

DIPLOMATIC NETWORK AND OFFICIAL VISITS

Ensuring presence and strengthening multilateralism in the Indo-Pacific

In the French conception, the Indo-Pacific encompasses some 50 countries, *i.e.* over a quarter of UN members. Defending interests in this area requires a major diplomatic investment.

In the Indo-Pacific, France supports a network of 37 embassies, hundreds of diplomats and thousands of agents attached to various ministries, covering all the countries in the region, without exception. There are many official visits, although they have been concentrated in just a few countries, including the United Arab Emirates, China, and India. France is also investing in regional organisations while developing new multilateral formats, in particular trilateral formats.

A UNIVERSAL DIPLOMATIC NETWORK

France has a network of 37 embassies in the Indo-Pacific region, which coordinates a large proportion of bilateral cooperation in all areas (*see Fact sheet No.11 – Scientific cooperation and innovation and Fact sheet No.9 – Cultural cooperation and Francophonie*). Some have a wider geographical scope. The embassy in Fiji covers Kiribati, Nauru, Tonga and Tuvalu¹.

Among these 52 countries, there are two special cases: the embassy in Yemen was closed in 2015 following the deterioration of the political and security situation, as was the representative office in North Korea in 2020 due to the closure of borders in the context of the pandemic. France has a representative office in Taiwan, the French Office in Taipei.

There are only nine female ambassadors in the network (including Bangladesh, Djibouti, Laos, Oman and Singapore), and none in the region's seven G20 countries.

There are also three thematic ambassadors: an ambassador for the Indo-Pacific since 2020; an ambassador for regional cooperation in the Indian Ocean; and an ambassador for the Pacific Community and the Pacific Regional Environment Programme.

Compared to its main regional partners, the French embassy network is not particularly concentrated.² 23 percent of France's embassy network is located there (37 embassies out of 162), compared with 24 percent for the United States (40 out of 167), 26 percent for the United Kingdom (40 out of 156), 26 percent for China (44 out of 171) and 28 percent for Japan (42 out of 151).

As for the diplomatic presence of Indo-Pacific countries in France, sixteen of them, mostly Pacific island states, have no embassy in Paris. In some cases, their embassies in Belgium have a geographical scope which extends to France, as is the case with Fiji, Tuvalu, the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea.

These countries have consulates in six French cities, three of which are in overseas territories: Marseille (China, Indonesia and Japan), Lyon (China and Japan), Strasbourg (China and Japan), Nouméa (Australia, Indonesia, Japan, New Zealand and Vanuatu), Papeete (China) and Saint-Denis (China, India and Madagascar) (*see Fact sheet No.1 – Overseas territories*).

UNEVENLY BALANCED OFFICIAL VISITS

The region's importance is reflected in the many official visits it receives, including those from the President, the Prime Minister and the Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs³. Since 2017, there have been more than 70 visits in the Indo-Pacific.

The President, whose visits are highly symbolic, has made three trips to China (2018, 2019 and 2023), the United Arab Emirates (2017, 2021 and 2022) and Japan, coupled with participation in the G20 in Osaka in 2019, the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games in 2021, and the G7 in Hiroshima in 2023. Kenya and India have been visited twice.

The President visited Indonesia and Thailand for the G20 and APEC summits in 2022. For the first time

¹To make the picture more comprehensive, the embassy in the Philippines covers Micronesia, the Marshall Islands and Palau, the embassy in New Zealand covers the Cook Islands, the embassy in Vanuatu covers the Solomon Islands, the embassy in Sri Lanka covers the Maldives, the embassy in Kenya covers Somalia, the embassy in Indonesia covers East Timor, and the Indian embassy covers Bhutan.

² Lowy Institute Global Diplomatic Index (2021), <https://globaldiplomacyindex.lowyinstitute.org>

³The figures only include on-site visits, not the many exchanges by telephone and videoconference, or visits to Paris.



under the Fifth Republic, a Head of State visited Mongolia, Sri Lanka and the Pacific island states (Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea) in 2023. On the other hand, there were no visits to strategic countries such as South Korea and Singapore.

As for the Prime Minister's rare visits, they generally overlap with those of the President. Trips have been made to the United Arab Emirates (2018), China (2018), Vietnam (2018), Djibouti (2020) and Kenya (2021).

Successive Europe and Foreign Affairs ministers have travelled extensively, with more than 45 visits to the region since 2017. Three countries are often visited: the United Arab Emirates with nine visits, China with seven, and India with six. They are followed by South Africa, Indonesia and Japan (three visits), and South Korea (two visits). Other countries have been visited once, including Burma (2017), Madagascar, Mauritius and Mozambique (2020) and Oman (2022). The Minister for the Armed Forces has also travelled extensively (*see Fact sheet No.4 – Military presence and defence diplomacy*).

We should add the visits, since 2022, by the Minister Delegate for Foreign Trade, Attractiveness and French Nationals Abroad and the Secretary of State for Development, Francophonie and International Partnerships. The former visited Singapore (2022), New Zealand (2023) and Tanzania (2023). The latter visited Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu (2022), as well as Madagascar and India (2023) (*see Fact sheet No.6 – Development aid and the environmental*).

INTEGRATION INTO A REGIONAL ARCHITECTURE

France and the French overseas territories participate in many regional forums, either as members or as observers. In the Pacific Ocean, France is a founding member of the Pacific Community (CPS), set up in 1947, and, since the withdrawal of the Netherlands in 1962, the only EU member state to participate. The United Kingdom, which withdrew in 2005, returned in 2021. New Caledonia enabled France to join the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), first as an associate member in 1999, then as an observer in 2006. Nouméa was admitted as a full member ten years later, along with French Polynesia.

In the Indian Ocean, France is a member of the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), which it joined in 1986

through La Réunion. In 2020, it became a member of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) on behalf of Réunion, nineteen years after joining it as a dialogue partner.

In Southeast Asia, France has been an ASEAN dialogue partner since 2020. Paris has joined an ADMM+ expert group, although it is unable to become a full member. On the other hand, its presence within the ASEAN Regional Forum is realised only through the European Union.

In 1996, Paris and Singapore initiated the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), which has 53 partners, including 30 European countries, 21 Asian countries, the EU and the ASEAN secretariat. Although the French President has been invited to attend the APEC summit in 2022, France is not a member (*see Fact sheet No.8 – Economic cooperation and business*).

France participates in around fifteen multilateral conferences, forums and dialogues in the region, including the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), which it chaired in summer 2021. The country would like to join ReCAAP (Cooperative Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia), to which five European countries (Germany, Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom) already belong (*see Fact sheet No.5 – Security and police cooperation*).

France participates in minilateral arrangements. The signing of the FRANZ agreements in 1992 with Australia and New Zealand (*see Fact sheet No.7 – Humanitarian aid, crises and natural disasters*) was followed by the introduction of more political trilateral formats: the France-India-Australia dialogue in 2020, and the France-India-United Arab Emirates dialogue in 2023.

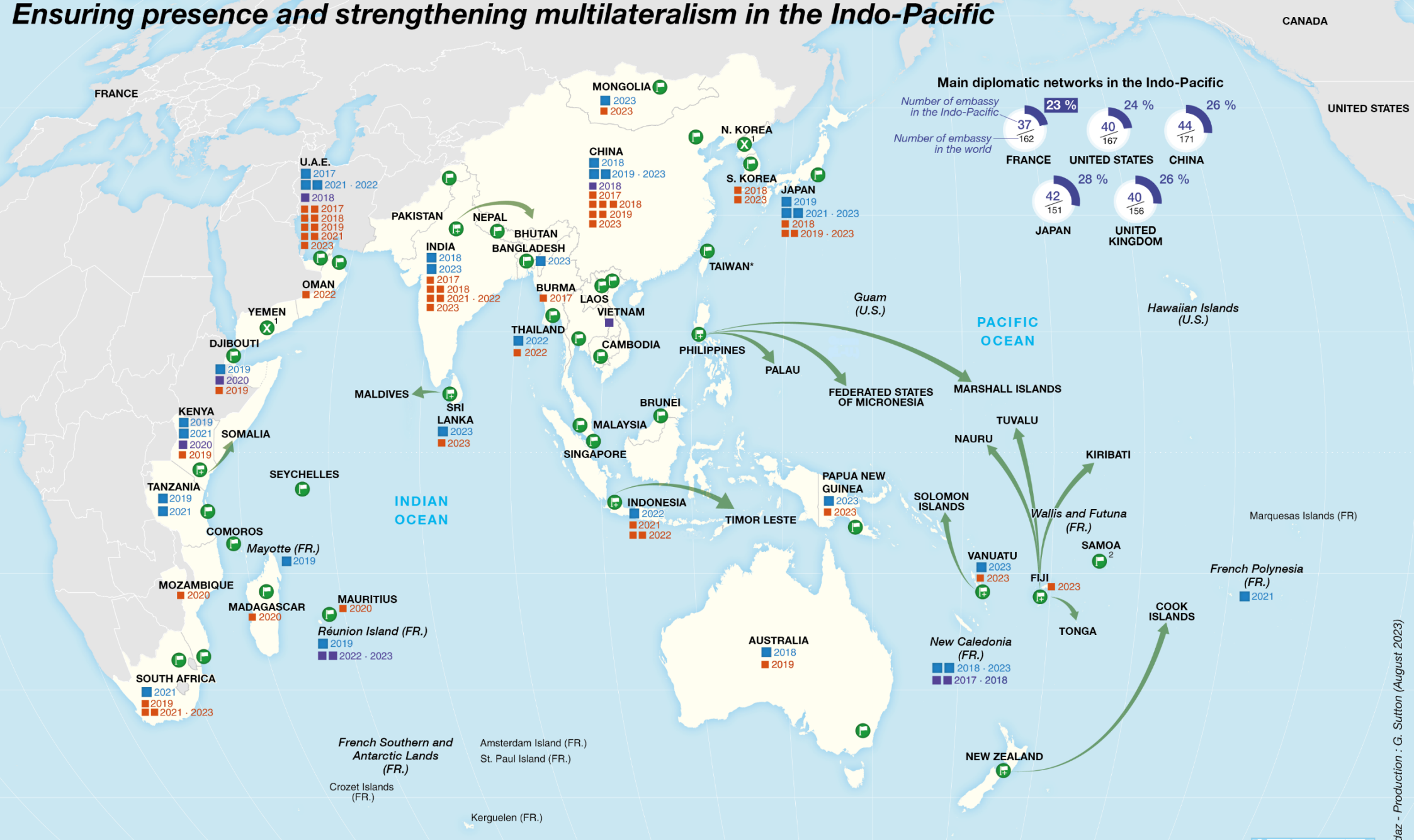
July 2023

Antoine BONDAZ and Marie DESBONNETS⁴

⁴ Contact: a.bondaz@frstrategie.org // @AntoineBondaz

No.3 - DIPLOMATIC NETWORK AND OFFICIAL VISITS

Ensuring presence and strengthening multilateralism in the Indo-Pacific



Diplomatic network

- Embassies
- Embassy with expanded geographical jurisdiction
- Territories covered by these embassies
- Embassy/representative office closed

* French office in Taipei

Official visits
By number, since 2017

- President of the Republic
- Prime Minister
- Minister for Europe and Foreign affairs

1. The representative office in North Korea has been closed since 2020, the Embassy in Yemen since 2015
2. The embassy to Samoa was announced in July 2023





ABOUT THE PROJECT

France in the Indo-Pacific - Proactive power and solutions provider is an unprecedented research project that consolidates, synthesises and maps France's actors and actions in a region of vital importance to national interests.

It consists in a dozen **thematic fact sheets** intended to provide greater visibility and to highlight what is being done in overseas territories for the benefit of the French people and local populations by ministries, other state actors but also French business and NGOs.

This project ties in with research by FRS, including **two policy papers**: “La France, une puissance d’initiatives en Indo-Pacifique” (November 2022)⁵ and “Reconceptualizing French foreign and security policy in the Indo-Pacific” (July 2023)⁶.

List of Fact Sheets as of September 15th, 2023

- No.1 - Overseas territories
- No.2 - Demographics and political representation
- No.3 - Diplomatic network and official visits
- No.4 - Military presence and defence diplomacy
- No.5 - Security and police cooperation
- No.6 - Development aid and the environment
- No.7 - Humanitarian aid, crises and natural disasters
- No.8 - Economic cooperation and business
- No.9 - Cultural cooperation and Francophonie
- No.10 - Education and human rights
- No.11 - Scientific cooperation and innovation

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

This project was initiated by **Antoine BONDAZ, Ph.D.**, director of the “Observatory for Multilateralism in the Indo-Pacific”. He was assisted by **Marie DESBONNETS**, a Sciences Po student and a graduate of IEP Lyon. **Nathan BLUJSTAN**, a graduate from SOAS, translated.

The Foundation for strategic research (FRS), founded in 1992, is a foundation with public utility status (decree of February 26, 1993) that operates in complete independence. Its mission is to analyse strategy and international security issues, and to contribute to the strategic debate in France and the promotion of French thinking abroad.

FRS conducts research on and in the Indo-Pacific through regional and thematic approaches, publishes policy papers and reports, organises international conferences, conducts high-level strategic dialogues (bilateral and trilateral), pilots a European exchange platform on the Indo-Pacific and has signed cooperation agreements with the region's leading think tanks.

⁵ <https://www.frstrategie.org/publications/notes/france-une-puissance-initiatives-indo-pacifique-2022>

⁶ <https://www.frstrategie.org/en/publications/notes/reconceptualizing-french-foreign-and-security-policy-indo-pacific-2023>