacific which are being engaged by all stakeholders including, China, US and France. A fresh approach needs to be brought in Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) that how Muslim states can search for options in Indo-Pacific as global powers are crafting new world order. France has been colonial power in Africa and there are many Muslims in France, so dialogue is needed between France and Muslim states over contentious issues.

Pakistan needs to identify some potential sectors and approach France for joint ventures in these areas. For instance, Pakistan can get a set of value-added products like making cheese and improving its agriculture sector. France is the right destination for Pakistani students. Besides, French university campuses could be brought to Pakistan. France is interested in having students worldwide as universities are affordable which will enhance its soft power. Pakistan needs to protect its cultural sites and for this help from France could be taken to preserve heritage. This can make the country's tourism more productive because French people travel a lot to Asia. Therefore Pakistan's deserts in the south and lush green valleys of northern areas could be the right destination.

Pakistan had a few defence contracts with France, such as Mirage planes and Agosta 90B submarines. However, India is a more attractive market for the French Military-Industrial Complex. Nevertheless,

---

<sup>44</sup> *Pakistan's PM: Our Economic Future Is Now Linked to China*, Al-Jazeera, September 03, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/talktojazeera/2020/09/>.

Pakistan's military could work with the French military to deal with non-traditional security challenges like environmental challenges and also to deal with catastrophic climatic events. Maritime communication lines must be protected if Pakistan has to implement the Blue Economic policy. For this sake, Pakistan Navy can work with the French Navy for joint ventures to protect sea-lanes' safety and security. France wishes to have its security architecture of Indo-Pacific, therefore, it cannot ignore Pakistan.

## **CONCLUSION**

France can make a constructive contribution in the Indo-Pacific region through its culture, values, education, tourism, people to people contact, and sports, which could enhance its acceptability in the region. French President Emmanuel Macron has tried to internationalize France to respond to the global challenges. Countries in Indo-Pacific region want their economies to be strengthened so that they could be saved from Chinese financial monopoly. Pakistan needs to think beyond the traditional security landscape for broader regional commitments. It needs to identify regions with higher chances of prosperity and economic integration. Its engagement with the Indo-Pacific stakeholders like France is likely to boost its Blue Economic initiative. Thus, Pakistan's Blue Economic dream can succeed if it makes inroads in the Indo-Pacific region.