

Appendix

France's Military Presence and Naval Deployments in the Asia-Pacific

This Appendix provides further details on French military capabilities and security partnerships in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Specifically, it focuses on France's (1) forward deployed forces, (2) naval deployments and (3) participation in regional multilateral security regimes.

1. Forward Deployed Forces in the Indian and Pacific Oceans Regions

France maintains 'sovereignty forces' deployed in its overseas territories and 'presence forces' stationed in countries with which it has defence agreements.

French sovereign forces are located in the southern quadrant of the Indian Ocean and in the South Pacific. The Armed Forces in the South Indian Ocean Zone (*Les Forces armées dans la zone sud de l'Océan Indien*, FASZOI) are divided between La Réunion and Mayotte islands. FASZOI deploy 2 surveillance frigates (each one equipped with 1 helicopter), 1 multi-mission ship, 2 patrol vessels and 2 tactical transport aircrafts (2019 data).¹ In the Pacific Ocean, the French Armed Forces in New Caledonia (*Forces armées de la Nouvelle-Calédonie*, FANC) and in French Polynesia (*Forces armées de Polynésie française*, FAPF) operate 2 surveillance frigates (equipped with 1 helicopter each), 3 patrol vessels, 2 multi-mission ships, 5 maritime surveillance aircrafts, 4 tactical transport aircrafts and 5 helicopters.²

Likewise, Paris maintains 'presence forces' in the northern quadrant of the Indian Ocean, and specifically in the United Arab Emirates (*Forces françaises aux Émirats arabes unis*, FFEAU) and in Djibouti (*Forces*

¹ MoD, *France and Security in the Indo-Pacific*, 2019b, p. 6.

² Ibid.

françaises à Djibouti, FFDj)—fielding 6 multirole Rafale combat aircraft (in the UAE), 4 Mirage-2000 combat aircraft (in Djibouti), 8 helicopters and 1 tactical transport aircraft.³ France also deploys space capabilities that, although not exclusively devoted to the Indian and Pacific Oceans, have significant applications therein. In addition to their military and intelligence applications, space capabilities complement French naval forces in monitoring France’s vast EEZ in these oceans.⁴ Likewise, France retains a network of communications interception stations in Mayotte, La Réunion, New Caledonia and French Polynesia.⁵

2. Naval Deployments

French-US Naval Deployments

Paris and Washington have bolstered their operational cooperation by increasing the number of combined deployments in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. In 2015, France deployed a carrier strike group in the Indian Ocean named Task Group (TG) 473—formed around the aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle and placed for several months under American operational control—for the mission Arromanches 2 (2015); this mission was followed by an additional Task Force (TG) 473 deployment in 2019 (for the mission Clémenceau).⁶ In 2017, the Task Group (TG) amphibious 473.01, built around the amphibious landing ship Tonnerre, was deployed in the Indian Ocean for the mission Bois Belleau 100. US Marines were embarked aboard the Tonnerre under the command of a French officer supported by a Franco-American combined staff.⁷ Furthermore, the Jeanne d’Arc mission embarked several dozen US Marines in 2017 and 2018.⁸

French-UK Naval Deployments

France and the UK have similarly sought to expand their naval cooperation in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. In 2017, for instance, two Merlin helicopters from the Royal Navy and a detachment of sixty British Navy personnel were included on board of the helicopter carrier Mistral for the duration of the Mission Jeanne d’Arc.⁹

³ Ibid.

⁴ See, e.g., French Ministry of Armed Forces, Written Answer to French MP of Wallis-and-Futuna, French National Assembly, 16 January 2018e; and French Chief of the Navy Staff, Christophe Prazuck, Testimony before the National Assembly’s Committee on National Defence and Armed Forces, 3 October 2019, pp. 16-17.

⁵ Jean-Marc Manach, ‘Comment on peut, en trois clics, découvrir la carte des stations d’écoute des espions de la DGSE’, *Slate*, 7 May 2014.

⁶ MoD, *Mission Arromanches 2*, Press kit, <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/content/download/420906/6461226/dossier%20de%20presse%20arromanches-GAN.pdf>; MoD, *Mission Arromanches 3*, Press kit, <https://www.colsbleus.fr/exemplaires/8897>; MoD, *Opération Clémenceau*, Press kit, 4 March 2019c.

⁷ MoD, *Bois Belleau 100*, Press Kit, <https://www.colsbleus.fr/exemplaires/10196>.

⁸ MoD, *Mission Jeanne d’Arc’ 2017*, Press kit, <http://www.colsbleus.fr/exemplaires/9349>; MoD, *Mission Jeanne d’Arc’ 2018*, Press kit, <http://www.colsbleus.fr/exemplaires/10416>.

⁹ French Embassy in Malaysia, ‘Military Cooperation Campaign “Jeanne d’Arc 2017”’, 25 September 2017.

That same year, France and the UK also jointly assumed command of the Combined Task Force 150 (CTF 150), a multinational mission for combating terrorism and illicit traffic in the Indian Ocean, with a force consisting of frigates from France (*Surcouf* and *Nivôse*), the UK (*HMS Monmouth*) and Australia (*HMAS Arunta*), as well as by US naval reinforcements (with the cruisers *USS Truxtun*, *USS Hué City* and the dock-landing ship *USS Carter Hall*).¹⁰ In 2018, the Royal Navy Wildcats helicopters deployed for 5 months on the helicopter carrier *Dixmude*, as part of the Jeanne d'Arc mission, to the Asia-Pacific region (together with fifty US Marines).¹¹ Thereafter, Royal Navy (RN) ships continued to support the Charles de Gaulle aircraft carrier on operations in the Indian Ocean and UK personnel to serve and train on the Charles de Gaulle.¹² For instance, in July 2018, RN ships joined a French Navy task group for a deployment in the South China Sea.¹³

France's Approach to Naval Deployments and FONOPs

The procedures followed by French deployments differ from those of US so-called freedom of navigation operations (FONOPs). France's approach to naval deployments rests on two main principles.

First, France follows the official guideline provided by then Minister of Defence, Jean-Yves Le Drian, at the 2016 Shangri-La Dialogue. He indicated that France would continue to sail “her ships and flying her aircraft wherever *international law allows* and *operational needs require*” (emphasis added).¹⁴ Accordingly, the French Navy could in principle conduct naval deployments inside the 12 nautical miles (nm) around contested islets in the South China Sea (that the PRC considers as its territorial sea) as provided for by UNCLOS. However, since no specific operational need has required France to do so, the French Navy has so far sailed outside the 12 nm demarcation around contested islets in the South China Sea. Second, unlike the US, the French government does not publicize the transits of its military vessels in the South China Sea (and does not refer to its naval deployments in the region as *operations* or FONOPs).¹⁵

Through this policy of “constructive ambiguity,”¹⁶ France aims to balance different interests. For one, it seeks to uphold freedom of navigation and, more broadly, international law. At the same time, it aims to retain room for manoeuvre to decide whether and when to deploy within the 12 nm demarcation around contested islets in the South China Sea. According to a report of the French National Assembly, this approach to naval deployments also reflects the desire to avoid tensions with the PRC and to maintain a stable and

¹⁰ MoD, ‘CTF 150 : Rôle, moyens et missions’, SIRPA Marine, 7 June 2017b.

¹¹ UK MoD, ‘Military Cooperation: United Kingdom and France’, 18 January 2018a, pp. 4-5.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Wesley Rahn, ‘South China Sea: France and Britain Join the US to Oppose China’, *Deutsche Welle*, 27 June 2018.

¹⁴ Minister of Defence Jean-Yves Le Drian, Speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue, Singapore, 5 June 2016a.

¹⁵ By contrast, the US Navy transits within 12 nm from these contested islets and publicizes its FONOPS through public speeches and reports, such as the Pentagon’s *Annual Freedom of Navigation Report*. It does so with the goal of upholding freedom of navigation and international law (although Washington did not ratify UNCLOS) and of challenging Beijing’s excessive maritime claims. Eleanor Freund, ‘Freedom of Navigation in the South China Sea: A Practical Guide’, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, June 2017; and US DoD, ‘DoD Annual Freedom of Navigation (FON) Reports’, <https://policy.defense.gov/OUSDP-Offices/FON>.

¹⁶ Former MoD official, interview, Paris, 12 May 2020.

predictable partnership with Beijing.¹⁷ Paris thereby seeks to display its support for international law and retain operational flexibility while avoiding actions deemed provocative which could destabilize its relationship with China.

This approach to naval deployments is consistent with France’s diplomatic position with regards to the territorial disputes in the South China Sea. For one, France does not take part in these territorial disputes, maintaining a position of neutrality. This is also meant to ensure that Paris does not wish to get drawn into such disputes because of its colonial past. In the 1930s, as a colonial power in Indochina, France had asserted sovereignty over the Paracel and the Spratley archipelagoes].¹⁸ Furthermore, France emphasizes that these disputes must be resolved through diplomatic and peaceful means—and not by *fait accompli* tactics—and so as to ensure freedom of navigation.¹⁹

Methodological Note on the Data on Naval Deployments

The source used to gather data on French naval deployments in the Indian and Pacific Oceans (Figure 1 and Table 1) is the French Navy magazine *Cols Bleus*. Data were gathered for the 2012-2019 (both included) period. Prior to 2012, data were not included because the magazine listed missions differently (e.g. focus on some major missions, exclusion of smaller and middle-sized missions) which would have prevented comparability over time. The data were organized along the following categories:

- *Mission Statement*. The name of the mission as used in a given issue of the magazine is indicated. Each issue of *Cols Bleus* lists so-called “generic” and “non-generic” missions. Generic missions take place on a regular basis and always under the same mission statement, such as “Maritime Surveillance” or “Fisheries Policing.” Non-generic missions are singular missions that take place either only once or on a six-month, annual or biannual basis, such as the missions “Jeanne D’Arc” or “Bois Belleau” (discussed above), for example. For those missions, complementary information on the respective deployment was found on the website of the French MoD (www.defense.gouv.fr) when searching for the mission statement in combination with the year in which it took place.
- *Type of Ship* involved in a specific mission. Figure 1 does not visualize all French deployments in the region but only those of the French Navy’s capital ships listed in Table 1. This allows to focus on major deployments and to set aside minor deployments, e.g. for hydrographic missions.
- *Name of Ship* as indicated in *Cols Bleus*.
- *End Date of Mission*. In Figure 1, missions are listed based on their end date (rather than their starting date). This was done because some missions start at the end of the year (e.g. November/December) and continue into the following year. In order to avoid listing missions twice, the end date of a mission was therefore used.

¹⁷ National Assembly, *Enjeux stratégiques en mer de Chine méridionale*, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Report no. 1868, 10 April 2019a: p. 56.

¹⁸ After its defeat at Dien Bien Phu, Paris withdrew from Southeast Asia in 1956 disentangling herself from territorial disputes with Beijing. On France’s involvement in territorial disputes in the South China Sea, see Thi Lan Anh Nguyen, ‘Origins of the South China Sea Dispute’, in *Territorial Disputes in the South China Sea: Navigating Rough Waters*, edited by Jing Huang and Andrew Billo (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 15-35; and Monique Chemillier-Gendreau, *La souveraineté sur les archipels Paracels et Spratleys* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2000).

¹⁹ National Assembly, 2019a, pp. 12 and 53.

- *Nationality of Deployment.* For vessels from other European countries and the US that conducted deployments with the French Navy in the Indian and Pacific Oceans, their nationality is indicated based upon the Correlates of War country codes.
- *Indian and Pacific Oceans.* The location of the mission as shown in the *Cols Bleus* is indicated, i.e. whether each ship transits through the Indian and/or Pacific Ocean.

3. Engaging Multilateral Security Regimes

In addition to the Shangri-La and the Raisina Dialogues (discussed in the paper), France joined the South Pacific Defence Ministers Meeting (SPDMM), created in 2013, which biannually gathers the defence ministers to discuss security threats in the South Pacific (with Australia, Chile, Fiji, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Tonga).²⁰

The French Chief of Defence Staff annually participates in the Asia-Pacific Chiefs of Defence Conference (CHOD), the meeting of the chiefs of staff of the Pacific nations, representing approximately thirty countries.²¹ France is also the only permanent European member of the Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS), the biannual meeting of the regional chiefs of the naval staff, as well as of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), the WPNS' equivalent for the Indian Ocean.²² WPNS and IONS provide a framework to foster regional cooperation, interoperability and information sharing in the area of maritime security.²³

Below the Chief of Defence Staff level, other French military officers participate in a wide range of regional fora such as the annual meeting of heads of military intelligence in the region (the Asia-Pacific Intelligence Chiefs Conference, APICC, together with the UK and US) or in minilateral grouping. The latter include the Quadrilateral Defence Coordination Group (QUAD)—with the US, Australia and New Zealand—focused on maritime security in the South Pacific, and FRANZ, the trilateral arrangement between France, Australia and New Zealand tasked with bolstering cooperation in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) in the South Pacific.²⁴ In 2019, France also became observer member of the Heads of Asian Coast Guard Agencies Meeting (HACGAM).²⁵

²⁰ See for instance, MoD, 'Pacifique : la coopération multilatérale au cœur du South Pacific Defence Ministers' Meeting', *Opérations*, 7 May 2013b; South Pacific Defence Ministers Meeting (SPDMM), 'Joint Communiqué', 8-10 May 2019.

²¹ MoD, 'Participation de l'amiral ALPACI au CHOD : 'Securing A Free and Open Indo-Pacific'', *Opérations*, 3 October 2018d. See also Prashanth Parameswaran, 'How Does the Indo-Pacific Defence Chiefs Conference Fit into Asia's Security Landscape?', *The Diplomat*, 3 September 2019b.

²² Senate, 2016, p. 43. The United Kingdom is an observer state within WPNS.

²³ Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS), 'Business Charter', September 2010, p. 2; Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), 'Working Groups', <http://www.ions.global/ions-working-groups>.

²⁴ Senate, *Australie*, 2016: p. 43; MoD, *France and Security in the Indo-Pacific*, 2018c, p. 7.

²⁵ MFA. 'The Indo-Pacific : A Priority for France, April 2021a, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/asia-and-oceania/the-indo-pacific-region-a-priority-for-france/>.

Paris further maintains liaison officers in various functional organizations dedicated to the surveillance of maritime spaces and sea lines of communication of the Indian and Pacific Oceans, namely the Information Fusion Centre in Singapore, the Regional Centre for the Fusion of Maritime Information (CRFIM), in Madagascar, and the Information Fusion Center/Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) located in New Delhi.²⁶ Paris has also sought to join, unsuccessfully so far, two working groups of the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM+) as well as the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP).

²⁶ MoD, 2018c, p. 6.