

POLICY BRIEF

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Sharing the same principles: an essential factor for cooperation, stability and the resolution of territorial issues in the Indo-Pacific

Valérie Niquet

During two critical meetings, Prime Minister Abe's visit to France in May 2019, followed by President Macron's visit to Japan in June of the same year, several elements were highlighted that demonstrate a close convergence of analysis on the strategic situation in the Indo-Pacific region. This convergence paves the way for increased opportunities for cooperation. Internal evolutions on defense-related issues in Japan since 2012 have made this type of cooperation more accessible. On the French side, a more assertive ambition for engagement in a critical area has been expressed on many occasions.

A convergence of ideas

France has repeatedly reaffirmed its commitment to essential principles, which also underpin Japan's Defence and security policy. For Florence Parly, French Minister of Armed Forces, the evolution of the security order in the Indo-Pacific affects our interests directly.¹ These principles are the will to preserve stability, the principle of freedom of navigation, to respect the rule of law based on a universal value system that rejects the use of force, or coercion to change the status quo and to reject hegemony strategies of influence. For Paris as for Tokyo, the implementation of these principles relies on elements of military capability, and the French Minister of the Armed Forces confirmed that France must maintain a level of capabilities ready to face any threats in the region, including threats to the implementation of the freedom of navigation and insidious or grey zones risks.

With regard to the perception of the strategic situation in the Indo-Pacific area, which makes particular sense for France, with

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¹ Speech by Florence Parly, Minister of the Armed Forces, Shangri La Dialogue June 2019.

direct national interests in the Indian and the Pacific Ocean (the only European power in this case), and with a considerable presence of more than 1 million residents, 3 permanent bases, 5 military commands and some 7000 pre-deployed personnel. Beyond the major economic challenges, which depend on the stability of the region and the security of maritime lines of communication, 93% of France's EEZ, the second largest in the world, is located in this very area.

The perceptions and analysis of the strategic situation in France and Japan are very similar. For Japan, the area is at the heart of its vital interests, which directly affect the economic and strategic security of the archipelago. With regard to threat assessment, France's 2017 Defence Review, as well as the new edition of the Indo-Pacific Strategy, published in June 2019, highlights, like Japanese documents, the risks associated with big power rivalries, fait-accompli strategies, the threat to a free access to resources, particularly in the maritime space but also environmental and climate-related risks.²

For France, what is at stake goes beyond the economy and the prosperity of Europe but is a question of principles based on the respect of rules governing international relations.³ These rules apply to the respect of sovereignty with no interference, which is challenged in the maritime space of the Indo-Pacific.

A common willingness to engage in the area

The willingness of France and Japan to engage in the area, and to cooperate, are two factors that play a significant role in deepening relations.

For France, the desire to diversify our strategy towards Asia is essential, initiated by

President Hollande and confirmed by President Macron. This is an essential element of our strategy towards this region.

In concrete terms, France is already involved in many actions in the area with its regular participation in naval exercises, in particular with Japan, India, Australia, and the United States, the deployment of our navy in the China Sea several times a year, including with European observers but also, the ambition to strengthen our partnerships with regional maritime powers such as Australia, India, Japan, Indonesia, Singapore, South Korea, Malaysia and Vietnam.

Concerning information sharing, at the heart of the concept of Maritime Domain Awareness, France has a liaison officer within the Information Fusion Center (IFC Changi and Madagascar) on sea lines of communication surveillance. It also plays a role with its liaison officers with HA/DR coordination centers in an area particularly vulnerable to natural disasters. Here again, cooperation with Japan, whose excellence in this area is recognized, is a significant point.

In this respect, France is ready to strengthen its cooperation with regional organizations, where it can play a major role as an intermediary, particularly with the EU, within organizations such as the ADMM+ format. This would also strengthen the partnership with Japan.

In the Pacific, France is part of the FRANZ format, which coordinates and rationalizes civil and military assistance to Pacific states and territories. In a period of uncertainty, when other powers are developing ambitions in the region, this is an essential element. In this sector in particular, in such a vast and vulnerable area, capacity development is essential, and both

² *La France et la sécurité en Indo-Pacifique*, <http://defense.gouv.fr>, June 2019.

³ Speech by Florence Parly, Minister of the Armed Forces, Shangri La Dialogue 2019.

Japan and France have a role to play.

In the same area, the North Pacific Coast Guard Forum, (2000), a Japanese initiative, and the Heads of Asia Coast Guards meetings initiated in 2004 offers other opportunities for positive cooperation.

At the same time, since 2012, Japan has adopted a new posture on security and defense which facilitates its commitment to a higher international contribution to peace, including in partnership with new actors beyond the United States, even if Washington remains - and it cannot be otherwise - the core of Japan's defense and security system.⁴

In 2013, Japan adopted a national security strategy for the first time since 1945. In 2014, the principles for transferring military equipment were made more flexible, making it possible, for example, to sign an ACSA (acquisition and co servicing agreement sharing of defense supplies and services) with France in July 2018. Not to mention the new defense laws, which came into force in 2016 and facilitate the participation of the Self defense forces in humanitarian aid, peacekeeping, and natural disaster response operations. All this also facilitates cooperation, including cooperation involving the self-defense forces, in capacity development.

Converging concepts of security and stability

These evolutions led to greater convergence on concepts, but with differences that must be taken into account and understood.

In Tokyo, two concepts dominate that of FOIP and that of QUAD (United States, Japan, India Australia) sometimes seen as an operational translation of the previous one.

For its part, France adheres to the concept of a free and open Indo-Pacific with, however, a more inclusive vision, particularly towards ASEAN countries.

Moreover, if China's lack of transparency and assertiveness is taken into account in Paris, the pursuit of a strategy of lucid and constructive engagement is never rejected. Here again, there is an element of convergence with Japan, which, for its part, with the visit of Prime Minister Abe to China in 2018, and the invitation to the Chinese President for a state visit in 2020, favors the same willingness to normalize its relations with the PRC.

Capacity development: an operational field of cooperation

France maintains a network of military cooperation and strategic partnerships throughout the Indo-Pacific region, including joint capacity development exercises, sharing of expertise, training of personnel, providing equipment in sectors related to information sharing, detection assistance, humanitarian assistance, and natural disaster response. All this is at the heart of our objective of stabilization in the area, an objective shared with Japan.

Paris also wants to better coordinate all these actions, with all its partners which range from the Pacific to Africa and South-East Asia, whose centrality must not be forgotten. As far as Africa is concerned, this is a major challenge for France and Europe, including in terms of training, with, in particular, the Africa 2015 plan which, as in the Pacific, aims to offer African countries a positive alternative to China's offensive.

For its part, Japan has placed capacity development at the heart of its security and stabilization policy. In particular, with the

4 Prime Minister Abe: «Japan must be a net contributor to the provision of the world's welfare and security... Japan will proactively contribute for Peace and Stability of the region and the world.»

training of maritime personnel in Somalia and Djibouti, the provision of coastguard patrol boats and self-defense force training aircraft to countries such as Vietnam and the Philippines, the training of military personnel specializing in underwater medicine, and very importantly, assistance in the development of seabed mapping, where France also has an area of excellence.

In all these areas, synergies with France can and must be developed between two countries that share the same values and many interests. This cooperation applies to the countries of Asia and the Pacific, where the logic of cooperation is solid. However, East Africa and the Horn of Africa with the problems related to piracy is also a major region in the Indian Ocean. Japan's investment, with the TICAD conferences, the next of which will be held in Tokyo in August 2019, is an essential element of this complementary stabilization strategy.

These synergies will also be translated into areas that also contribute to fostering dialogue and strengthening the strategic partnership between our two countries, including the environment and climate change, which increases the vulnerability of sensitive areas such as the South China Sea, as well as territories in the Indian Ocean and the Pacific. These challenges offer a wide range of opportunities for cooperation and dialogue. Moreover, these opportunities and the role played by France in Europe, contribute to an increased awareness of security issues in the region, and the development of a more integrated approach and strategic vision among all the States of the European Union.