



## France and AUKUS

### Bouncing Back to Live Up to Pacific Challenges

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#### ► Key Takeaways

- AUKUS, intended to be a coordinated response to the Chinese expansion in the Indo-Pacific, called into question France's strategic positioning in the region.
- A year later, France's main objective is to rebuild a strategic dynamic at the Indo-Pacific level with all stakeholders, and especially Australia. A positive dynamic has been restarted for a few months that could allow a new form of strategic cooperation.
- Working with such partners is key to tackle the diversity of challenges in the Pacific Islands region, ranging from climate change to maritime security and seabed activities regulation to an expanded Chinese influence in the region.
- Priority for France if a high-intensity conflict were to emerge in Indo-Pacific would obviously be to protect the integrity of French territories, the 1.6 million French people living in the region, as well as the crucially important sea lanes of communication (SLOC), but also to maintain political and strategic credibility with regional actors.

## Introduction

Back in September 2021, the announcement of AUKUS<sup>1</sup> – the defense partnership between Australia, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US) was a shock to Paris: not only it meant the brutal conclusion of a submarine deal signed in 2016, but it also provoked a major breach of confidence<sup>2</sup> in France’s relations with its three key partners – shedding crude light on the divergences of approaches regarding the best way to salvage the rules-based order and address the China challenge. This initiative, intended to be a coordinated response to the Chinese expansion in the Indo-Pacific, called into question France’s strategic positioning in the region.

One year after, however, AUKUS does not seem to have marked a major turning point regarding the French strategy in the Indo-Pacific, especially in the Pacific.<sup>3</sup> After an immediate aftershock, France’s bilateral relations with Washington, Canberra and to an extent London gradually recovered. Political and strategic discussions at the Shangri-La Dialogue in June 2022, the recent visits of the Australian Prime Minister<sup>4</sup> and minister of

Defense<sup>5</sup> in France and numerous bilateral calls at the end of Summer between French and Australian political and military leaders have pointed to a positive dynamic for an improved strategic cooperation in the region.

Rather than prompting a radical change in the France’s Indo-Pacific strategy, AUKUS highlighted a fault line between the strategic/political rhetoric level and the operational level of defense cooperation

regarding the French engagement in this region. The multiple maritime security and climate change challenges in the Pacific Islands region require France to cooperate closely with its regional partners, starting with Australia, and continue to promote effective multilateralism. In addition, the growing risks of high-intensity conflicts in the vicinity of the Pacific Islands region, particularly in the Taiwan Strait and/or in the South China Sea, require for France to speed up the strengthening of its interoperability with its regional allies in the coming years and probably to decide on the role it would like to – and be able to – concretely support its own interest and allies.

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### The AUKUS highlighted a fault line between the strategic/political rhetoric level and the operational level of defense regarding the French engagement in this region

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1. The White House, “Joint Leaders Statement on AUKUS”, September 15, 2021, available at: [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov).

2. A. Chrisafis and D. Boffey, “Stab in the Back’: French Fury as Australia Scraps Submarine Deal”, *The Guardian*, September 16, 2021, available at: [www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com).

3. *France’s Indo-Pacific Strategy*, Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, February 2022.

4. K. Willsher, “Albanese Arrives in France to Heal Rift with Emmanuel Macron”, *The Guardian*, July 1, 2022, available at: [www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com).

5. H. van Leeuwen, “Macron Mulls Trip Down under to Cement Australia-France Rapprochement”, *Financial Review*, September 2, 2022, available at: [www.afr.com](http://www.afr.com).

# Strategic Partnerships with the United States, Australia, and United Kingdom: Bouncing Back

One year after AUKUS, the main objective of France remains to rebuild a strategic dynamic at the Indo-Pacific scale with partners and allies, especially Australia.

## *United States*

The political relations with the US recovered quite quickly. The discussion between Presidents Macron and Biden on October 29<sup>th</sup>, 2021, allowed the bilateral relations to get back on track a few weeks after AUKUS announcement, with the US committing to “*systematic and in-depth consultation and coordination*” and welcoming France and European Union (EU) strategies in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the two allies signed the *Strategic Interoperability Framework* (SIF)<sup>7</sup> in December 2021, to improve interoperability between their navies, with a focused effort on ocean control and power projection. In the Indo-Pacific as in the Atlantic, the relation with the US is thus along the same line as before: a strong partnership, but still a French sense of caution about a too harsh anti-China tone from Washington, as in the context of Freedom of Navigation (FONOPS)<sup>8</sup> in South China Sea. Paris therefore keeps its distance from initiatives such as the QUAD<sup>9</sup> or *Partners in the Blue Pacific* initiative<sup>10</sup>, regionally perceived as anti-China coalitions, favoring an *ad hoc* cooperation rather than a full association.

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This being said, Paris and Washington would have common interests to continue carrying out regular large-scale naval exercises in this region, such as ARC 21 and La Pérouse,<sup>11</sup> and to strengthen interoperability with other regional partners and allies. France could also assume a growing role during the biannual RIMPAC exercise held by US Pacific Fleet in Hawaii, the largest naval exercise worldwide, by deploying at least a multi-mission frigate (FREMM)<sup>12</sup> or an air defense frigate (FDA)<sup>13</sup>, while exercising a

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6. The White House, “United States-France Joint Statement”, October 29, 2021, available at: [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov).

7. X. Vavasseur, “French Navy Ink Strategic Interoperability Framework”, *Naval News*, December 18, 2021, available at: [www.navalnews.com](http://www.navalnews.com).

8. US Department of Defense, Freedom of Navigation Report Annual Release, April 1, 2022 available at: [www.defense.gov](http://www.defense.gov).

9. The White House, “Fact Sheet: Quad Leaders’ Tokyo Summit 2022”, May 23, 2022, available at: [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov).

10. Launched on June 24, 2022, without the French support. This is an informal group aimed at strengthening the economic and diplomatic relations with Pacific Island nations in through three pillars: Climate and energy, Infrastructure, including transport and communication, and Maritime security, including illegal fishing.

11. Major naval exercises carried out respectively off Japan and in the Bay of Bengal in 2021.

12. Multi-mission frigate “Aquitaine” class.

13. Air defense frigate “Chevalier Paul” class.

more important level of commitment and responsibility<sup>14</sup> as the command of one of the naval *Task groups*. Such a level of commitment in Asia-Pacific area would reflect both France's level of naval warfare expertise and the symbol of its desire for a stronger partnership with traditional allies.

## **United Kingdom**

Although the alliance remains strong, the relationship with the United Kingdom is accustomed to political ups and downs. It has suffered badly from Brexit, contentious issues abound from fishing to migrants in the Channel – and competition between these two countries remains strong in the Indo-Pacific. In the meantime, at the operational level, military cooperation never really ceased, however: as an example, UK joined *Polaris 21*<sup>15</sup> in Winter 2021, one of the biggest international naval exercises organized by France, a few months after AUKUS.

The new strategic doctrine theorized by the former Prime Minister Boris Johnson (*Global Britain*) marked the return of UK in Asia-Pacific in 2021, with a modest but persistent reinforcement of its naval presence<sup>16</sup>, with two UK offshore patrol vessels (HMS *Spey* and *Tamar*)<sup>17</sup> deployed in Asia Pacific. But, apart from a logistical stopover in French Polynesia,<sup>18</sup> the total absence of operational interaction or coordination of these two patrol vessels with the French warships remains a matter of disappointment. Franco-British rivalry has multiple other dimensions: regional influence, industrial and defense

partnerships, or maritime security leadership. However, UK and France should now find a way to work together more closely in this region, as the stakes are high and their respective capacities obviously insufficient considering the numerous and growing challenges of this region. The participation of a British warship alongside the “*Jeanne d’Arc*” mission would, for example, be an important first step and an important signal given to the countries of the region. The bilateral relationship

should also involve better coordination to carry out certain common patrol activities in the seas of Southeast Asia or in the South Pacific, but also within the framework of training or capacity building activities organized for the benefit of the coastguards or navies in the seas of Southeast Asia or in the South Pacific.

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**UK and France should now find a way to work together more closely in this region**

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14. France usually deploys only a *Floréal*-type frigate from New Caledonia or French Polynesia.

15. K. Willsher, “UK Takes Part in Huge French Naval Exercise to Counter ‘Emerging Threats’”, *The Guardian*, December 5, 2021, available at: [www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com).

16. R. Balletta, “Delivering “Global Britain”—A Naval Perspective”, *Proceedings*, Vol. 147/4/1,418, U.S Naval Institute, April 2021, available at: [www.usni.org](http://www.usni.org).

17. “HMS *Spey* (P234)”, *Wikipedia*, available at: [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org).

18. Tweets written by HMS *Spey* twitter account on February 20, 2022, available at: [www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com).

## Australia

The diplomatic reset in the France-Australia relations followed the Australian general election in May, 2022 and the visit of the new Albanese Prime Minister to Paris on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022. A Joint Statement<sup>19</sup> provided a political impulse to set up a new ambitious roadmap reviving the strategic partnership initially signed in 2016, in which defense and security cooperation is essential. This was highlighted by the visit of the Australian Defense Minister Richard Marles, beginning of September, to the naval base of Brest<sup>20</sup> in Brittany. Meanwhile, Naval Group received a mutually agreed compensation of 555 million euros.<sup>21</sup>

Here again, one should recall that operational cooperation never really ceased during the past year, as the two nations' respective interests, including a contiguous exclusive economic zone (EEZ), are inseparable in the South Pacific. Canberra (along with Wellington) also activated the FRANZ mechanism established in 1992<sup>22</sup> to coordinate with the French Forces and provide an emergency humanitarian assistance to Tonga under Australian coordination<sup>23</sup> after a violent volcanic eruption hit the archipelago in January 2022. While it is obvious that the early termination of the *Future Submarine Program*<sup>24</sup> contract has broken a strong dynamic of cooperation, Australia has nevertheless continued to support the numerous technical stopovers of the French warship *Astrolabe* in Hobart in Tasmania, actively participated in multinational HADR<sup>25</sup> and maritime security exercises, such as *Marara*<sup>26</sup> in May 2022, and continued to join the coordinated maritime patrols in support of the Pacific islands countries (PICs) within the framework of the *Pacific Quadrilateral Defence Coordination Group* (Pacific QUAD).<sup>27</sup> Australia also participated to the first Coastguard seminar organized in Oceania by France in the Pacific

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A Joint Statement provided a political impulse to set up a new ambitious roadmap reviving the strategic partnership

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19. "Joint statement by France and Australia", *Elysée*, June 1, 2022, available at: [www.elysee.fr](http://www.elysee.fr).

20. Ministère des Armées, « France Australie : la Coopération militaire relancée », September 9, 2022, available at: [www.defense.gouv.fr](http://www.defense.gouv.fr).

21. "Submarine Crisis: Australia Agrees to 555 million euros Settlement with France's Naval Group", *Le Monde with AFP*, June 11, 2022, available at: [www.lemonde.fr](http://www.lemonde.fr).

22. Ambassade de France en Nouvelle-Zélande, aux Îles Cook et aux Îles Samoa, "The FRANZ Mechanism for the Regional Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance", available at: [www.nz.ambafrance.org](http://www.nz.ambafrance.org).

23. Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, "Emergency Humanitarian Assistance to Tonga – Joint Statement from FRANZ", January 31, 2022, available at: [www.diplomatie.gouv.fr](http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr).

24. Q. Do, "The Future Submarine Program and the Role of Systems Engineering", *Australian Defence Magazine*, May 21, 2020, available at: [www.australiandefence.com](http://www.australiandefence.com).

25. Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief.

26. Marine Nationale, "Marara 2022 : Manœuvre logistique des forces armées en Polynésie française pour l'exercice multinational", May 13, 2022, available at: [www.defense.gouv.fr](http://www.defense.gouv.fr).

27. Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, "Relations bilatérales Nouvelle-Zélande", *France Diplomatie*, available at: [www.diplomatie.gouv.fr](http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr).



in October 2021, following the France-Oceania Summit decisions in July 2021.<sup>28</sup> The next exercises (Talisman Saber and Croix du Sud in 2023) should also enable France and Australia to increase their ability to work together and demonstrate, to the regional countries, a desire for a stronger commitment in Asia-Pacific.

New ambitions could also be considered, such as bilateral patrols in the Southeast Asia Seas, joint and concerted capacity building activities with PICs and Southeast Asia Navies and Coastguards. Some regular exchanges of Navy and Coastguard officers during further naval deployments in the Asia-Pacific region, as during the *Indo-Pacific Endeavour* (IPE) Australian deployment and/or the regular interaction or integration of an Australian warship during the next deployments of the French carrier battle group or the “Jeanne d’Arc” mission would also be avenues for closer cooperation. The French posture in the new context of *Partners in the Blue Pacific*, for which France has chosen to be a simple observer, should also be clarified, so that the bilateral relationship can move forward.

## Facing Together the Many Common Challenges in the Pacific

### *Chinese Expansion in the Region*

Historically linked to the United States, Australia and New Zealand, PICs are increasingly coveted by China, which is deploying hybrid strategies to gain an increasing influence in the region.<sup>29</sup> China seeks indeed to develop access to break the geostrategic constraint of the three chains of islands and to gain strategic depth.<sup>30</sup> The second Chinese objective of such an active behavior in the Pacific Islands region is diplomatic. Since the 1970s-1980s, Beijing and Taipei have been vying for the support of PICs.<sup>31</sup> In recent years, China has embarked on a diplomatic offensive of PICs through the so-called checkbook diplomacy – offering financial aid or loan facility to build or renovate infrastructure, notably through the Belt and Road initiative.<sup>32</sup> In 2019, the Solomon Islands and Kiribati Islands terminated their recognition of Taiwan in favor of China. To rally the PICs to its camp, the Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi recently made a diplomatic tour of the PICs, during which Beijing proposed to sign a *China-Pacific Five-Year Action Plan for Common Development*, focusing on security, economy, health, and climate change. If China failed to have this plan signed, Wang Yi’s visit enabled the signing of 52 bilateral agreements with various Pacific

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28. Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, “Final Declaration – 5<sup>th</sup> France-Oceania Summit”, *France Diplomacy*, July 19, 2021, available at: [www.diplomatie.gouv.fr](http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr).

29. B. Chellaney, “China’s Global Hybrid War”, *The Strategist*, December 10, 2021, available at: [www.aspistrategist.org](http://www.aspistrategist.org).

30. K. Needham, “Pacific Islands a Key U.S. Military Buffer to China’s Ambitions, Report Says”, *Reuters*, September 20, 2022, available at: [www.reuters.com](http://www.reuters.com).

31. As of October 2022, 13 countries and Vatican City have recognized Taiwan as a sovereign country.

32. X. Lang, “What Can We Learn from China’s Military Aid to the Pacific?”, *SIPRI*, June 20, 2022, available at: [www.sipri.org](http://www.sipri.org).

countries.<sup>33</sup> In response, the United States announced on September 29<sup>th</sup> a new strategy in the Pacific,<sup>34</sup> accompanied by 810 million dollars<sup>35</sup> in aid to support the PICs maritime security (to fight against illegal fishing in particular), climate resilience and economic development. While Paris has not shown a strong reaction to the Chinese advance to the region, some concerns about the predatory attitude of Beijing in the region has however been growing, as demonstrated by several declarations of President Macron.<sup>36</sup>

## ***Climate Change and the Challenges Facing the Oceans***

Climate change is a risk multiplier, seen by the PICs as an existential threat second to none. Some territories will indeed be chronically submerged from 2030, with scenarios of increased climatic migratory flows. In recent years, Pacific countries have witnessed the deadly combination of more intense storms and cyclones, sea level rise, ocean warming and acidification – and a process of accelerated erosion and submersion of the lowest coastal areas.<sup>37</sup> Rising level already impacts the 118 islands of French Polynesia to various degrees depending on whether it is atolls or high islands, and in the next 60 years models envision up to 11% loss of French islands land surface.<sup>38</sup> While geopolitical rivalries complicate international cooperation, Australia and France have an essential role to play in coordinating their mitigation and adaptation strategies in the Oceanian region. The numerous declarations of the member countries of the Pacific Islands Forum, the Climate Vulnerable Forum, the AOSIS countries (Alliance of Small Island States), regularly recall the existential nature of the climate challenge. The climate issue is very present in French diplomatic rhetoric and one of the priorities, as demonstrated by the “*One Ocean Summit*”<sup>39</sup> held in Brest in February 2022 or by its candidacy to host the next

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Geopolitical rivalries  
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to tackle transnational  
challenges

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33. M. Julienne, “Un coup d’épée dans l’océan. La tournée de Wang Yi dans le Pacifique insulaire”, *Lettre du Centre Asie*, No. 97, Ifri, June 3, 2022.

34. *Pacific Partnership Strategy of the United States*, The White House, September 2022.

35. The new funding includes monies for initiatives already in the pipeline, capped by a 10-year US\$600 million Economic Assistance Agreement pending in the Congress for cleaning dirty waters under the South Pacific Tuna Treaty.

36. “*In this region of the globe, China is building its hegemony step by step. [...] We should work with China [...] to intensify exchanges and seize all the opportunities, but if we don’t organize ourselves, it will soon be a hegemony that will reduce our freedoms, our opportunities and that we will have to endure.*” Speech of French President Emmanuel Macron on New Caledonia in Noumea, May 5, 2018, available at: [www.elysee.fr](http://www.elysee.fr).

Referring to China without naming it, in Papeete: “*But I tell you very clearly, in the times that are opening up, woe to the little ones, woe to the isolated, woe to those who will have to endure influence and incursions of hegemony that will come to seek their fish, their technologies, their economic resources.*”, Speech of French President Emmanuel Macron in Papeete, Tahiti, July 28, 2021, available at: [www.elysee.fr](http://www.elysee.fr).

37. “One Ocean Summit: An International Summit to Take Action Together”, *Campus France*, February 15, 2022, available at: [www.campusfrance.org](http://www.campusfrance.org).

38. C. Bellard, C. Leclerc and F. Courchamp, “Potential Impact of Sea Level Rise on French Islands Worldwide”, *Nature Conservation*, No. 5, 2013, pp. 75-86, available at: [www.doi.org](http://www.doi.org).

39. « One Ocean Summit », *One Planet Summit*, February 11, 2022, available at: [www.oneplanetsummit.fr](http://www.oneplanetsummit.fr).

United Nations conference on the oceans in 2025. Two other major Indo-Pacific countries, the United States and Australia, are also committed to the fight for the climate, and the new orientations taken by the Albanese and Biden administration in this region should now facilitate a stronger coordination with France. France, the French Pacific Territories, Australia, New Zealand and the U.S. are founding members of both the Pacific Community and the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Program (SPREP) which run important programs and actions that benefit the Pacific Islands and their people.

## **Maritime Security**

Maritime security includes the protection of vessels against terrorism, piracy, robbery, but also tackles trafficking of goods and people, illegal fishing, risks over biodiversity and maritime pollution. The South China Sea remains a hot spot, complicated by the multiplicity of stakeholders and the absence of a regional fisheries organization or the conclusion of any code of conduct,<sup>40</sup> with high risk of uncontrolled or miscalculated escalation. Illegal, unregulated, and unreported (IUU) fishing is already a growing concern in the Pacific Islands region<sup>41</sup>: as the South China Sea halieutic resources are gradually depleting,<sup>42</sup> Pacific countries see fishermen – often accompanied by militias and coastguard vessels – moving to more promising waters, such as in their own EEZs, which contribute to raise tensions in the region.<sup>43</sup>

The French sovereignty forces in the Indo-Pacific will be better equipped in the coming years to face these multiple maritime security challenges, thanks to the delivery by 2025 of six new overseas patrol boats,<sup>44</sup> the arrival of new surveillance aircraft between 2024 and 2030 with the AVSIMAR program.<sup>45</sup>

## **Seabed**

The regulation of the seabed domain and mining<sup>46</sup> is the next important issue to deal with, along with the protection of the submarine infrastructure network. Indeed, the rupture of a submarine cable in Tonga in January 2022 during the tsunami – and the recent

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40. V. Hoang, “The Code of Conduct for the South China Sea: A Long and Bumpy Road”, *The Diplomat*, September 28, 2020, available at: [www.thediplomat.com](http://www.thediplomat.com).

41. M. Wall, “Satellites Uncover Widespread Illegal Fishing in Pacific Ocean”, *Space.com*, July 22, 2020, available at: [www.space.com](http://www.space.com).

42. A. Salleh, “The South China Sea: Preventing the Tyranny of the Commons”, *The Diplomat*, January 4, 2020, available at: [www.thediplomat.com](http://www.thediplomat.com).

43. D. Southerland, “Chinese Overfishing in the South Pacific Devastates Some Islands’ Livelihoods”, *Pasifika Environews*, April 9, 2021, available at: [www.pasifika.news](http://www.pasifika.news).

44. L. Lagneau, “Destiné à la Marine nationale, le premier patrouilleur de la classe ‘Félix Éboué’ entame ses essais en mer”, *Opex360*, July 27, 2022, available at: [www.opex360.com](http://www.opex360.com).

45. “Falcon 2000MRA”, *Dassault Aviation*, available at: [www.dassault-aviation.com](http://www.dassault-aviation.com).

46. The report emphasizes the need to conduct a policy dedicated to the seabed, in order to provide France with a long-term strategy that will allow it to develop technological and industrial resources comparable to other major maritime states: [www.defense.gouv.fr](http://www.defense.gouv.fr).



cyberattack on an underwater cable off the coast of Hawaii<sup>47</sup> – are reminders of the dependence to and vulnerability of these infrastructure for digital connectivity, especially in an area so exposed to climate change effects.<sup>48</sup> This could encourage France to work together with Australia on a converging approach regarding seabed exploration in Pacific Ocean. We can also emphasize the importance of laying new cables as duplication is essential to ensure a sustainable and secured connectivity. French company Alcatel Submarine Networks is one of the main cable's firms in the Pacific but has also to face a trilateral partnership for infrastructures set up by Japan, the US and Australia in 2018, very active in submarine cables.<sup>49</sup> As strategic national interests to counterbalance China in the region converge, a rapprochement with regional partners in this area of cooperation could also be a welcomed development.

## Conclusion

France's strategic ambition in the Indo-Pacific remains that of acting as a "balancing power".<sup>50</sup> Despite multiple naval and aerial exercises,<sup>51</sup> demonstrating its resolve and capacity to deploy quickly in the region in a time of emergency, tyranny of distance is still limiting what Paris can do if any conflict arises in Asia-Pacific. The priority for France if any high-intensity conflict were to emerge in Indo-Pacific would obviously be to protect the integrity of French territories, the 1.6 million French people living in the region, as well as the crucially important sea lanes of communication, but also to maintain political and strategic credibility with regional actors. It is also very likely that a conflict in this region will lead the US to partially disengage from some other operational theatres, such as in the Mediterranean Sea or the Indian Ocean. In such a context, France could then, in cooperation with its allies and partners and while assuming a leading role, deploy a dedicated *Task Group* in one of these regions to fill the gap induced by the US reduced presence.

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47. S. Bodon, "Investigators Halt Hawai'i Underwater Cable Cyberattack", *Hawaii Public Radio*, April 13, 2022, available at: [www.hawaiipublicradio.org](http://www.hawaiipublicradio.org).

48. C. Morel, "The Pacific Caught in the World Wide Web? Geopolitics of Submarine Cables in Oceania", *Études de l'Ifri*, Ifri, September 2022.

49. W. Qiu, "US-Japan-Australia Trilateral Partnership for Indo-Pacific Infrastructure Investment", *Submarine Cable Networks*, March 29, 2021, available at: [www.submarinenetworks.com](http://www.submarinenetworks.com).

50. C. Pajon, "France: the Leading European Power in the Indo-Pacific" in: J. Bowen (ed.), *Europe's Indo-Pacific Embrace: Global Partnerships Pour Regional Resilience*, Perth US-Asia Center/Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, September 16, 2021.

51. K. Moriyasu, "Europe Sends Air Power to Indo-Pacific after Flexing Naval Muscle", *Nikkei Asia*, September 12, 2022, available at: [www.asia.nikkei.com](http://www.asia.nikkei.com).

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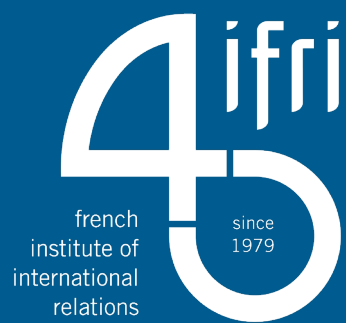
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