

Redefinition of France's China Policy in a Volatile Geopolitical Context¹.

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Introduction

Becoming aware gradually of several realities and trends regarding China's domestic and international policies and taking into account the evolution of the US/China strategic competition as well as its impact on the Indo-Pacific region, France has progressively redefined its bilateral relations with China in line with the EU's position but also in the light of a geopolitical context which has become extremely volatile. This short article aims at presenting this evolution and questioning its relevance.

1. Contextual factors of France's redefinition of its relations with China

In the 1990s, 2000s and early 2010's, France's foreign policy toward China revolved around three central objectives: a) To increase its economic interests in this vast emerging market; b) To intensify its diplomatic cooperation with Beijing to integrate China into the international system, and c) To encourage political and economic reforms in China in the hope that these will lead to internal liberalization and a certain 'westernization' of the country³.

But in the 2010s, France has gradually become aware of several realities and trends regarding China's domestic and international policies. First, since 2012 and the arrival in power of Xi Jinping, China has increasingly asserted itself outside its national borders, to promote its interests but also its vision of world order, and its model of governance. One of the most important goals set by the Chinese Communist Party is to make the country the world's leading power by 2049.

Second, China defends a vision that combines, a) Internal political hardening to ensure domestic stability, b) A search for economic self-sufficiency ('*Dual circulation strategy*'⁴), and c) External projection and assertiveness, using a wide range of foreign policy tools ranging from military means including nuclear weapons (*hard power*)⁵ to the implementation of a wide and multilevel strategy of

¹ Please do not cite this article without the author's agreement. Thank you.

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³ Françoise Mengin (2001) « La politique chinoise de la France Du mythe de la relation privilégiée au syndrome de la normalisation », *Critique Internationale*, Vol.3(12):89-110

⁴ Through its 'dual circulation strategy', China encourages domestic demand (*internal circulation*) to reduce its dependency on external demand, while strengthening exportation (*external circulation*). China's "dual-circulation" strategy means relying less on foreigners, *The Economist*, 5th November 2020

⁵ According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) "China is in the middle of a substantial expansion of its nuclear weapon arsenal, which satellite images indicate includes the construction of over 300 new missile silos". SIPRI (2022) "Global nuclear arsenals are expected to grow as states continue to modernize"—New SIPRI Yearbook

influence (*soft power*) whose tone may have changed, especially in France⁶.

Finally, China, which has increased its presence in international/regional organizations,⁷ has become a key player on various global issues (climate change, debt management for developing countries, international development financing, WTO reform, etc.), both as a negotiating partner and as a promoter of a model different from that of France, and other liberal democracies.

These developments led Paris to forge a more coherent policy toward China in a very volatile geopolitical context where Asia plays a decisive role, where the Sino-American rivalry but also their economic interdependency is a major structuring factor, where a global pandemic has revealed France's – and the EU – extreme dependency in some strategic sectors (medicines and medical equipment, semi-conductor, rare earth,), where war has returned to Europe with the conflict in Ukraine, and finally, where many questions are raised about a China-Russia alignment, often considered as a “limited entente”⁸.

2. France's redefined policy toward China since 2019

In coherence with the EU global strategy toward China (March 2019) which considers “China as a partner, a competitor, and a systemic rival”⁹, France is now conducting a Foreign Policy toward China that is articulated at the bilateral and European levels and which mainly aims to defend France as well as the EU's interests and priorities toward China¹⁰.

First, by continuing to promote trade in sectors characteristic of the French economy (aeronautics and space, agrifood, transport, urban development, retail, and financial services..) and attracting Chinese IDE in France – and the EU - that create jobs and forge long-term, balanced partnerships. In France, the stock of Chinese FDI rose from €1.2bn in 2013 to €10.1bn in 2017 before falling back to €8.7bn in 2018. Significant investment has been in the semiconductor, luxury, and hospitality sectors¹¹.

Second, by rebalancing and defending reinforced reciprocity with China. Indeed, it exists numerous

out now. Available at: <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2022/global-nuclear-arsenals-are-expected-grow-states-continue-modernize-new-sipri-yearbook-out-now>

⁶ P. Charon and J.B Jeangène Vilmer (2022) *Les opérations d'influence chinoises. Un Moment manichéen*. IRSEM. Available at: <https://www.irsem.fr/rapport.html> ; « L'ambassadeur de Chine en France et « la guerre de l'opinion publique », *Le Monde*, 17th June 2021

⁷ <https://warsawinstitute.org/chinas-growing-influence-international-organizations/>

⁸ P. Haenle and A. Wyne (2022) “The Paradox of the Russia-China Relationship, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace”. Available at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/08/18/paradox-of-russia-china-relationship-pub-87695>

⁹ European Commission (2019), *EU-China – A strategic outlook*, Brussels, 12th March

¹⁰ B. Poletti and B. TAN (2022) *Rapport d'information sur la stratégie de la France et de l'Europe à l'égard de la Chine*, Assemblée Nationale, Paris, 9 february.

¹¹ Direction générale du Trésor (2022), *Investissements chinois sortants*. Available at », 10th May <https://www.tresor.economie.gouv.fr/Pays/CN/investissements>

situations that illustrate a significant lack of reciprocity in France-China relations

*In the trade sector*¹². France's trade with China is significantly imbalanced. China represents France's largest bilateral trade deficit. The French trade deficit with China reached €39.6bn in 2021 compared to €38.9bn in 2020 and €32.3bn in 2019.¹³ Furthermore, access to the Chinese market remains difficult for French companies, while the role of the State in the economy remains important and hinders the progress of many projects, complicates foreign players' access to information, and makes it more difficult for them to interact with local and central Party officials. A trade rebalancing challenged by China's "dual circulation strategy".

In the academic sector. Chinese researchers have access to EU public research funds, but the reverse is not true. Chinese military young officers can be trained in some French institutions, such as the 'École de Guerre' in Paris (War school), but France seems unable to send trainees to equivalent institutions in China. As a response, that school has temporarily stopped welcoming Chinese trainees¹⁴.

In the media sector. While many Chinese channels are broadcast in France ('Bouquet Grande Muraille' (Great wall package) with its 15 channels¹⁵), in addition to CGTN which has recently received the authorization, broadcasting permits for French media (Radio France Internationale (RFI), France 24, especially in Chinese, are very difficult to obtain in China.

Third, by reducing France's dependency on strategic sectors (medicines, rare earth, semiconductors,) through re-industrialization, raw material recycling, production reshoring, R&I,¹⁶....

Fourth, by maintaining a close and demanding relationship with China, especially regarding China's positioning regarding International labor law and the fight against forced labor, the fight against climate change, the promotion of global public goods, or debt management for developing countries¹⁷.

Fifth, by facilitating cooperation with China.

Economic cooperation. In the light of French-Chinese cooperation that has been developed in the civil nuclear and aeronautics sectors (EPR in Taishan, A320 assembly line, and A330 finishing line in Tianjin), and its extension to new sectors (sustainable development, health, aging economy,

¹² Direction générale du Trésor (2022), *Echanges bilatéraux entre la France et la Chine*, 20th April <https://www.tresor.economie.gouv.fr/Pays/CN/echanges-bilateraux-entre-la-france-et-la-chine>

¹³ Idem.

¹⁴ B. Poletti and B. TAN (2022), op. cit., p.84

¹⁵ Tang Media, Great Wall Europe TV. See: <http://www.tangmedia.fr/greatwall/en/description.html>

¹⁶ E. Fabry (2022) « Réduire la dépendance de l'UE aux importations chinoises de terres rares et autres minerais stratégiques », Institute J. Delors, 10th October ;

¹⁷ Communiqué de la Présidence de la République, 16 février 2022, sur les relations franco-chinoises et les questions internationales.

future industry, financial services, etc.)¹⁸

Development cooperation. The implementation of joint projects based on high environmental, social, and procurement standards and in compliance with sustainable financing rules. In this regard, in February 2022, Paris and Beijing planned to jointly build seven infrastructure projects worth over \$1.7 billion (\$1.9 billion) in Africa, Southeast Asia, and Eastern Europe, making France the first country to establish the third-party market intergovernmental cooperation mechanism with China¹⁹

The main rationale of this partnership was that a) French enterprises have a unique advantage in advanced manufacturing, environmental protection, and engineering construction, while Chinese firms have accumulated rich experience in basic infrastructure construction, energy, equipment building, and the internet. Enterprises from both countries are complementary and have a huge potential for third-party market cooperation, b) France considers this cooperation as relevant insofar as they allow the promotion of high social and environmental standards, as well as environmental standards towards China's ambitions in this area, c) it was a way for France to continue to remain engaged and put itself, and its industry, forward into these emerging markets

Finally, it should be underlined that while maintaining its “One China Policy” towards China, simultaneously, France has also greatly increased its interactions with Taiwan in many fields (education, science, technology, human rights,...), and welcomed the opening of a second Taipei representative office in Aix-en-Provence (South of France)²⁰.

3. France-China relations in the Indo-Pacific context.

As all the dimensions of such relations in that context cannot be covered, this presentation proposes to focus on an aspect that represents a specificity of France's presence in that region, namely its security and defense policy.

a) Evolution of the Indo-Pacific region of which France is a country

The Indo-Pacific region at the heart of the global political economy

Especially because, the region is both the richest area in the world - in terms of GDP (60% of global GDP) - and the one with the highest growth rate (+/- 6%), it has the highest R&D expenditure in the world, it represents a place where main innovations that have changed the world in recent years took

¹⁸ B. Poletti and B. Tan (2022), op. cit., p.90

¹⁹ “France joins China in infrastructure projects”, *Deutsche Welle (DW)*, 24th February 2022

²⁰ Bureau de Représentation de Taipei en France (2022) « L'inauguration du Bureau de Taïwan à Aix-en-Provence », 15th December. Available at : https://www.roc-taiwan.org/fr/priv_fr/post/214.html

place (batteries for electric cars, semiconductors, 5G, space...), but also because it fuels the growth of other areas and, in particular of the EU, for which it accounts for an increasingly large share of exports, imports, and investments, and is located at the center of international trade routes²¹.

A geopolitically volatile region due to US/China strategic ambitions and other significant tensions

The region is greatly structured by the strategic competition between the US and China for supremacy in Indo-Pacific as well as in the world. The United States is a fully-fledged Indo-Pacific nation with significant interests in the region which has long relied on a tight network of alliances and military bases in the region, giving them the leading role in the regional security architecture. In response to this established power in the region, China has since Xi Jinping came to power in 2012, undertaken to challenge American supremacy on all levels: ideological, economic, technological, diplomatic, and military. Relying on its immense human, economic and financial resources, it has launched the "Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)", which openly aims to make the Indo-Pacific a region under Chinese influence, not without mobilizing its military in support of its numerous territorial claims in the South China Sea²²

To make the situation even more volatile, many other tensions exist in this wide region, including the nuclear threat from North Korea, Indo-China territorial disputes, South China sea disputes, to which should be added several significant challenges such as piracy, terrorism, trafficking, and climate change, to name a few.

France as an Indo-pacific country

To understand France's position toward China in the context of the Indo-Pacific region, it must be underlined that France *is* an Indo-pacific country. Indeed, France is present in the South of the Indian Ocean with the islands of Mayotte and Reunion, the Eparses Islands and the French Southern and Antarctic Lands, and in the Pacific with its territories in New Caledonia, Wallis, and Futuna, French Polynesia, and Clipperton. Furthermore, France has the second-largest Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)²³ in the world (after the United States), 93% of which is in the Indian and Pacific oceans, and 7,000 French military personnel are deployed in the region ("forces de souveraineté" (*sovereignty forces*)) where 1.8 million French nationals live²⁴.

²¹ M. Michel-Brassart and L. Trastour-Isnart (2022) *Rapport d'information sur les enjeux de défense en Indopacifique*, Assemblée Nationale, 17th February.

²² Ibid, p.10

²³ According to the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, an EEZ is a maritime space over which a coastal State exercises sovereign and economic rights with respect to the exploration and use of natural resources.

²⁴ M. Michel-Brassart and L. Trastour-Isnart (2022), *op. cit*, p.8

b) France-China relations in the context of France's Strategy for the Indo-Pacific

Ambitions of the French strategy in the Indo-Pacific (2018-2022)

In 2018, France adopted a 'Strategy for the Indo-Pacific' during a visit of the French President to Australia²⁵. This strategy is oriented around four pillars with specific objectives: 1) an "economy, connectivity, research, and innovation" pillar, 2) a "multilateralism and rule of law" pillar, 3) a "fight against climate change, biodiversity, sustainable management of the oceans" pillar, and 4) a "security and defense" pillar.

On this last pillar, the French Ministry of the Armed Forces proposed a 'Defence Strategy' in 2019 aiming at 1) Ensuring the security of French citizens, territories, and interests, 2) Contributing to the security of the regional areas surrounding its overseas territories through military cooperation and enhanced defense diplomacy, 3) Preserving free and open access to common spaces such as the sea, airspace, or cyberspace as the security of maritime communication routes is particularly central to France's concerns, 4) Strengthening the multilateral mechanisms essential for maintaining regional stability, 5) Learning from the natural disasters that have struck the region to be better prepared for those that are bound to multiply with climate change

More generally, France aims at ensuring respect for international law (freedom of navigation and overflight), at strengthening the non-proliferation regime, and at reinforcing multilateral processes of security dialogue and consultation.

Instruments of France's Indo-Pacific Strategy

France has designated three main instruments to implement its Indo-Pacific Strategy²⁶

- *Promotion of multilateralism and strategic partnerships*

France is involved in different forums of cooperation and dialogue in the field of defense and security (Shangri-La Dialogue since 2012, Indian Ocean Naval Symposium, Member of the Indian Ocean Rim Association, South Pacific Defense Ministers' Meeting (SPDMM), participation of French Defense Minister in the ASEAN Meeting of Defense Ministers organized by Vietnam (Dec. 2020)

France strengthens dialogue with all countries of the region, except North Korea, on security and defense issues. France has signed a strategic partnership with some of them (the US (historic ally),

²⁵ France's Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs (2018), *France's Indo-Pacific Strategy*, Paris, 67 p.

²⁶ M. Michel-Brassart and L. Trastour-Isnart (2022), *op. cit.*, p.27

India (1998), Australia, and Japan (1995 and 2013)) and remains open to cooperation with others such as ASEAN members and China²⁷.

This open, non-confrontational position distinguishes France from the United States, which, on the contrary, has designated China as an adversary and is building a network of alliances against it, the latest example being the AUKUS. Even though France is fully aware of China's growing power, its hegemonic aims, and its increasing assertiveness, it prefers to work to build, with all the actors and countries in the region, an alternative model to the Chinese model, fully respecting the sovereignty of its partners and international law, in particular freedom of movement at sea, while fully accepting the balance of power, including military power.

- *Deployment of military missions to reaffirm France's presence and demonstrate France's military capabilities in the region*

Naval missions. Thus, in February 2021, France deployed its nuclear attack submarine (NAS) *Émeraude*, and the vessel *Seine* and the frigate *Vendémiaire* (Marianne Mission) for a mission in the South China Sea. France also participates in regional naval exercises. In May 2021, the ships of the "Jeanne d'Arc" mission " joined with the US, Japan, and Australia, in the Arc21 naval exercise organized by the Japanese forces on the island of Kyushu. Some of these missions have irritated China like in April 2019 when after the transit of the French Frigate *Vendémiaire* in the Taiwan Strait, Beijing sent ships, accused France to have "illegally crossed" the Taiwan Strait by entering "Chinese territorial waters", and then canceled France's participation in the naval parade for the 70th anniversary of the People's Liberation Army²⁸.

Air missions. France also has a strong presence in the skies over the Indo-Pacific region, either alone or in cooperation with its allies, although the French Air Force has only six transport aircraft and three helicopters. In July 2021, France launched the "Heifara Wakea" mission and projected an air force composed of 3 Rafales, 2 A330 Phénix, and 2 A400M Atlas aircraft as well as about 170 airmen towards French Polynesia in less than 40 hours and with a total of thirteen refueling operations. With this mission, France showed that despite the 17,000 kilometers separating them, it was able to protect Polynesia and that it was a reliable actor and a balancing power.²⁹

²⁷ Ibid, p.69

²⁸ « Tensions entre la France et la Chine après le passage de la frégate « Vendémiaire » dans le détroit de Taiwan », Le Monde, 26 April 2019

²⁹ French Ministry of the Armed Forces (2021) Heifara-Wakea Mission. Available at: <https://archives.defense.gouv.fr/english/operations/missions-realisees/monde/heifara-wakea-2021>

- *Searching for greater involvement of the EU in the region*

France's Strategy in the Indo-Pacific (2018) and its decline into a defense strategy (2019) preceded the publication of the EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific (16 September 2021)³⁰ and its 7 priorities: Sustainable and inclusive prosperity, Ecological transition, Maritime governance, Digital governance, Connectivity, human health, and Security and Defense. France played a central role in lobbying the Council, along with Germany and the Netherlands - which have themselves published their national strategy for the Indo-Pacific region - intending to adopt this European strategy whose priorities largely overlap with the French strategy.

The French and European strategies differ, however, concerning security and defense. Indeed, while the EU's objective in the region is "to promote regional security based on an open and rules-based architecture", the means put at the service to achieve this objective appear singularly limited.

c) The AUKUS alliance and Australia's cancellation of the sub-marine contract: A significant challenge.

The establishment of the AUKUS alliance (a trilateral security pact between the USA, Australia and the UK) and Australia's decision then to cancel its diesel submarine contract with France (15th September 2021) for US nuclear submarines, suddenly, while it was considered as the cornerstone of a "strengthened strategic partnership" since 2017, caused a "staggering" effect on the French authorities³¹, and was considered as "a shot in the back" by the French MOFA, Jean-Yves Le Drian³².

If France sees now AUKUS as an ambitious project vague and uncertain, it also considers it as a security pact that confirms Australia's new and total alignment with the US position, whose main objective is to target China and to strengthen US strategy against China in terms of dissuasion and containment, and a project that creates a confrontational logic in the region which obliged countries to take a position in favor or against China³³.

In addition, France considers that such a pact complicates the regional security architecture of the region which was constituted of bilateral security agreements, especially with the US, and of plurilateral dialogues with or without the US (ASEAN, ADMM+, QUAD,..). Thus, AUKUS comes as an additional format, but the multiplication of such security formats in the region blurs the clarity of commitments and expectations. And finally, it reshuffles the deck in relations between the United States and its main allies in the region: Japan, South Korea, Korea, and New Zealand which in general

³⁰ European Commission (2021) *Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council. The EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific*, JOIN(2021) 24 final, Brussels, 16th September.

³¹ M. Michel-Brassart and L. Trastour-Isnart (2022), op. cit, p.33

³² « Sous-marins : la colère de la France contre le « coup dans le dos » australien », *Les Echos*, 16 September 2021

³³ M. Michel-Brassart and L. Trastour-Isnart (2022), op. cit, p.38.

have not been so enthusiastic about AUKUS.

As underlined by a recent report from the French National Assembly, in this context, France now has to take into account two potential security scenarios in the Indo-Pacific region to shape its position in the region and toward China³⁴.

The first scenario is the *risk of escalation scenario*. It is characterized by an growing arming efforts by the US and its allies in the region, a Chinese military build-up, the creation of new alliances as a response to the rapid build-up of Chinese military capabilities, and the deployment of more and more US troops in the neighboring zone of China. A situation that could lead the US and their allies into what Graham Allison has called the 'Thucydides trap'³⁵. The trap is for the US to be drawn into a war with China to eliminate an adversary that threatens its interests and its global supremacy.

A second scenario is the *false status quo scenario*. The Sino-American conflict could take the form of a new "cold war" which could remain 'cold' for a very long time despite periodic bursts of tension. China might prefer to let the Americans continue their war posture as long as Congress, the media, and public opinion start to raise questions about the cost of mobilizing for a war that never comes. Following Sun Tzu's strategic precepts, China would prefer to make the US lose than defeat him militarily. China's military build-up - ironically financed by trade surpluses with the West! - would not be so much about preparing for a conflict than to demoralize and exhaust the US.

If in this scenario, China won't attack Taiwan, the status quo, however, would only be apparent. China, as it has done for decades, would continue to advance its points meticulously, slowly, with mini-actions – to control more territory – taking place under the radar and beyond the reach of the US' obligation to retaliate. The Chinese strategy is thus similar to a game of go, closing the "Sun Tzu trap" on the US³⁶.

d) Relevance of France's Indo-Pacific Strategy today

In such context, France has pursued its Indo-Pacific Strategy, while being careful not to oppose the US, to take some distance with the NATO's position toward China, and to strengthen security and defense partnerships and dialogues with countries of the region.

Pursuing its Indo-Pacific Strategy

³⁴ M. Michel-Brassart and L. Trastour-Isnart (2022), op. cit, p.44

³⁵ G. Allison (2017) *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides' Trap?* Mariner Books/Houghton Mifflin.

³⁶ M. Ferguson (2022), "Sun Tzu's Trap: The illusion of Perpetual Competition", Modern War Institute, 2 nd October. Available at: <https://mwi.usma.edu/sun-tzus-trap-the-illusion-of-perpetual-competition/>

The AUKUS alliance and Australia's cancellation of the submarine contract have undoubtedly hit the French strategy in the Indopacific, as France had given a central role to the "strategic partnership" with Australia. The AUKUS alliance which triggered the hardening of the security environment and adds a bloc logic in the region can only undermine the French Strategy that is based on cooperation, dialogue, and multilateralism.

However, despite this challenge from AUKUS, many observers in France agree that the French Strategy remains relevant, both in its objectives and missions. France considers that cooperation, dialogue, and multilateralism must be promoted all the more as they appear to be neglected by the two major regional powers, with the risk of escalation to the detriment of all Indo-Pacific countries, and the world³⁷. This explains why Macron was recently at APEC and ASEAN Summits. France seems convinced also that this strategy responds to the expectations of many countries which, even if they are allies of the United States, remain worried about the risk of escalation that AUKUS could bring.

Now if France has also a security and defense dimension in its Indo-Pacific Strategy, these aspects are included from a different angle than the American strategy. France does indeed have a permanent military presence in the region – whose capacities would increase under the new military programming law (LPM) (2024-2030) – but this presence should not be read, like that of the US, as the instrument of a power struggle. On the contrary, it aims at contributing to de-escalation by supporting the deployment of its forces on the necessary respect for the law, sovereignty, and freedoms, in particular the freedom of maritime movement recurrently violated by China.

France seeks to uphold these principles all the more because the US, an assertive supporter of the law, has never ratified the international instruments (Convention on the Law of the Sea, Rome Statute, etc.) containing the principles it claims to defend.

Refusing alignment but not opposing the US

France cannot, on its own - even with other EU Member States - represent a credible alternative to the US regarding the Chinese threat. Indeed, French government is aware that while it must refuse alignment, its strategy cannot be opposed to that of the US, with which it must seek compatibility. But as underlined by French Parliamentarians: "*Our country is on a knife-edge between participation in the US strategy and refusal of outright alignment*"³⁸

³⁷ M. Michel-Brassart and L. Trastour-Isnart (2022), op. cit, p.48

³⁸ Ibid., p.55

Cautious about NATO's position toward China

France remains cautious about the redefinition of NATO's "strategic concept" and its turn towards China. If France and the EU consider China as a systemic rival, they also consider it as a competitor and an essential partner in addressing other major global challenges, starting with climate change.

France and the European countries are now very vigilant to ensure that NATO is not distorted and reoriented against China, taking them hostage with the risk of dragging them into the new "cold war" that the US is setting up in the Indo-Pacific. At a time when the United States is "pivoting" towards Asia, it seems even more important to focus NATO on Europe³⁹.

Strengthening partnerships with other countries in the Indo-Pacific region

Finally, France aims at establishing a network of alliances with countries that reject US/China conflictual logic, that share the same concerns about security and maritime freedom, and that support the idea of a regional order based on law, dialogue, and cooperation that contributes to the development of the region. While these countries are allies of the US, their interests are not necessarily always aligned with those of the US and they are also seeking to diversify their alliances.

One example is Indonesia. France has recently strengthened its "strategic partnership" with this country with the signature of an agreement on security and defense after which Indonesia decided to acquire 42 Rafale jets (€8.1 billion) (February 2022)⁴⁰. Simultaneously, the strengthening of security and defense cooperation with India or Djibouti is also ongoing.

Conclusion

In its relations with China, France has become much aware of Beijing's growing power, its hegemonic aims, and its increasing assertiveness, and has redefined its bilateral relations with this country accordingly. In the Indo-Pacific context, France seeks to continue to consider China as a competitor and a systemic rival, but also as a partner to deal with many challenges in that region. In other words, France is struggling not to be drawn into a confrontational and bloc logic and proposes then to the countries of this region an alternative model which is based on multilateral security/defense cooperation and dialogue and that respects their sovereignty as well as international law. Only time will tell us if this non-confrontational approach with China will be successful.

³⁹ Ibid, p.57

⁴⁰ France seals \$8.1 billion deal with Indonesia to sell 42 Rafale jets, *Reuters*, 10th February 2022