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Will the EU take view of the Indo-Pacific?

Comparing France's and Germany's approaches

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Will the EU take view of the Indo-Pacific?

For the past few years, the term Indo-Pacific has increasingly come to supplant the previously common term of Asia-Pacific. The term Indo-Pacific itself, however, is not simply a geographical reference to the ‘confluence of the two seas’, the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, as former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe put it. The term itself is laden with geopolitical references. In particular, the Trump administration’s “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” concept aims to contain China and is thus an expression of the growing strategic rivalry between Washington and Beijing. In Beijing, “Indo-Pacific” is primarily perceived as a U.S.-led containment strategy directed against China. As such, it is first and foremost a political term and therefore neither purely descriptive nor value-neutral.

Hence, there has been much debate in Europe over, firstly, the meaning and usage of the term itself at member state level. France, for quite some time, stood alone by using the term “Indo-Pacific” and also by publishing a number of strategic documents outlining her Indo-Pacific strategy. Other EU member states, including, *inter alia*, Germany and the Netherlands, seemed wary of its usage due to its particular geopolitical connotations or at least indifferent to the idea. And, secondly, France essentially pushed for the adoption of the term at the European level as well as for a European Indo-Pacific strategy thereby triggering a debate at the European level on whether the EU should develop its own Indo-Pacific strategy.¹ Yet, with Germany in September 2020 and the Netherlands in November 2020 publishing their own national Indo-Pacific strategies, the debate certainly has gained traction in Europe. Even more so, because the governments of France, Germany and the Netherlands have all publicly stated that they would be in favour of an EU strategy on the Indo-Pacific.

In order to assess the likelihood of a possible common EU approach to the Indo-Pacific, it seems necessary to first of all closely analyse and identify strategic convergences and divergences, with regard to the Indo-Pacific

¹ Felix Heiduk and Gudrun Wacker, “From Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific: Significance, Implementation and Challenges” (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, June 2020); Axel Berkofsky and Sergio Miracola, “Geopolitics by Other Means: The Indo-Pacific Reality,” (Rome: ISPI, January 29, 2019), <https://www.ispi-online.it/en/pubblicazione/geopolitics-other-means-indo-pacific-reality-22122>; Garima Mohan, “A European Approach to the Indo-Pacific?” (Berlin: Global Public Policy Institute, August 20, 2020), <https://www.gppi.net/2020/08/20/a-european-approach-to-the-indo-pacific>.

strategic concepts launched by the EU's two biggest member states France and Germany. Strategic convergence is hereby understood as comprising ideational as well as material dimensions. How the term "Indo-Pacific" is conceived in Berlin and Paris, and which underlying ideas on regional order prevail in the respective conceptualisations, therefore matter just as much for our comparative analysis, as do the stated policy goals and objectives as well as the associated initiatives, projects and partners.

We assume that a potential emergence of a European strategy on the Indo-Pacific depends at least partly on the 'compatibility and the coherence'² of the French and the German conceptualisations. This is mainly because post-Brexit the formerly loose diplomatic coalition of the so-called E3 group of major European powers France, Germany and the UK has essentially been transformed into the E2: France and Germany. Across an array of foreign and security issues, the E2 have strongly influenced, at times even driven, European foreign policy making by forming loose, issue-based diplomatic coalitions.³ Duchâtel and Mohan have argued that 'strategic dilution' between Berlin and France could derail moves towards a European strategy on the Indo-Pacific.⁴ This assumption ties in, conceptually speaking, with the scholarly debates on post-Lisbon foreign policy making in the EU. Here, one assertion has been that EU foreign policy making is increasingly characterised by the formation of informal coalitions of like-minded states, often outside of the formal CFSP-institutions, to coordinate their foreign and security policies with the goal of thereby kick-starting Europeanisation processes.

Hence, while the answer to the question in the title of this working paper is unlikely to be a straightforward "yes" or "no", given the flux of the subject matter, we hope to be able to tentatively provide some clues via close examination of the levels of strategic convergence and divergence prevalent in the Indo-Pacific approaches of the "big two", France and Germany.

Cross-loading in post-Lisbon foreign policy making

The as "Europeanisation" or "EU-isation" of foreign policy has been traditionally deemed to consist of two key dynamics: On the one hand, member states were to upload their national foreign policy preferences to the EU level (also referred to as bottom-up Europeanisation). Bottom-up Europeanisation was essentially launched at member state level and then pro-

² Mathieu Duchâtel and Garima Mohan, "Franco-German Divergences in the Indo-Pacific: The Risk of Strategic Dilution" (Paris: Institut Montaigne, October 30, 2020), 2, <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/blog/franco-german-divergences-indo-pacific-risk-strategic-dilution>.

³ Erik Brattberg, "The E3, the EU, and the Post-Brexit Diplomatic Landscape" (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 2020), <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/06/18/e3-eu-and-post-brexit-diplomatic-landscape-pub-82095>.

⁴ Duchâtel and Mohan, "Franco-German Divergences in the Indo-Pacific," 1.

duced changes in Brussels. On the other hand, member states also downloaded policy models and ideas from the EU level to the national level (also referred to as top-down Europeanisation). Top-down Europeanisation therefore took place when ideas and policies emerged in Brussels and subsequently led to changes at the member state level. Most scholars argued that with regard to real world foreign policy making in the European Union, the bottom-up and top-down dimensions were interconnected.⁵ Hence, the Europeanisation of foreign policy is conceived as a process which runs vertically, via practices of uploading and downloading, within the framework of Common Foreign and Security Policy institutions.⁶ In line with these conceptions it has also been assumed that the treaty of Lisbon, through institutional innovations such as the creation of the EEAS (European External Action Service) and the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs, would further boost top-down Europeanisation of foreign-policy making as well as strengthen the EU's ability to speak with one voice in global affairs.⁷

New research on post-Lisbon foreign policy making in the EU, however, has not only challenged previous assumptions over the increased EU actorness in global affairs, but also shown an increased reliance on horizontal practices in EU foreign policy making. This is not exactly a new insight, as Claudia Major has argued as early as 2005 that in addition to vertical practices of uploading and downloading, member states have at all times also engaged simultaneously with other member states horizontally in practices of "cross-loading".⁸ The process of EU foreign policy making therefore is conceived to not only take place vertically between member states and Brussels, but also horizontally between different member states or groups of member states. The latter is not necessarily tied to formal processes and institutions at EU level, as it can take place prior to, around and in EU-led processes and institutions. Aggestam and Bicchi argue that:

"Cross loading' goes beyond the idea of only the EU offering the arena for change and also deals with a 'cross-country', 'cross-institutions' and 'cross-policy' dimension, where domestic change might not only be generated at the EU level but might come indirectly through the transfer of ideas, norms and ways of doing things that

⁵ Reuben Wong, "The Europeanization of Foreign Policy," in *International Relations and the European Union*, ed. Christopher Hill and Michael Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 149–70.

⁶ Eva Gross, *The Europeanization of National Foreign Policy*, Palgrave Studies in European Union Politics (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2009), https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230233850_1; Nicole Alecu de Flers and Patrick Müller, "Dimensions and Mechanisms of the Europeanization of Member State Foreign Policy: State of the Art and New Research Avenues," *Journal of European Integration* 34, no. 1 (January 1, 2012): 19–35, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2011.566330>.

⁷ Simon Duke, "European External Action Service: Antidote against Incoherence," *European Foreign Affairs Review* 17 (2012): 45.

⁸ Claudia Major, "Europeanisation and Foreign and Security Policy – Undermining or Rescuing the Nation State?," *Politics* 25, no. 3 (September 1, 2005): 175–90, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9256.2005.00242.x>.

are exchanged from and with European neighbours, domestic entities or policy areas'.⁹

Additionally, recent scholarship has found that the importance of horizontal cross-loading in post-Lisbon foreign policy making in the EU has grown, thereby challenging traditional conceptions of EU foreign policy making based on vertical forms of uploading and downloading. Case studies have illustrated that EU member states have increasingly relied on horizontal cross-loading, often in informal coalitions of like-minded states and outside of the formal CFSP-institutions, to coordinate their foreign and security policies.¹⁰ Cross-loading takes place in the form of a 'co-constitutive dialogue' which can include agreement, as well as disagreement, 'denial, rejection or transformation' of policies and practices.¹¹ To be sure, often a single member state, or a group of member states, will initiate and lead the process and try to lead, but even at this stage the process itself does usually not involve a straightforward transfer of ideas, policy objectives or practices onto other member states, but rather involves contestation and transformation.

The emerging literature on cross-loading does say little, however, on the scope conditions for such coalitions of like-minded states to emerge and start the process of cross-loading. To this end, we employ insights from the literature on strategic convergence and strategic partnerships. Strategic convergence is said to not only incorporate shared interests across various policy fields, but also a common sense of project and purpose based on shared ideas and norms.¹² We therefore assume that the greater the level of strategic convergence, understood here as the convergence of ideas, interests and policies with regard to stated objectives, the likelier it is that such coalitions of like-minded states emerge as well as succeed in cross-loading.

⁹ Lisbeth Aggestam and Federica Bicchì, "New Directions in EU Foreign Policy Governance: Cross-Loading, Leadership and Informal Groupings," *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 57, no. 3 (2019): 515–32, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12846>.

¹⁰ Anand Menon, "European Defence Policy from Lisbon to Libya," *Survival* 53, no. 3 (2011): 75–90, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2011.586191>.

¹¹ Aggestam and Bicchì, "New Directions in EU Foreign Policy Governance," 517.

¹² Felix Heiduk, "What Is in a Name? Germany's Strategic Partnerships with Asia's Rising Powers," *Asia Europe Journal* 13, no. 2 (June 1, 2015): 131–46, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10308-014-0399-1>; Monica Den Boer and Irina Wiegand, "From Convergence to Deep Integration: Evaluating the Impact of EU Counter-Terrorism Strategies on Domestic Arenas," *Intelligence and National Security* 30, no. 2–3 (May 4, 2015): 377–401, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02684527.2014.988450>; Christoph O. Meyer, "Convergence Towards a European Strategic Culture? A Constructivist Framework for Explaining Changing Norms," *European Journal of International Relations* 11, no. 4 (December 1, 2005): 523–49, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066105057899>; Wyn Rees and Richard J. Aldrich, "Contending Cultures of Counterterrorism: Transatlantic Divergence or Convergence?," *International Affairs* 81, no. 5 (October 2005): 905–23, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2346.2005.00494.x>; David Scott, "The 'Indo-Pacific'—New Regional Formulations and New Maritime Frameworks for US-India Strategic Convergence," *Asia-Pacific Review* 19, no. 2 (November 1, 2012): 85–109, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13439006.2012.738115>; John Dumbrell, *A Special Relationship: Anglo-American Relations from the Cold War to Iraq* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

From Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific: the evolution of a concept

The Indo-Pacific or Indo-Pacific region has enjoyed growing popularity for over ten years as a geographical and strategic construct in the foreign and security policy discourse in Japan, the United States, Australia, India, France and some Southeast Asian states. Many see the Indo-Pacific as a new geographical and strategic frame of reference that has at least partially come to replace the previously dominant Asia-Pacific construct.

The term has found its way into official documents such as national security strategies or defence white papers as well as into the rhetoric of the elites. It is also increasingly being discussed in think tanks and academic institutions. As a result, it has become a kind of 'geopolitical nomenclature'.¹³ Moreover, the Indo-Pacific is currently *the* arena in which the growing rivalry between the United States and China in Asia is being played out. Accordingly, it has gained in importance geopolitically and geo-economically over the last two decades. Moreover, many Asian actors do not perceive it as a "purely" geographical construct but also as an alternative to the Chinese "Belt and Road" Initiative (BRI). Geopolitical and geo-economic aspects are thus closely intertwined in the Indo-Pacific.

In response to China's growing regional influence in general and to the BRI in particular, a number of regional powers have developed alternative concepts under the label "Indo-Pacific". First and foremost, the United States under then President Donald Trump have attempted to respond directly to the perceived Chinese challenge by presenting a strategic concept called the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" (FOIP) as a counter narrative to what Washington perceives as a looming potential Sinocentric reorganisation or restructuring of the region. The FOIP is widely regarded in Washington as a means to rebalance U.S. foreign, security and economic policy towards China. Its main objectives include: providing alternatives to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) for Asian countries, securing freedom of navigation throughout the Indian and Pacific Oceans, the maintenance of the (U.S. dominated) rules-based international order, and free, fair, and reciprocal trade between the United States and the countries of the region through bilateral trade agreements. In addition, the FOIP-relevant documents emphasise the importance of investments, especially in the area of infrastructure, for the region and strive for a stronger role for the USA in the area of infrastructure investment. The USA thereby wants to offer an alternative to "state-controlled", i.e., Chinese, investments, which Washington has criticised for creating "debt traps" and overtly benefiting Chinese companies and workers. And last years' revival of the defunct U.S.-Australia-India-Japan quadrilateral security dialogue with Washington (the so-called Quad)

¹³ John Hemmings, *Global Britain in the Indo-Pacific*, Asia Studies Centre, Research Paper no. 2/2018 (London: Henry Jackson Society, May 2018), 17.

at the helm was widely regarded as an indirect rebuke of Beijing's geopolitical ambitions. The FOIP was also seen as instrumental for the U.S. to maintain its relevance as a resident power in Asia. Thus, there is little doubt that the FOIP's main thrust is directed against what the U.S. government perceives as China's increasingly 'aggressive' behaviour and its attempts to 'undermine' the rules-based international order.¹⁴

In addition to the FOIP, Japan, Australia, India and the Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN) have also presented their own concepts of the "Indo-Pacific". Concurrently a scholarly debate on the "Indo-Pacific" has emerged.¹⁵ And while the majority of contributors seem to interpret it as a response to China's rise and the BRI, observers have pointed out that "the" Indo-Pacific currently lacks conceptual clarity, too. For the time being no uniform, homogenous conceptualisation of the Indo-Pacific has emerged to date. Rather, the term is used by the United States, Japan, Australia, India or the ASEAN to refer to very different, in part divergent concepts, which in turn are based on different ideas on regional order. The divergences involve, among other things, a) the extension of the Indo-Pacific as a geographical area, b) the objectives associated with each respective concept, c) the focus or weighting of different policy fields within each respective concept, d) the question of China's inclusion or exclusion, and e) the significance of bi-, mini- and multilateral approaches to trade and security policy. And while the United States, in particular, is using the FOIP to openly position itself against China across policy fields, states such as Japan, ASEAN or Germany are not seeking a comprehensive "decoupling" from China, especially not economically.

The various conceptions or understandings are also reflected in the corresponding priorities and initiatives. While one of Japan's priorities is the conclusion of multilateral free trade agreements, for example, India views such efforts rather ambivalently and withdrew from the RCEP negotiations at the end of 2019. The Trump administration is also opposed to multilateral free trade agreements but is seeking to conclude bilateral agreements instead.

Differences also exist in the weighting of individual policy areas. The strong focus on security and defence policy in Washington is particularly striking here, whereas Japan, Australia and India have so far attached greater importance to areas such as infrastructure development and connectivity.

¹⁴ Mike Pence, "Vice President Mike Pence's Remarks on the Administration's Policy towards China" (Washington, D.C., October 4, 2018), <https://www.hudson.org/events/1610-vice-president-mike-pence-s-remarks-on-the-administration-s-policy-towards-china102018>.

¹⁵ See Seng Tan, "Consigned to Hedge: South-East Asia and America's 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' Strategy," *International Affairs* 96, no. 1 (January 1, 2020): 131–48, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiz227>; Dewi Fortuna Anwar, "Indonesia and the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific," *International Affairs* 96, no. 1 (January 1, 2020): 111–29, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiz223>; Berkofsky and Miracola, "Geopolitics by Other Means"; Kei Koga, "Japan's 'Indo-Pacific' Question: Countering China or Shaping a New Regional Order?," *International Affairs* 96, no. 1 (January 1, 2020): 49–73, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiz241>.

This weighting is also reflected in the approaches chosen: All actors except ASEAN (which is concerned with maintaining its own centrality) have so far refrained from pursuing multilateral approaches to security policy, though all actors rhetorically stress the importance of existing regional forums such as ARF and EAS. In terms of infrastructure policy, the approaches chosen are mostly bi- or minilateral. In economic policy, on the other hand, all actors, with the exception of the United States and India, prefer predominantly multilateral approaches. In China, however, the Indo-Pacific is viewed, regardless of the different conceptualisations outlined above, as part and parcel of an anti-Chinese containment strategy by Washington.¹⁶

Chinese criticism notwithstanding, the debate on the Indo-Pacific has gained traction within Europe, too. France had been promoting the idea, and published related strategy papers, from 2018 onwards. In 2020, Germany followed suit by publishing its own Indo-Pacific *Leitlinien* (guidelines).

France and the Indo-Pacific

So far, the French approach in the Indo-Pacific expresses itself mainly through strategic documents by the Ministry of the Armed Forces (*Ministère des Armées*/MDA) and the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs (*Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères*/MEFA). The first was launched in May 2019 by the MDA and is titled “France and Security in the Indo-Pacific”¹⁷ and focusses unmistakably on the security-dimension of the Indo-Pacific. Later that year, the MDA also released “France’s Defence Strategy in the Indo-Pacific”¹⁸, which further elaborates the French approach in the security domain. In June 2019, the MEFA launched a paper titled “French Strategy in the Indo-Pacific ‘For an inclusive Indo-Pacific’”¹⁹, which aims to widen the issue areas of French engagement in the region. Nonetheless, within French foreign policy circles, discussions on the Indo-Pacific started as early as late 2013, influenced by exchanges with Japanese academics and officials under the Abe administration. However, the term only made its first public appearance in 2018. First, through a joint statement²⁰ signed by French President

¹⁶ Heiduk and Wacker.

¹⁷ Ministère des Armées, “France and Security in the Indo-Pacific”, (Paris: June 2019), https://franceintheus.org/IMG/pdf/France_and_Security_in_the_Indo-Pacific_-_2019.pdf accessed: 11.12.2020

¹⁸ Ministère des Armées, “France’s Defence Strategy in the Indo-Pacific”, (Paris: 2019), <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/content/download/559608/9684004/file/France's%20Defence%20Strategy%20in%20the%20Indo-Pacific%20-%202019.pdf> accessed: 11.12.2020

¹⁹ Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères, “French Strategy in the Indo-Pacific ‘For an inclusive Indo-Pacific’”, (Paris: 2019), <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/asia-and-oceania/the-indo-pacific-region-a-priority-for-france/> accessed: 11.12.2020

²⁰ Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, “Joint Strategic Vision of India-France Cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region”, (New Delhi: March 10, 2018), <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/29598/joint+Strategic+Vision+of+IndiaFrance+Cooperation+in+the+Indian+Ocean+Region+New+Delhi+10+March+2018> accessed: 29.10.2020

Emmanuel Macron and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in March, and then during President Macron's visit to Garden Island naval base in Australia in May 2018. His speech²¹ there, in particular his mentioning of an Indo-Pacific axis comprising Paris, Delhi, and Canberra, set the stage for the later strategic approach of France in the region. In August 2018, during an Ambassadors' Conference, President Macron reiterated his Indo-Pacific strategy once more and mentioned the relation to Japan as a "key relationship".²² In June 2019, Florence Parly, French Minister for the Armed Forces, further substantiated the Indo-Pacific during a speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore.²³ Accompanied by a French aircraft carrier, she reaffirmed the French commitment to the Indo-Pacific and subsequently released the MDA strategy paper for the Indo-Pacific. President Macron picked her iterations up during a visit to La Réunion in October 2019.²⁴ In the presence of, among others, the Prime Minister of Madagascar, and the Indian Minister of State for External Affairs, he delineated the Indo-Pacific strategy as a primarily geopolitical endeavour and accentuated its African dimension.

From a French understanding, the Indo-Pacific region "constitutes a maritime and land geographical area, shaped by inter-actions around centres of gravity – India, China, Southeast Asia, Australia. It comprises the Indian, Pacific and Southern Oceans and forms a security continuum spreading from the East African coastline to the Western American seaboard."²⁵ Although rather peripheral to the "centres of gravity" of the region and housing a comparably small population (1.6 million French nationals), the French overseas territories amount to the world's second largest exclusive economic zone (EEZ) with almost 9 million square kilometres.²⁶ In addition, France's overseas territories "host military bases and capabilities", which are "essential to France's security activities in the region".²⁷ Hence, France sees itself as a "resident power" of the Indo-Pacific.²⁸

France views the Indo-Pacific to be of paramount importance for a variety of issue areas. In this regard, the most pronounced dimensions of the Indo-

²¹ Emmanuel Macron, "Discours à Garden Island, base navale de Sydney" [Speech at Garden Island, naval base of Sydney], (Paris: May 3, 2018), <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2018/05/03/discours-a-garden-island-base-navale-de-sydney> accessed: 21.10.2020

²² Emmanuel Macron, "Speech by President Emmanuel Macron - Ambassadors' Conference 2018", (Paris: August 27, 2018), <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/the-ministry-and-its-network/news/ambassadors-week/ambassadors-week-edition-2018/article/speech-by-president-emmanuel-macron-ambassadors-conference-2018> accessed: 29.10.2020

²³ Rachel Au-Young, "Shangri-La Dialogue: France reaffirms commitment to Indo-Pacific", *The Straits Times*, June 2, 2019, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/france-reaffirms-commitment-to-indo-pacific> accessed: 29.10.2020

²⁴ Emmanuel Macron, "Choose La Réunion: unis dans l'espace Indo-Pacifique" [Choose La Réunion: united in the Indo-Pacific space], October 23, 2019, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2019/10/23/choose-la-reunion-unis-dans-lespace-indo-pacifique> accessed: 29.10.2020

²⁵ Ministère des Armées, "France and Security in the Indo-Pacific", 1.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁷ Ministère des Armées, "France's Defence Strategy in the Indo-Pacific", 7.

²⁸ Ministère des Armées, "France and Security in the Indo-Pacific", 2.

Pacific region are the domains of security and order, multilateralism, trade, and environmental and climatic protection. Moreover, France emphasises the ramifications and gravity of each issue area beyond the region, underlining their global dimension in particular. In security terms, France sees the area as a site of increasing tensions and crises, potentially leading to “conflicts with regional or even global implications”²⁹. In this context, France views the tensions between the U.S. and China as the primary drivers of changing alignments and eroding multilateral efforts.³⁰ Besides great power rivalries, France regards “radical Islam” and terrorism as a major issue in the region, which is interrelated with the increasing prevalence of transnational criminal organisations.³¹ Regarding the economic and trade dimension of the Indo-Pacific, France holds that “the economic centre of gravity has shifted from the Atlantic to the Indo-Pacific”³². Consequently, France perceives the region as a “key player” for the global economy and globalisation, as it is central to international value chains and trade flows.³³ Given the increasing polarisation in the region, the French strategy defines multilateralism as another crucial issue for the Indo-Pacific. According to the French perspective, it was precisely the multilateral order that enabled the region to thrive economically.³⁴ However, increasingly “diverging interests, challenge[s] to [multilateral] principles, and [the] promotion of alternative frameworks”, have led to a decline of multilateralism in the region.³⁵ Lastly, environmental degradation and climate change represent an increasing challenge for the region. In this context, France sees climate change as a “threat multiplier”.³⁶

Faced with this array of challenges, the French strategy envisions a growing role for France in the region. It situates the current adjustments as an evolution of its previous policies in the region, when France declared Asia to be a “new frontier for French diplomacy” 25 years ago.³⁷ Accordingly, the MEFA strategy paper holds that the notion of the Indo-Pacific means France should “expand [its] vision, while maintaining a strong Asian foothold”.³⁸ President Macron’s speech at Garden Island further elaborates the French role in the Indo-Pacific, by envisaging France as a “mediating, inclusive and stabilising power”³⁹. France derives the legitimacy for these roles from various sources. First and foremost, the possession of overseas territories is crucial for the French self-understanding as a “resident power”. France refers to this fact

²⁹ Ministère de l’Europe et des Affaires étrangères, “French strategy in the Indo-Pacific”, 27.

³⁰ Ministère des Armées, “France’s Defence Strategy in the Indo-Pacific”, 8.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

³² Ministère de l’Europe et des Affaires étrangères, “French strategy in the Indo-Pacific”, 26.

³³ *Ibid.*, 13.

³⁴ Ministère des Armées, “France and Security in the Indo-Pacific”, 2.

³⁵ Ministère des Armées, “France’s Defence Strategy in the Indo-Pacific”, 5.

³⁶ Ministère des Armées, “France and Security in the Indo-Pacific”, 2.

³⁷ Ministère de l’Europe et des Affaires étrangères, “French strategy in the Indo-Pacific”, 26.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

throughout its strategic documents and views it as an essential argument to build up its capacities. This becomes especially evident in the MDA paper:

France is rooted in the southern part of the Indian Ocean [...]. France is also anchored in the Pacific Ocean [...]. Our armed forces stationed overseas, and our permanent military basing allow France to fulfil the *security responsibilities of a resident power of the Indo-Pacific*.⁴⁰

Additionally, an observer noted that India's and Australia's positions on French overseas territories in the Indian and Pacific Ocean have evolved strikingly from merely tolerating to accepting the French presence and viewing France as a "major strategic partner".⁴¹ As a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), and founding member of the European Union and NATO, France sees itself as a capable diplomatic actor, which avails itself to mediate in conflicts and negotiations in the region. Moreover, President Macron called France a "balancing power" in this regard, during the Conference of French ambassadors in June 2019.⁴² Further, the successful negotiation of the Paris Agreement, and initiatives around the linkage of security and climate change, lend France legitimacy as a reliable actor in the environmental realm. By depicting the region as an area where "power relations prevail"⁴³, France underlines the necessity for its military presence. Citing its power projection capabilities and its overall military prowess, though, France goes even further and presents itself as a power to be reckoned with in the Indo-Pacific.⁴⁴ No less important, France also mentions "threats and challenges that are increasingly affecting its overseas territories", thus calling for a "more assertive presence" in its sovereign spaces.⁴⁵ Yet, France maintains to stand firmly on and uphold international law. Interestingly, France acknowledges the existence of other conceptions and strategies for the Indo-Pacific and deems its own strategy inclusive of others. In this regard, statements by French ambassadors in the region are particularly noteworthy, as the ambassador to India notes that France will act "in concert with India"⁴⁶ and that France and India have a "joint Indo-French strategic vision of the Indo-Pacific since March 2018"⁴⁷, while the

⁴⁰ Ministère des Armées, "France and Security in the Indo-Pacific", 2. (emphasis added)

⁴¹ Frédéric Grare, "France, the Other Indo-Pacific Power", (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 21, 2020), <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/10/21/france-other-indo-pacific-power-pub-83000> accessed 17.11.2020

⁴² Emmanuel Macron, "Ambassadors' conference – Speech by M. Emmanuel Macron, President of the Republic", (Paris: August 27, 2019), <https://lv.ambafrance.org/Ambassadors-conference-Speech-by-M-Emmanuel-Macron-President-of-the-Republic> accessed 17.11.2020

⁴³ Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères, "French strategy in the Indo-Pacific", 27.

⁴⁴ Ministère des Armées, "France and Security in the Indo-Pacific", 15.

⁴⁵ Ministère des Armées, "France's Defence Strategy in the Indo-Pacific", 16.

⁴⁶ Emmanuel Lenain, "France will act in concert with India to ensure a free, open and secure Indo-Pacific region", *The Times of India*, December 8, 2019, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/toi-edit-page/france-will-act-in-concert-with-india-to-ensure-a-free-open-and-secure-indo-pacific-region/> accessed 30.10.2020

⁴⁷ Ibid.

ambassador to Indonesia calls for “closer cooperation between France and ASEAN countries in the framework of the ASEAN outlook on the Indo-Pacific”⁴⁸. In another op-ed, the ambassador to India characterises France and India as two countries that “cherish their strategic autonomy”⁴⁹. This hints towards a role outside of zero-sum logics.

Given this context, France formulates its strategic objectives and priorities both implicitly and explicitly. France envisions “an inclusive space of balance, development, security and diversity, where attempts at hegemony must be discouraged along with temptations of division or confrontation”⁵⁰. In this regard, France intends to “continue strengthening and rebalancing its comprehensive strategic partnership with China”⁵¹. In particular, France demands “greater reciprocity [...] both in the framework of confident and constructive political dialogue and in deepening economic and trade relations”⁵². Answering a parliamentary query⁵³ about its approach towards China, the French government noted that it is engaged in an “open dialogue” with China to inform it about its positions regarding cyber-espionage, stability in the South China Sea, 5G and the New Silk Road Initiative. It also noted a “dense dialogue” regarding global issues like climate change, protection of biodiversity, and debt relief for developing countries. Thus, France attempts to steer China into a more benign trajectory. As another objective, France intends to “expand and deepen” its strategic partnerships in the region.⁵⁴ However, the two strategic papers mention different partners in this regard. While the MEFA strategy paper mentions “Strategic Partnerships/Dialogues”⁵⁵ to comprise Australia, Canada (sectoral partnerships), China, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, United Arab Emirates, the United States, and Vietnam, the MDA paper has a two-tiered partnership model⁵⁶ with “primary partners” India, Australia, USA, and Japan, and “other partners” Malaysia, Singapore, New Zealand, Indonesia, and Vietnam. Regarding Thailand and the Philippines, France will “seek to deepen its bilateral relationships” with these two countries especially in the fields of maritime and environmental security.⁵⁷ Apart from the rather alluded adversary China, though its “assertive attitude” is mentioned as the

⁴⁸ Olivier Chambard, “What France wishes to do in the Indo-Pacific”, *The Jakarta Post*, November 26, 2019, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/academia/2019/11/26/what-france-wishes-to-do-in-the-indo-pacific.html> (emphasis added) accessed 30.10.2020

⁴⁹ Emmanuel Lenain, “Shoring up Indo-Pacific: Covid crisis urges us to develop region’s multilateral dimension”, *The Indian Express*, June 3, 2020, <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/public-health-coronavirus-economic-impact-indo-pacific-geopolitics-6439614/> accessed 30.10.2020

⁵⁰ Ministère de l’Europe et des Affaires étrangères, “French strategy in the Indo-Pacific”, 30.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Assemblée Nationale, “Question écrite N° 30241 de Mme Nadia Ramassamy” [Written Question No. 30241 by Ms. Nadia Ramassamy], (Paris: August 4, 2020), <http://questions.assemblee-nationale.fr/q15/15-30241QE.htm> accessed 17.11.2020

⁵⁴ Ministère de l’Europe et des Affaires étrangères, “French strategy in the Indo-Pacific”, 35.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁵⁶ Ministère des Armées, “France and Security in the Indo-Pacific”, 1.

⁵⁷ Ministère des Armées, “France’s Defence Strategy in the Indo-Pacific”, 18.

“most striking new phenomenon of this century”⁵⁸, and its recent diplomatic and military activities were described as generating “deep-seated concerns”⁵⁹, the French strategy explicitly names North Korea and its nuclear programme as an adversary and a destabilising factor for the region.⁶⁰ Another “major challenge” is the “significant development” of Pakistan’s nuclear arsenal, whereas France is uncertain about Pakistan’s intentions.⁶¹ Although mentioned as a major partner, the United States do not feature prominently in the French strategic papers. With the U.S., France intends to strengthen its bilateral cooperation and coordination in the South Pacific and Indian Ocean.⁶² Most notably however, in the MEFA paper, the United States are only mentioned once with regards to the bilateral rivalry with China, where it is asserted that the direction of that relationship “will be crucial in determining balances in the Indo-Pacific”.⁶³ Another French objective is the strengthening of multilateralism in the Indo-Pacific. Additionally, France wants to strengthen the role of the European Union in the Indo-Pacific and increase its visibility. ASEAN is seen as the key organisation for this endeavour. In a response to a parliamentary query on EU-ASEAN relations, the French government explained that it supports the strengthening of the political dimension of this relation through the development of cooperation on traditional and non-traditional security issues, like maritime security, cybersecurity or disaster resilience.⁶⁴ Furthermore, France is supporting the conclusion of a strategic partnership between the EU and ASEAN, admission of the EU to the East Asia Summit (EAS), and aims to contribute to the drafting of a “European Pacific strategy”.⁶⁵ Overall, France intends to increase both its own influence and that of the European Union in the Indo-Pacific.⁶⁶

In order to achieve its objectives in the region, France has launched, or intends to launch various initiatives. At the domestic front, France has thus far established a new ambassadorial position for the Indo-Pacific.⁶⁷ Further, the French 2019-2025 Military Programming Law has started “an exceptional military build-up to adapt its defence system to evolving security challenges”⁶⁸. In the region, after then French defence minister, Jean-Yves Le Drian, initially surprised his European counterparts by suggesting the establishment of a stable and visible European naval presence in the South China

⁵⁸ Ministère de l’Europe et des Affaires étrangères, “French strategy in the Indo-Pacific”, 27.

⁵⁹ Ministère des Armées, “France’s Defence Strategy in the Indo-Pacific”, 8.

⁶⁰ Ministère des Armées, “France and Security in the Indo-Pacific”, 1, 4.

⁶¹ Ministère des Armées, “France’s Defence Strategy in the Indo-Pacific”, 11.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 17.

⁶³ Ministère de l’Europe et des Affaires étrangères, “French strategy in the Indo-Pacific”, 27.

⁶⁴ Assemblée Nationale, “Question écrite N° 20006 de M. Buon Tan” [Written Question No. 20006 by Mr. Buon Tan], (Paris: July 30, 2019), <http://questions.assemblee-nationale.fr/q15/15-20006QE.htm> accessed 17.11.2020

⁶⁵ Ministère de l’Europe et des Affaires étrangères, “French strategy in the Indo-Pacific”, 31.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁶⁷ Eryk Bagshaw, “France escalates China push, appoints ambassador for Indo-Pacific”, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, October 12, 2020, <https://www.smh.com.au/world/asia/france-escalates-china-push-appoints-ambassador-for-indo-pacific-20201012-p5647f.html> accessed 11.12.2020

⁶⁸ Ministère des Armées, “France and Security in the Indo-Pacific”, 1.

Sea in 2016⁶⁹, France has followed suit in March 2019, by sending the aircraft carrier *Charles de Gaulle* to the region, and pledging to send carriers “more than twice a year [to] the South China Sea”.⁷⁰ However, unlike the US Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOP), the French naval presence in the South China Sea is more of a symbolic nature, as it does not run as close to disputed islands and territories as the US FONOPs.⁷¹ In the wake of its Indo-Pacific strategy, France has already concluded deeper strategic partnerships with India, Australia, and Japan. Close ties to India appear to be particularly crucial for France, as President Macron began his pursuit of deeper engagement in Delhi, invited Indian representatives to his speech on La Réunion, and the French ambassador to India, compared to his regional colleagues, appears particularly active⁷² in filling the Indo-Pacific strategy with substance through opinion pieces in Indian media. Furthermore, the partnership with India is labelled a “privileged defence relationship” by France.⁷³ With Australia, France aims to expand “the governance of common spaces (maritime, air and space) or shared ones (cyberspace), in order to ensure free, open and secure access to them”.⁷⁴ With regards to Japan, France sees it as a “major partner for strengthening international law and freedom of movement in the Indo-Pacific”.⁷⁵ Particularly noteworthy, France held its first trilateral dialogue with India and Australia on 9 September 2020.⁷⁶ Overall, the French partnerships mostly comprise joint military exercises, armament contracts, as well as information exchanges. France also regards its engagement in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR), and operations against illegal trafficking, among others, as part of its Indo-Pacific strategy.⁷⁷ During his speech on La Réunion, President Macron also announced a joint military exercise with South Africa called “Oxide” for November 2020. Also on the African continent, France intends to “play a central role in the defence and protection of Djibouti” in order to ensure

⁶⁹ Embassy of France in Abu Dhabi, “Speech Mr. Jean-Yves Le Drian, Minister of Defence at the Shangri-La Dialogue”, Singapore, 5 June 2016, <https://ae.ambafrance.org/Speech-Mr-Jean-Yves-Le-Drian-Minister-of-Defence-at-the-Shangri-La-Dialogue> (accessed 27.10.2020)

⁷⁰ Naval Today, “French Aircraft Carrier Gets Underway for First Deployment since 2016”, *Naval Today*, March 5, 2019, <https://navaltoday.com/2019/03/05/french-aircraft-carrier-gets-underway-for-first-deployment-since-2016/> (accessed 27.10.2020)

⁷¹ Bruno Tertrais, „ Point de vue par Bruno Tertrais: L'Europe et l'enjeu de l'Indopacifique” [Point of View by Bruno Tertrais: Europe and the Indo-Pacific challenge], *Ouest-France*, June 10, 2019.

⁷² e.g. Emmanuel Lenain, “France will act in concert with India to ensure a free, open and secure Indo-Pacific region”, Emmanuel Lenain, “Shoring up Indo-Pacific: Covid crisis urges us to develop region’s multilateral dimension”, Emmanuel Lenain, “France is committed to support India’s Make in India enterprise in defence sector”, *The Indian Express*, February 5, 2020, <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/france-india-relations-make-in-india-in-defence-6251108/> accessed: 11.12.2020

⁷³ Ministère des Armées, “France’s Defence Strategy in the Indo-Pacific”, 17.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ministère de l’Europe et des Affaires étrangères, “Indopacifique – 1er dialogue trilatéral entre la France, l’Inde et l’Australie – Déclaration de la porte-parole (9 septembre 2020)” [Indo-Pacific – First trilateral dialogue between France, India and Australia – Declaration of the spokesperson (September 9, 2020)], (Paris: 2020), <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/dossiers-pays/australie/evenements/article/indopacifique-1er-dialogue-trilatéral-entre-la-france-l-inde-et-l-australie> accessed 11.12.2020

⁷⁷ Ministère des Armées, “France and Security in the Indo-Pacific”, 4, 6.

freedom of movement from Djibouti to the Strait of Hormuz.⁷⁸ Further, France intends to increase its foothold in regional multilateral organisations, such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), where France is a candidate for full membership.⁷⁹ Additionally, the French strategic documents also mention the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM+), the Heads of Asian Coast Guard Agencies Meeting (HACGAM), and the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships (ReCAAP) as fora for increased engagement.⁸⁰ Moreover, France became a Development Partner to ASEAN at the beginning of September 2020.⁸¹ In concert with its major partners Australia and India and EU countries, France will work towards the “strengthening of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS)”, which it will chair for two years from 2020.⁸² In the field of armament cooperation, the MDA strategy paper mentions the future submarine programme with Australia and the A400M ATLAS programme with Malaysia.⁸³ Further, France also contributes to surveillance of “maritime spaces and sea lanes of communication of the Indo-Pacific” within the framework of dedicated regional centres such as the Information Fusion Centre of Singapore (IFC), the Regional Centre for the Fusion of Maritime Information (CRFIM) in Madagascar, and the Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) in India.⁸⁴ In the environmental realm, the French MDA, in conjuncture with the parties of the South Pacific Defence Ministers’ Meeting (SPDMM), has set up a geopolitical observatory of the security and defence challenges of climate change in 2016, which aim at assessing the impact of climate change on the regional defence cooperation.⁸⁵ France also pushes for the establishment of an “Indo-Pacific environmental risk mapping, within the framework of multilateral cooperation”⁸⁶. A dedicated structure, set up by France and Australia, already exists, and focuses on risk assessments in the Indian and Southern Oceans, in particular cyclones, fishing, resources, pandemics, migrations, sea-level rise. The “Kivi Kuaka” Programme, monitoring bird migrations as an early warning alert for cyclones, and the “Marine Legacy” Initiative, as a means for crisis prevention in the fisheries sector, are named in this regard. In support of the EU position in the region, France is working on the implementation of the EU Connecting Europe and Asia strategy, the conclusion of a strategic partnership with ASEAN, the admission to the East Asia Summit (EAS), and

⁷⁸ Ministère des Armées, “France’s Defence Strategy in the Indo-Pacific”, 18.

⁷⁹ Emmanuel Lenain, “Shoring up Indo-Pacific: Covid crisis urges us to develop region’s multilateral dimension”

⁸⁰ Ministère de l’Europe et des Affaires étrangères, “French strategy in the Indo-Pacific”, 31.

⁸¹ Embassy of France in Singapore, “France becomes ASEAN’s newest Development Partner”, (Singapore: 2020), <https://sg.ambafrance.org/France-becomes-ASEAN-s-newest-Development-Partner> accessed: 11.12.2020

⁸² Ministère des Armées, “France’s Defence Strategy in the Indo-Pacific”, 17.

⁸³ Ministère des Armées, “France and Security in the Indo-Pacific”, 16.

⁸⁴ Ministère des Armées, “France and Security in the Indo-Pacific”, 6.

⁸⁵ Ministère des Armées, “France and Security in the Indo-Pacific”, 12.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

revitalising of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), as well as supporting the conclusion of FTAs in the region.⁸⁷

The French vision on order in the Indo-Pacific is relatively clear-cut. France intends to promote a “stable, law-based and multipolar order in the Indo-Pacific”⁸⁸. In the MDA strategy paper, the French government is most specific by proposing to “contribute to the building of a regional security architecture”⁸⁹. Since the lack of thereof is seen by France as conducive for great power struggle in the region. Although the strategy papers reserve most of the space for bilateral and minilateral deliberations, the few times ASEAN is mentioned, France wishes to promote its centrality in the Indo-Pacific. In a similar vein, France does not seem to propagate new institutions in the Indo-Pacific, but rather aims to strengthen existing ones. Lastly, although France perceives China as a challenger to the regional order, intensified dialogue and trust-building is seen as crucial to halt a potential cycle of escalation.

Germany and the Indo-Pacific

Nowhere in the *Leitlinien* (guidelines) is the geographic dimension of the “Indo-Pacific” clearly defined via a listing of precise geographic references or else. The document even states that “There is no generally agreed geographical definition of the Indo-Pacific region. Different players define it differently’. According to the *Leitlinien*, the term “Indo-Pacific” is used ‘to describe the entire area shaped by the Indian and Pacific Oceans’. More than via its geographical demarcations, the “Indo-Pacific” is conceived as a *Raum* (space) defined by the interplay of geopolitics and geo-economics via ‘interlocking competing strategic projections and global value chains’.⁹⁰ Because of this, and in the context of a perceived general shift of political and economic heft towards the Indo-Pacific, the region is perceived as ‘crucial’ for the future form and design of the international order in the 21st century. As one official put it: ‘The Federal Government considers the Indo-Pacific to be the entire region characterised by the Indian Ocean and the Pacific, in which strategic projections compete. (...) The Indo-Pacific is not a question of geography or a clearly-defined geographical area’.⁹¹

At the same time, the Indo-Pacific is viewed as a *Raum* (space) that lacks strong formal institutions and norms, making it susceptible to inter-state

⁸⁷ Ministère de l’Europe et des Affaires étrangères, “French strategy in the Indo-Pacific”, 31.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ministère des Armées, “France and Security in the Indo-Pacific”, 4.

⁹⁰ Bundesregierung (Federal Government of Germany), “Leitlinien Zum Indo-Pazifik” (Berlin: August 2020), 8, <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/blob/2380500/33f978a9d4f511942c241eb4602086c1/200901-indo-pazifik-leitlinien--1--data.pdf>. accessed 11.12.2020

⁹¹ Peter Schoof, “The EU and ASEAN are predestined for a close partnership,” October 19, 2020, <https://www.deutschland.de/en/topic/politics/indo-pacific-german-guidelines-for-future-policy>. accessed 11.12.2020

competition over issues of hegemony and balance of power.⁹² Key dimensions attributed to the “Indo-Pacific” are therefore its strategic dimension (‘shifts in the balance of power’), its structural dimension (the institutional ‘structure of the region’), its normative dimension (‘the rules-based international order’), and, perhaps most importantly, its geo-economic dimension (‘Asia’s growth dynamics’).⁹³ The last two dimensions point towards Germany’s role conception as *inter alia* a global *Handelsnation* (trading state) and a strong proponent of a rules-based international order. Accordingly, Germany cannot remain on the side lines and cannot act ‘as a mere observer of these dynamic developments’.⁹⁴ Foreign Minister Heiko Maas even argued that: ‘The Himalayas and the Malacca Strait may seem a long way away. But our prosperity and our geopolitical influence in the coming decades will depend not least on how we work together with the countries of the Indo-Pacific region. That, more than anywhere else, is where the shape of the international order of tomorrow will be decided’.⁹⁵ Concurrently, the *Leitlinien* state that Germany, embedded in the European Union (EU), ‘has a great interest in participating in Asia’s growth dynamics and in being involved in shaping the Indo-Pacific region, as well as in upholding global norms in regional structures’.⁹⁶

While the term “Indo-Pacific” made its way into official French rhetoric from 2018 onwards, Germany’s *Leitlinien* on the Indo-Pacific were only published on September 2nd, 2020. Prior to this, a small number of German officials had used the term during speeches, but for the most part in reference to the Indo-Pacific concepts of “partners” rather than as a stand-alone concept or strategy of the German government.⁹⁷ Prior to this, officials were for a long time rather reluctant to use the term at all due to its use by the Trump administration and it being perceived as essentially a containment strategy against China. It was not until ASEAN had published its “ASEAN outlook on the Indo-Pacific” that German officials decided to develop their own, in their own words ‘inclusive’, approach to the Indo-Pacific.

In the *Leitlinien* eight core interests are defined. The first core interest mentioned is ‘peace and security’ in the region, which is increasingly threatened by ‘increasing geopolitical tensions’ in the region, but also by

⁹² Bundesregierung, “Leitlinien Zum Indo-Pazifik,” 8.

⁹³ Bundesregierung, 8.

⁹⁴ Bundesregierung, 2.

⁹⁵ Auswärtiges Amt, “Foreign Minister Maas on the Adoption of the German Government Policy Guidelines on the Indo-Pacific Region,” Press Release (Berlin: September 2, 2020), <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/newsroom/news/maas-indo-pacific/2380474>. accessed: 11.12.2020

⁹⁶ Bundesregierung, “Leitlinien Zum Indo-Pazifik,” 8.

⁹⁷ Niels Annen, “Speech by Minister of State Annen at the Reception of Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale on the Occasion of the Raisina Dialogue 2020” (New Delhi: January 14, 2020), <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/newsroom/news/annen-raisina/2292714> accessed: 11.12.2020; Jasper Wieck and Alexander Ziegler, “View: Franco-German Tango Roots for an Open Indo-Pacific,” *The Economic Times*, January 22, 2019, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/view-franco-german-tango-roots-for-an-open-indo-pacific/articleshow/67635679.cms?from=mdr>. accessed: 11.12.2020

North Korea's nuclear weapons program, border disputes, civil conflicts, 'refugee movements', and terrorist networks.⁹⁸ Any would-be destabilisation, or even a complete breakdown, of regional security is perceived to be detrimental to Germany's interests in the region. Secondly, the *Leitlinien* mentions 'diversifying and deepening relations' as a core interest. A diversification is understood both geographically as well as 'in substance', and the need to diversify is mainly brought about to 'avoid unilateral dependencies and to strengthen ties with the global players of tomorrow'.⁹⁹ Main areas of cooperation are 'trade, investment and development', but political and security aspects are also mentioned (as well as culture, education and science). While the respective paragraph does not mention China explicitly, observers have interpreted it as a call for a reduction of Germany's trade over-dependence on China.¹⁰⁰ Chancellor Merkel said as much with regard to Germany's trade relations in the Indo-Pacific in a recent speech, when she explicitly referred to the lop-sidedness of Germany's exports to the region in favour of China, and the need to diversify trade relations, in the same sentence.¹⁰¹ More so, the paragraph explicitly calls for a closing of ranks with democracies, as well as with partners who hold 'shared values', as 'particularly important'.¹⁰²

Thirdly, the prevalence of multilateral, rather than bipolar or even outright hegemonic, economic and security structures are listed as a core interest. A relapse into some sort of a new Cold War, with countries 'forced to choose between two sides or fall into a state of unilateral dependency', is to be avoided.¹⁰³ Fourthly the document mentions the preservation of 'open shipping routes', specifically with reference to the Strait of Malacca as a bottleneck for trade between Europe and Asia, as a core interest. Any major disruption of maritime trade routes would have a direct negative impact on global supply chains and thus 'would have serious consequences for the prosperity of and provision of our population'.¹⁰⁴ Fifthly, and somewhat linked with the previous proposition, 'open markets and free trade' are mentioned as another core interest of Germany as a trading state. Rules-based free trade, multilaterally via the WTO as well as via EU free trade agreements with partners in the region, is perceived as crucial for Germany's economic security.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁸ Bundesregierung, "Leitlinien Zum Indo-Pazifik," 9.

⁹⁹ Bundesregierung, 9.

¹⁰⁰ Garima Mohan, "Germany Gets on Board with the Indo-Pacific," *9dashline.Com* (blog), September 11, 2020, <https://www.9dashline.com/article/germany-gets-on-board-the-indo-pacific> accessed 11.12.2020; Frédéric Grare, "Germany's New Approach to the Indo-Pacific," *Internationale Politik Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (October 2020), <https://ip-quarterly.com/en/germanys-new-approach-indo-pacific>.

¹⁰¹ Angela Merkel, "Grußwort von Angela Merkel Auf Der Asien-Pazifik-Konferenz (Welcome Remarks by Angela Merkel at the Asia-Pacific-Conference)" (Asien-Pazifik Konferenz der deutschen Wirtschaft (Asia-Pacific-Conference of German Business), Berlin, October 19, 2020), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IR8AEH_0iw4. accessed 11.12.2020

¹⁰² Bundesregierung, "Leitlinien Zum Indo-Pazifik," 9.

¹⁰³ Bundesregierung, 9.

¹⁰⁴ Bundesregierung, 9.

¹⁰⁵ Bundesregierung, 9.

Sixthly, ‘digital transformation and connectivity’ is mentioned. Germany’s economic prosperity, and its international competitiveness, are viewed as increasingly co-dependent on closer connectivity with regions and markets in the Indo-Pacific region especially with a view on digital transformation and key technologies in the context of the so-called fourth industrial revolution. Connectivity hereby is supposed to be based on fair competition, transparency and sustainability and should also ‘avoid over-indebtedness’¹⁰⁶ – which observers have regarded as another indirect hint at China.¹⁰⁷ To paraphrase remarks by a German official during a discussion on Germany’s Indo-Pacific guidelines: The *Leitlinien* are not directed against China, but they are nonetheless part of a response to China’s policies and its repercussions in the region.

The *Leitlinien* then go on and declare, seventhly, environmental protection to be a core interest of Germany. Rising emissions, coupled with the unsustainable use of natural resources, rapid population growth and urbanisation and threats to biodiversity, is not only putting strong burdens on ‘our planet’s ecosystems’, but are viewed as potential triggers of social unrest, including irregular migration, too. The stated objective hereby is ‘to ensure that growth in the Indo-Pacific region is environmentally friendly and socially compatible’.¹⁰⁸ Last but not least, the document mentions ‘access to fact-based information’ to ward off efforts by ‘authoritarian actors’ to ‘manipulate and influence’ via the spread of disinformation predominantly through social media. To do so, the availability of ‘fact-based information’ is to be increased.¹⁰⁹

The description of Germany’s core interest is then followed by a list of guiding norms or ‘principles’ of Germany’s policies in the Indo-Pacific. These include commitments to joint European approaches wherever possible, multilateralism, the rules-based order, the UN development goals, human rights, partnerships at eye-level and inclusivity. Especially the latter norm does set Germany’s Indo-Pacific *Leitlinien* apart from those of some other actors, most notably the U.S., as it clearly labels ‘containment and decoupling strategies’ as uncondusive with Germany’s commitment to an inclusive conceptualisation of regional order. It thereby heavily draws on ASEAN and ASEAN-centred multilateral forums to foster cooperation between all countries in the region¹¹⁰ and seeks to ‘counteract the rise of bipolar structures’.¹¹¹ It is striking that the distinction between ‘interests’

¹⁰⁶ Bundesregierung, 10.

¹⁰⁷ Frederick Kliem, “Germany’s Indo-Pacific Strategy: Can Berlin Contribute?,” *RSIS Commentaries* No. 169 (Singapore: RSIS, September 10, 2020), <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/cms/germanys-indo-pacific-strategy-can-berlin-contribute/#.X3HRx3tCQ2w>. accessed 11.12.2020

¹⁰⁸ Bundesregierung, “Leitlinien Zum Indo-Pazifik,” 10.

¹⁰⁹ Bundesregierung, 10.

¹¹⁰ Bundesregierung, 11.

¹¹¹ Schoof, “The EU and ASEAN are predestined for a close partnership.”

and ‘principles’ is at times shaky at best. For example, while labelled as a guiding principle rather than a core objective, German officials have made it clear during interviews and press releases, that the fostering of a joint European approach to the Indo-Pacific, with Germany’s Indo-Pacific *Leitlinien* as a potential ‘basis for a future EU strategy’,¹¹² is indeed a core objective for Berlin, too. Particularly striking, there is no further structuring or sequencing with regard to Germany’s interests and policy preferences. In conversations with the authors, German officials confirmed that the eight core interests listed are all of equal value and importance. Beyond the reference to partners holding ‘shared values’ there is also no clear indication with regard to which Indo-Pacific countries are deemed to be key or crucial partners for Germany (and conversely which are not). In fact, the possible partners mentioned in the *Leitlinien* differ from policy field to policy field. The wide range of possible partners could be considered in line with the stated aim of diversification. To give a few examples, with regard to the strengthening of multilateral institutions ASEAN and its member states are mentioned. India and Japan are declared to be partners in the context of attempts to reform the UN’s Security Council and to safeguard the rules-based order. In tackling climate change, Germany will seek closer cooperation with, amongst others, China, India, the Pacific Island states, Australia and Southeast Asian nations. In the field of cyber security cooperation Singapore and South Korea are specifically mentioned, whereas China is described as a desired partner in the field of nuclear non-proliferation but also as a challenger to the rules-based international order.¹¹³ Free trade agreements are to be negotiated with Australia, New Zealand and Indonesia and others. Still, it is notable that cooperation with the U.S. is only mentioned in passing, for example in the context of cooperation with ASEAN-centred multilateral forums like the East Asia Summit.

In line with the diverse range of potential partners indicated above, the *Leitlinien* outline a vast variety of possible initiatives and projects to be launched or, if already running, to be expanded and intensified. To support multilateralism and the rules-based international order in the region, Germany for example first and foremost seeks to step up its engagement with ASEAN, and ASEAN-led multilateral forums. This includes, to give a few examples, financial support for the ASEAN secretariat, but also at institutional level to push for an upgrade of the EU-ASEAN relations to a strategic partnership and to pursue observer status at the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM+). Support for multilateral institutions also encompasses other regional organisations such as the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF),

¹¹² Bundesregierung, “German Government Adopts Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific Region,” Press Release (Berlin: September 3, 2020), <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/search/indo-pacific-1781916>. accessed 11.12.2020

¹¹³ Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, “Rede der Ministerin an der Universität der Bundeswehr München” [Speech of the Minister at the Bundeswehr University Munich], (Munich: November 7, 2019), <https://www.bmvg.de/de/aktuelles/rede-der-ministerin-an-der-universitaet-der-bundeswehr-muenchen-146670>.

the Mekong River Commission (MRC), the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) or the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). The *Leitlinien* also mention cooperation with partners from the Indo-Pacific region in order to support international multilateral institutions such as the WTO, the WHO, the IMF, the World Bank or the UN Security Council. Finally, the Franco-German “Alliance for Multilateralism” is to be promoted in the region and Berlin will cooperate closely with Paris on the launch of a European strategy on relations with the Indo-Pacific region.¹¹⁴ In the field of environmental policy, Germany for example seeks to expand its donor activities with regard to projects aimed at the reduction in CO2 emissions with China, India and other regional actors. It also specifically seeks to expand projects on marine litter and marine conservation and protection and also to increase its activities to promote sustainable forestry management, sustainable agriculture and to combat deforestation. Other initiatives include, among others, protection of biodiversity, promoting green hydrogen and renewable energies, or combatting the illegal trade in wildlife.¹¹⁵

To strengthen regional peace and security, Germany for example seeks greater involvement in measures safeguarding the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. According to Germany’s Defence Minister this will include the dispatch of a German navy vessel to the region in 2021. She also stated that Germany will engage in greater defence cooperation with partners in the region in the form of taking part in exercises in the region or seconding liaison officers and joint exercises.¹¹⁶ Germany also seeks to join the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP). It also intends to expand its activities in the region in the fields of cyber security, combatting civil conflict and violent extremism, and arms control.¹¹⁷ To promote human rights and the rule of law, Germany intends to promote media freedom through for example supporting civil society activism in the field, journalist trainings and media dialogues, or inter-religious dialogues. It also seeks to expand projects in the areas of rule of law promotion as well as strengthening fact-based information. The latter will include the establishment of a Regional German Information Centre in Singapore.¹¹⁸ In the field of trade policy, Germany’s initiatives focus first and foremost on supporting the negotiation and

¹¹⁴ Bundesregierung, “Leitlinien Zum Indo-Pazifik,” 13–14.

¹¹⁵ Bundesregierung, 14–15.

¹¹⁶ Eryk Bourke and Latika Bagshaw, “Germany Refuses to Turn a ‘blind Eye’ to China, Teams up with Australia,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, November 2, 2020, <https://www.smh.com.au/world/asia/germany-refuses-to-turn-a-blind-eye-to-china-teams-up-with-australia-20201102-p56apf.html> accessed: 11.12.2020; Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, “Rede der Bundesministerin der Verteidigung, Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, zum Haushaltsgesetz 2021 vor dem Deutschen Bundestag am 30. September 2020 in Berlin” [Speech of Federal Minister of Defence Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer on the budget bill at the German Parliament on September 30, 2020 in Berlin](Berlin: September 30, 2020), <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/service/bulletin/rede-der-bundesministerin-der-verteidigung-annegret-kramp-karrenbauer--1796654>. accessed: 11.12.2020

¹¹⁷ Bundesregierung, “Leitlinien Zum Indo-Pazifik,” 15–16.

¹¹⁸ Bundesregierung, 17.

conclusion of EU Free Trade Agreements (FTA) with partners such as New Zealand, Australia and Indonesia, in the region. From the basis of bilateral FTAs, Germany will then aim to work 'towards a free trade agreement between the EU and ASEAN as a whole'.¹¹⁹ Berlin also seeks an EU-China investment agreement as well as boosting the German-centred business networks in the region.¹²⁰ Furthermore, Berlin seeks to expand connectivity to the Indo-Pacific through implementing the EU-Asia connectivity strategy, the EU-Japan Partnership on Sustainable Connectivity and Quality Infrastructure, or Green Energy Corridors with India. It also seeks to establish a future EU-ASEAN connectivity partnership as well as to conclude the EU-ASEAN Comprehensive Air Transport Agreement (CATA). Connectivity projects also extend to the digital sphere, for example with regard to cooperation on industry 4.0 with partners like Australia or South Korea in areas such as research or standardisation. Germany also seeks to establish a dialogue beyond 5G with partners in the Indo-Pacific region. Last but not least, initiatives extend to the field of culture, education and science, too. Here, initiatives include networking with partners in the region to foster closer people-to-people networks through expanding the funds available for academic and cultural exchanges with partner countries, increased funding for 'flagship projects' such as the Chinese-German Tongji University or the Indo-German Science and Technology Centre in New Delhi, as well as expanding similar modes of cooperation with other partners in the region.¹²¹

As evident from the short overview above, a range of initiatives is planned across a wide spectre of policy-fields, ranging from trade to security to academia and education. It has also become evident, that numerous already existing projects and initiatives are to be included under the umbrella term Indo-Pacific. For the time being, it seems impossible to say if there is a main focus and where it is going to be. German officials have argued that there is to be no hierarchisation of objectives and related policy areas. However, if one examines exclamations by German officials so far, initiatives in the fields of free trade, security, climate change and those linked to safeguarding the rules-based order might become somewhat prioritised.¹²²

In terms of the ideas on regional order inherent to the *Leitlinien* one can, first of all, infer that Germany envisions the Indo-Pacific as an 'inclusive' space. It has been emphasised in official documents as well as interviews and speeches by officials that China is regarded as part of the Indo-Pacific and that Germany's *Leitlinien* are not designed to 'contain' China. Further, Germany is neither part of any would-be 'anti-Chinese' alliance. The same

¹¹⁹ Schoof, "The EU and ASEAN are predestined for a close partnership."

¹²⁰ Bundesregierung, "Leitlinien Zum Indo-Pazifik," 18.

¹²¹ Bundesregierung, 18–19.

¹²² Moritz Koch, "Vor EU-China-Gipfel: Staatsminister Niels Annen kritisiert Peking ungewöhnlich scharf," [Before EU-China-Summit: State Minister Niels Annen criticises Beijing unusually harshly], *Handelsblatt*, September 13, 2020, <https://www.handelsblatt.com/politik/deutschland/vor-eu-china-gipfel-staatsminister-niels-annen-kritisiert-pekung-ungewoehnlich-scharf/26183108.html>. accessed: 11.12.2020

goes for a possible decoupling from China, which Germany negates as well. A new Cold War and the resulting bipolar international order is deemed incompatible with Germany's interests as a trading state.¹²³ Instead, Berlin seeks to maintain close relations with China at eye-level, whilst diversifying its relations with other partners in the region at the same time.¹²⁴ That includes at the rhetorical level a continuous commitment to 'Western' values and 'the West'.¹²⁵

Or as one German official put it: 'We want to make sure that we do not become economically dependent on one single market. At the same time, our guidelines do not exclude any partner, either. Instead, our inclusive policy approach, which encompasses all partners in the Indo-Pacific, aims to counteract the rise of bipolar structures'. In structural terms, Germany clearly favours a multilateral regional architecture. What is more, Germany envisions the Indo-Pacific multilateral order to be 'rules-based' in that international law rather than 'the law of the strong must prevail'.¹²⁶

Convergence or divergence? Comparing the French and German approaches to the Indo-Pacific

When one examines the role conceptions of France and Germany in the Indo-Pacific the differences are at first sight striking. French official documents conceive the Indo-Pacific predominantly as a geographic space encompassing French overseas territories and EEZs from the Eastern coast of Africa to the Pacific. The government in Paris hereby conceives of its role in the region first and foremost as a 'resident power'. The term 'resident power' is directly linked in documents and speeches to safeguarding the aforementioned French overseas territories, which house over 1.6 million French Nationals and amount to the world's second largest EEZ. Further to that, French officials have understood France's role in the region as one that acts as a 'stabilising' and 'balancing power', as well as a promoter of a rules-based order. To act out such a role France intends to put to use its increased naval presence and power projection capacities in the region, but at the same French officials have also mentioned a possible role for France as a mediator and a negotiator and a proponent of the rules-based order. Germany, on the other hand, conceives itself first and foremost as a trading state. It conceives the Indo-Pacific as a maritime space in which Berlin possesses neither overseas territories, EEZs nor naval resources. Its officials have repeatedly stressed the notion that Germany is neither a resident power nor a military actor in the region. Its officials do not perceive Berlin

¹²³ Schoof, "The EU and ASEAN are predestined for a close partnership."

¹²⁴ "Vor EU-China-Gipfel."

¹²⁵ Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, "„Defending The West“: Rede Der Bundesministerin Der Verteidigung Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer Auf Der Münchner Sicherheitskonferenz" ["Defending the West": Speech by the Federal Minister of Defence Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer at the Munich Security Conference](Munich: February 15, 2020).

¹²⁶ Bundesregierung, "Leitlinien Zum Indo-Pazifik," 11.

as a mere bystander either, however its involvement is first and foremost one in the field of trade and commerce. Berlin furthermore conceives its own role as a strong proponent of a rules-based regional order as well as of global norms and a promoter of multilateral cooperation in the region.

However, in terms of key objectives set out by Berlin and Paris, the similarities outweigh the differences. Shared objectives include, among others, participation in Asia's economic growth dynamics, safeguarding the rules-based order, avoiding the outbreak of military conflict, and strengthening the EU's role in the region. In speeches and interviews, officials from both country have emphasised the importance of open and safe sea-lanes and open and free markets when referring to the rules-based order. They also share the goal of 'diversifying' (Germany), or to 'expand and deepen' (France), their respective partnerships in the region to reduce overt reliance on China. While France mentions, among others, Australia, India and Japan as key strategic partners, Germany on the other hand emphasises the importance of ASEAN as a crucial partner in the region. Both furthermore do not attempt to contain or decouple from China, but rather view China in a more nuanced manner - as a partner in some policy areas such as environmental protection, and as a challenger in others. Therefore, both states seek to continue to engage with China through dialogues, agreements and other forms of engagement. Most notably, perhaps, the U.S. are hardly ever mentioned in neither the French nor German papers over the Indo-Pacific. However, the few times they are mentioned, it is mostly done so to accentuate the differences between the 'inclusive' conceptions of the Indo-Pacific that prevail in Berlin and Paris *vis-à-vis* the exclusive, containment-focused Free and Open Indo-Pacific concept of the Trump administration.

As co-initiators of the global "Alliance for Multilateralism", France and Germany also attempt to strengthen multilateralism in the Indo-Pacific via inter-regional cooperation between the EU and ASEAN with the stated objectives including an EU-ASEAN strategic partnership agreement, which was indeed successfully accomplished in December 2020, as well as the conclusion of an EU-ASEAN FTA in the future. Strengthening multilateralism for Berlin and Paris also includes fostering closer cooperation with other regional multilateral organisations, i.e., BIMSTEC, IORA or PIF. Both will also apply to join the ADMM+ and push for admission of the EU to the EAS. And at European level, Berlin and Paris seek to draft, in cooperation with other member states, an EU Indo-Pacific strategy paper by 2021.

Where they differ is that Berlin's Indo-Pacific guidelines are much broader in their outreach and encompass numerous objectives such as for example the promotion of human rights, fostering closer people-to-people relations through cooperation in culture, education and science or digital connectivity, which for the time being were only mentioned in passing by French officials. Where both states also differ slightly is with regard to their rhetoric

regarding their outlook on the regional security architecture. French officials have frequently promoted their idea of a ‘multipolar’ security order in the Indo-Pacific designed to balance China’s increasing assertiveness through a web of bi- and minilateral alliances and partnerships. This includes bilateral defence partnerships with Japan, Australia and India for example. German officials on the other hand appear to favour a multilateral security order with a stronger focus on legally binding, highly institutionalised forms of regional cooperation in the field of security and defence. German strategic documents mention RECAAP, the South China Sea COC, the MDI or the ATT as examples.

In terms of planned initiatives, France and Germany both seek to launch initiatives intent on deepening their respective partnerships with countries in the region. For the French, with their so far very security-oriented Indo-Pacific strategic documents and its self-conception as a “resident power”, this mostly comprises joint military exercises, arms exports and information exchanges. Germany’s initiatives related to its diversification strategy are much broader, in that they include increased security and defence cooperation, but also extend to other policy fields such as digital transformation (i.e. dialogues with Australia, Japan and South Korea), renewable energies (i.e. Green Energy Corridors with India), the promotion of media freedom (i.e. sponsoring media dialogues and scholarships for journalists), or humanitarian assistance (i.e. support for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh). Both countries also plan to increase their naval presence in the region by dispatching more, or in the case of Germany a first, naval vessel(s) to the region in 2021. Both also seek to expand their activities in conflict mediation and conflict management, especially with regard to lingering civil conflicts. Berlin and Paris also plan to launch initiatives aimed at tackling climate change and environmental politics more generally, including, among others, planned projects on the promotion of renewable energies, building regional cyclone alert systems, supporting sustainable fisheries, or combatting marine litter. Furthermore, Germany’s Indo-Pacific guidelines encompass projects designed to support multilateral organisations, for example extending financial support for the ASEAN secretariat. Unlike France, Germany also plans to channel some of its security cooperation with Indo-Pacific partners through NATO via its “Partners across the globe” programme. Generally, Germany’s planned initiatives are often linked to its self-conception as a trading state and therefore also encompass projects on the diversification of supply chains, improved market access for German and European products or the promotion of fair competition and sustainability. German officials have hereby reiterated the importance of concluding FTAs between the EU and Indo-Pacific countries, as well as strengthening the multilateral trade system with the WTO at the helm, too.

In terms of their outlook or conceptualisation of regional order, both countries share the assumption that hegemony as well as a bipolar order in the

Indo-Pacific would be detrimental to their respective interests. Both furthermore conceive of the Indo-Pacific as an inclusive space, thereby including China, which should be rules-based and with ASEAN at the centre. However, both countries differ markedly with regard to the underlying structure of the Indo-Pacific order. France intends to promote a “stable, law-based, multipolar” order, which appears to be based on numerous bi-, tri- and minilateral partnerships as its core building blocks. This is not to say that France neglects any multilateral aspects entirely, however, ASEAN and related multilateral forums feature much less prominently in the French debate compared to the debate in Berlin. Neither has France made attempts to join the Quad. Yet in comparison, Berlin’s ideas on order differ in that they see ASEAN and related multilateral organisations as core building blocks rather than bilaterals or trilaterals. This divergence, we argue, does not appear to be fundamental in nature, but rather in terms of their prioritisation of structural building blocks.

Conclusion

To conclude, our analysis failed to detect significant instances of strategic diversion between the Indo-Pacific concepts of France and Germany. To be sure, in terms of their role conceptions, there is significant divergence in that France sees itself as resident power safeguarding French territories and EEZs, while Germany conceives itself mainly as a trading state intent on safeguarding open trading routes and markets. However, the different role conceptions are in essence not antithetical. They contain numerous shared or complementary features such as their emphasis on the rules-based order, or their emphasis on inclusive forms of regional cooperation.

Furthermore, the different role conceptions for the most part do not lead to significant divergences in terms of key strategic objectives, planned initiatives or conceptualisations of regional order. This includes shared objectives such as the diversification of their partnerships in the region, the reduction of their (economic) overdependence on China or the preservation of open shipping routes. It also extends to numerous planned initiatives, such as expanding their respective naval presence in the region, the promotion of renewable resources and green energy or their nuanced approaches *vis-à-vis* China. Lastly it also extends to similar conceptualisations of the Indo-Pacific’s order as an inclusive, non-hegemonic and non-bipolar space.

These findings lead us to conclude, first, that strategic dilution between France and Germany with regard to the Indo-Pacific appears unlikely for the time being. Secondly, however, our analysis has also revealed an often very high level of abstraction in terms of the stated objectives as well as related initiatives on both sides. In many ways, both countries forego, for the

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time being, hard strategic choices in terms of a prioritisation of goals, partners in the region, as well as the related allocation or re-allocation of resources. As the current debates in both countries stand so far, they appear more as declarations of intent and rather than actual strategies. This appears to be the case especially with regard to Germany's *Leitlinien*. Thirdly, in the absence of strategic dilution and with Germany and France converging with regard to their key objectives, planned initiatives and conceptualisations of regional order, and because of both so far foregoing hard strategic choices in their respective Indo-Pacific strategies or guidelines, we assume that cross-loading between the "E2" as well as from the "E2" over to other EU members to be fruitful. However, were a EU document – be it in the form of a non-paper, guidelines or a strategy – to emerge as a result of Franco-German cross-loading, one can tacitly infer from our analysis that it might appear rather as a least-common denominator of European ideas and objectives on the Indo-Pacific rather than a clear-cut EU strategy. Given that France, with its overseas territories in the region and associated somewhat particular outlook, is *de facto* an outlier case in Europe, one can furthermore assume a European outlook or strategy to edge stronger towards Germany's trade-centric approach.