



**MINISTÈRE  
DES ARMÉES**

*Liberté  
Égalité  
Fraternité*

SHANGRI-LA DIALOGUE SPEECH OF SEBASTIEN LECORNU, FRENCH MINISTER  
OF THE ARMED FORCES, ON JUNE 11, 2022

*The spoken text shall prevail.*

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Ladies and gentlemen Ministers,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am very happy to be with you this morning. I want to thank the International Institute for Strategic Studies for organising such an essential forum, as well as our hosts – Singapore – a key stakeholder of the Indopacific and a strategic partner for France. I want to salute my Indonesian and Japanese colleagues with whom I am delighted to discuss today.

This dialogue platform is more necessary than ever. Our strategic environment is daily more constrained and polarized, and this, at a time when we need cooperation and cohesion.

France is a resident nation in the Indopacific. This means that our engagement in this vast region is one of the intangible elements of our sovereignty and of our defence and security policy. To put it simply, your stakes are our stakes.

This is the obvious reason for my presence here, a few days only after my appointment. And this is also the reason why our presidency of the Council of the European Union has strongly promoted concrete actions for the benefit of this region. This requires well-balanced, reciprocal partnerships, marked by trust, and covering areas of expertise of the EU such as maritime security, connectivity, cybersecurity and the fight against disinformation.

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*[The dynamics in the region]*

First of all, I want to recall a double reality that the Russian aggression against Ukraine brought to light: the threats against the security of Europe are threats for the rest of the world. Conversely, the security threat elsewhere in the world continues to be a priority for Europe. In that respect, the Indopacific plays a key role to preserve the fragile balances of the world, for global economy and for the security of the supply chains. The coronavirus pandemic has helped us realise that. Preserving these balances is especially important for us.

The invasion of Ukraine however places a fundamental challenge at the centre of the concerns for the international order. I want of course to speak about the use of force in obvious violation of the international laws. This directly threatens the security of all the States which, everywhere in the world, build their security on the basis of the law and the respect of their commitments. We do not want the illegal use of the force and of the threat to become a new standard, especially when this is associated with revisionist or expansionist aims.

Beyond this key challenge, we are facing three main stakes in the geopolitical rivalries in the Asia-Pacific area.

First of all competition between powers increasingly takes various shapes and is getting tougher, with economic, technological but also military dimensions. The reemergence of tensions in the China Sea, and the threats they represent for the access to the common areas bear testimony of that. I would also like to recall our attachment to peace and stability in the strait of Taiwan, where a crisis could have devastating consequences for all, even beyond the region. Hybrid strategies develop, and they have a genuine destabilizing effect. They make conflictuality even more complex, when we can brutally switch from competition to dispute or even confrontation, especially using civilian assets to produce military effects.

Then, the collective response mechanisms are fragilized and the multilateral forums are often questioned. Using multilateralism and *fait accompli* can especially be seen in the acceleration of the arms race and in the increased risk of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. We cannot reconcile ourselves to do that. This is an old French position.

**Finally, this power competition comes along other security challenges:** predation of the resources, especially fishing ones; consequences of the dramatic climate changes, with terrible natural disasters; fragility of the supply chains. These phenomena, against which the answer is bound to be collective, first strike the most fragile populations. France, aware owing to its overseas territories, of the specificities of island and coastal territories, will stand by all the countries to face them.

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*[What France defends and does to meet this context]*

**France is experiencing very directly the consequences of these tensions, as a nation of the Indopacific, since 2 million French citizens** live in the Réunion Island, Mayotte, French Polynesia, Wallis-and-Futuna and New-Caledonia. I know these fellow citizens very well, since I have been the Minister for Overseas territories for two years, during which I have worked on the regional integration of these territories, in the interest of our fellow citizens and of our partners in the region, through existing organisations such as the Pacific Island Forum and the Pacific community.

**To meet some of these security stakes, we have implemented a defence strategy in the Indopacific, initiated by President Macron in 2018.** Regularly adapted to the new challenges since then, it is aimed, beyond our sovereignty stakes, at defending multilateralism, international rules, the freedom of access to the common areas, a collective and inclusive approach to the security challenges, including those linked to environment and the climate.

**This strategy concretely relies on permanent and significant military assets deployed in the area.** They are, naturally, our French sovereignty forces, constantly present in our overseas territories in the Indopacific, and our presence forces in Djibouti and the United Arab Emirates, which represent more than 700 soldiers. These capabilities operate in the entire Asia-Pacific area and have many supporting points that we developed and will consolidate with our partners in the region. In that respect, I want to thank my colleagues ministers present here today. To give you an example, in 2021, we managed to deploy an attack submarine for many months in that area. The Jeanne d'Arc amphibious group went as far as Japan. A rafale fighter set up, taking off from mainland France, was deployed within a few hours as far as French Polynesia. France thus has an intervention capability over the entire area and develops the interoperability of its forces with those of our partners, especially the US ones. It does so with a constant concern: respecting the sovereignty of each State and developing strong partnerships with a number of countries I have the pleasure of seeing represented here.

**I can assure you that this commitment of the French armed forces will continue tomorrow. For instance, this year, an air power projection will start from France to carry out a sovereignty mission in the Pacific. It will be Mission Pégase 22.** Our forces will continue to fulfil their various operational missions and to participate in the major multilateral exercises of the area. They will organize exercises themselves. They will thus keep a significant presence in the region to show France's attachment to the stability of the Asia-Pacific region.

**France will continue to reinforce and modernize our capabilities with the deployment, by the year 2025, of 6 new ocean patrol vessels in the Indopacific, including two already this year in the Pacific, one based in New Caledonia and the other in French Polynesia.** These patrol ships will carry out surveillance and sovereignty missions. Along the same line, the 5 Falcons of the Pacific will be replaced by 5 new and more modern aircraft.

**This commitment is cooperative by essence. The French strategy in the Indopacific is not aimed against any State. It is implemented in full association with the other States in the area. France participates in the stability of the region by developing partnerships, the objective being to build, together, more autonomy and development.** These partnerships are not aimed at fueling tensions but, quite conversely, at making sure that each State can contribute to a regional security architecture. Since we are here in Singapore, I want to salute the all defence and security partnership we have forged. We are going to further strengthen through the signature, today, of a mutual logistic support agreement.

**This commitment is, by essence, responsible and collective.** As a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, France takes its part in the fight against global threats, proliferation being the first among them. It is involved in the negotiations about the Iranian nuclear capabilities. It participates in the implementations of the United Nations sanctions against North Korea. As president of the Council of the European Union, France gave a concrete impulse in order for the Union to be a provider of security in the Indopacific, especially regarding maritime security, with the setting up of the coordinated maritime presence in the Indian ocean. This commitment towards the region was confirmed in the European Union's Strategic Compass, the 1<sup>st</sup> White Paper on Defence that the Union has just adopted.

The European Union / China summit which was held in April is an example of the inclusive approach of the European Union's strategy in the Indopacific, through a demanding, well-balanced and lucid dialogue.

We persistently support the various security mechanisms promoted by the countries in the region, from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific. In South-East Asia, France remains attached to the central role of the ASEAN. This is the reason why it would like to join the ADMM+ to provide its expertise in key domains such as maritime security or peace keeping.

In the South Pacific, France is totally committed alongside island countries: be it in the field of population relief after natural disasters or in that of the fight against illegal, undeclared and non-regulated fishing. We carry this commitment out especially in the framework of the Pacific QUAD and the FRANZ partnership which are especially efficient.

**Faithfull to its multilateral approach respecting the sovereignty of all, France does not want to join one side or the other**, it made the choice of abiding by the law, the only option to ensure security and peace.

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Ladies and gentlemen,

I hereby reaffirm France's conviction: the challenges induced by geopolitical rivalries in a multipolar region require an inclusive and multilateral response, based on the respect of the law. The problems in the Indopacific region are also the problems of Europe and it goes the other way round as well. We can work together to solve them. France, whose steadfastness and reliability are known by its partners, already contributes to that and will resolutely continue to do so.

Thank you for your attention.