

Stand-in Forces: A French Perspective

Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific

by LTC Nicolas Poirot

The Marine Corps could extend its Stand-in Force capabilities overseas through enhanced cooperation in the Pacific with the French Armed Forces.

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forces in the Pacific represents a real opportunity for the Marine Corps to mature further the concepts of Expeditionary Advance Based Operations and Stand-in Forces. This could be achieved by building upon preexisting interactions in the area and through enhancing the integrated deterrence capabilities, which are key to stabilizing this part of the globe.

Common Understanding of the Environment

Competitors challenge the French armed forces and the U.S. Marine Corps in the same way. In the Indo-Pacific, the global development of military assets has redefined the military thresholds. Strategic intimidation and transgressions (movement of troops in border areas, ballistic missile tests, numerous incidents in the commons, or repeated flights of military aircraft into national airspaces of neighboring states, etc.) are now part of power competition during peacetime.

The competitive interactions taking place in those areas allow the use of legal non-kinetic and non-military actors (such as coast guards and paramilitary forces), providing leadership with greater flexibility in the implementation of coercion (modulation of violence, rollback). Nowadays, grey-zone activities and hybrid warfare have irreversibly spread into the cyber and space domains, which are now military domains.

French Armed Forces Constitute a Fully Capable Allied

France has the strong will to strengthen its strategic functions (know and anticipate, prevent, deter, protect and after intervene) in order to guarantee the continuity and credibility of its action in the long term and across the entire spectrum of confrontation.

In a *competitive context*, France relies on its armed forces to show its determination in the framework of a coherent global strategy to *win the war before the war*, acting as much as needed in all or some of the domains and environments. Assuming this role requires the French armed forces to help understand the capabilities and intents of the various competitors and to constantly propose relevant military options to the political decision makers. Therefore, France aims to develop bilateral and multilateral partnerships in the field of maritime domain awareness, deepening existing bilateral maritime dialogues (Japan and India) and seeking others, such as Indonesia. All actions France undertakes give meaning to its determination—such as when France interacts with some of its competitors and opponents (air policing, submarine detection, etc.) or carries out operational training activities or operational deployments, both in a French national framework and with its allies and partners.

Operational training directly contributes to the credibility of the French armed forces. It prepares the personnel and

France is a sovereign nation of the Indo-Pacific. Its overseas territories—Mayotte, La Reunion, the French Southern and Antarctic territories, New Caledonia, Wallis and Futuna, and French Polynesia—are home to 1.6 million French citizens. Spanning from the Indian to the Pacific Oceans, these territories account for nine out of eleven million square kilometers of France's Exclusive Economic Zone, which make it the second largest exclusive economic zone in the world after the United States. More than 200,000 French citizens also live in the littoral countries of the Indian Ocean, Asia, and Oceania. Accordingly, France intends to assume its role as a regional power in order to protect its sovereign interests, ensure the security of its citizens, and actively contribute to international stability.

The Marine Corps and the French armed forces share a lot of common (objectives, challenges, perception of the environment, services capabilities, expeditionary DNA, etc.). For this reason, developing the interactions between the Marine Corps and the French armed

the chain of command for the toughness of engagements, the diversity and ambiguity of hybrid courses of action, the synchronization of effects in several domains and environments, and for deployment within a coalition with its allies and partners. French deployments, exercises, and activities are a way to show the credibility of the French armed forces' capabilities and to notify their determination to their allies, competitors, and opponents. French armed forces ensure that every activity is part of a campaign plan and that strong strategic communication deliver the appropriate message to the right target—being an ally or competitor.

The dispute context is considered as war “just before” the war. In this type of balance of power, the French armed forces help lift uncertainty and prevent the imposition of a *fait accompli*. To do that, they rely on a high level of reactivity and well-adapted capabilities. Alongside the other strategic power instruments, they are also capable of understanding the intent of the various stakeholders in order to ascertain the national objectives and discourage the opponent while remaining in control of the level of violence.

The *confrontation* happens when a stakeholder, persistently using force to reach his objectives, provokes an equal reaction. France's prime objective in the confrontation is to force the opponent to accept French demands, especially by undermining its will and its ability to respond. Having a range of sovereign intelligence assets, the French armed forces are able to detect the low early warning of confrontation enabling themselves to anticipate the turn toward confrontation.

Common Capability Requirements

French Armed Forces develop further their capabilities and adapt their organization in order to conquer a multi-environment and multi-domain superiority. France relies on a credible, well-balanced, and coherent armed forces model. This model ensures the French armed forces the ability and the flexibility to assert themselves across the entire spectrum of con-

frontation. The excellence of the French chain of command relies on the flexibility and reactivity of its organization. France's ability to understand situations and decide quickly and cleverly enables its armed forces to synchronize effects on a broad scale—making the most of the opportunities offered by the cyber domain and artificial intelligence. Simplification effort makes it possible to regain useful time at all levels, thus promoting anticipation.

The French perspective and conceptual thinking constantly integrate the evolutions of conflict in order to identify the axes of transformation of France's armed forces and take the needs for resilience, rusticity, and resupply into account. To do that, it integrates the assumption of a major engagement, including high-intensity phases in all or some environments and domains, and makes the most of potential technological ruptures. Finally, France implements agile processes that enable its armed forces to seize cooperation opportunities in order to reduce the length and cost of the programs.

The French army, which is made out of three segments—emergency, intermediate, and decision—is undertaking its modernization. The SCORPION program totally redefines how

the French army will conduct military operations (vetronics system) and requires the current acquisition of new combat systems (JAGUAR Combat Reconnaissance Vehicles, GRIFFON Armoured Personnel Carriers and their multiple variants, Medium Protected Mobility Vehicles SERVAL, and combat [TIGRE] or mobility [CAÏMAN-NH 90] helicopter upgrades, among other equipment). The TITAN Program focuses on the decision segment and will introduce a new main battle tank (*Main Ground Combat System*), the future artillery system (*Common Indirect Fire System*), including long-range precision fires, and a state-of-the-art attack aviation platform. As the French armed forces' modernization occurs in the same period as *Force Design 2030*, sharing experimentations is key to managing the risk of losing interoperability.

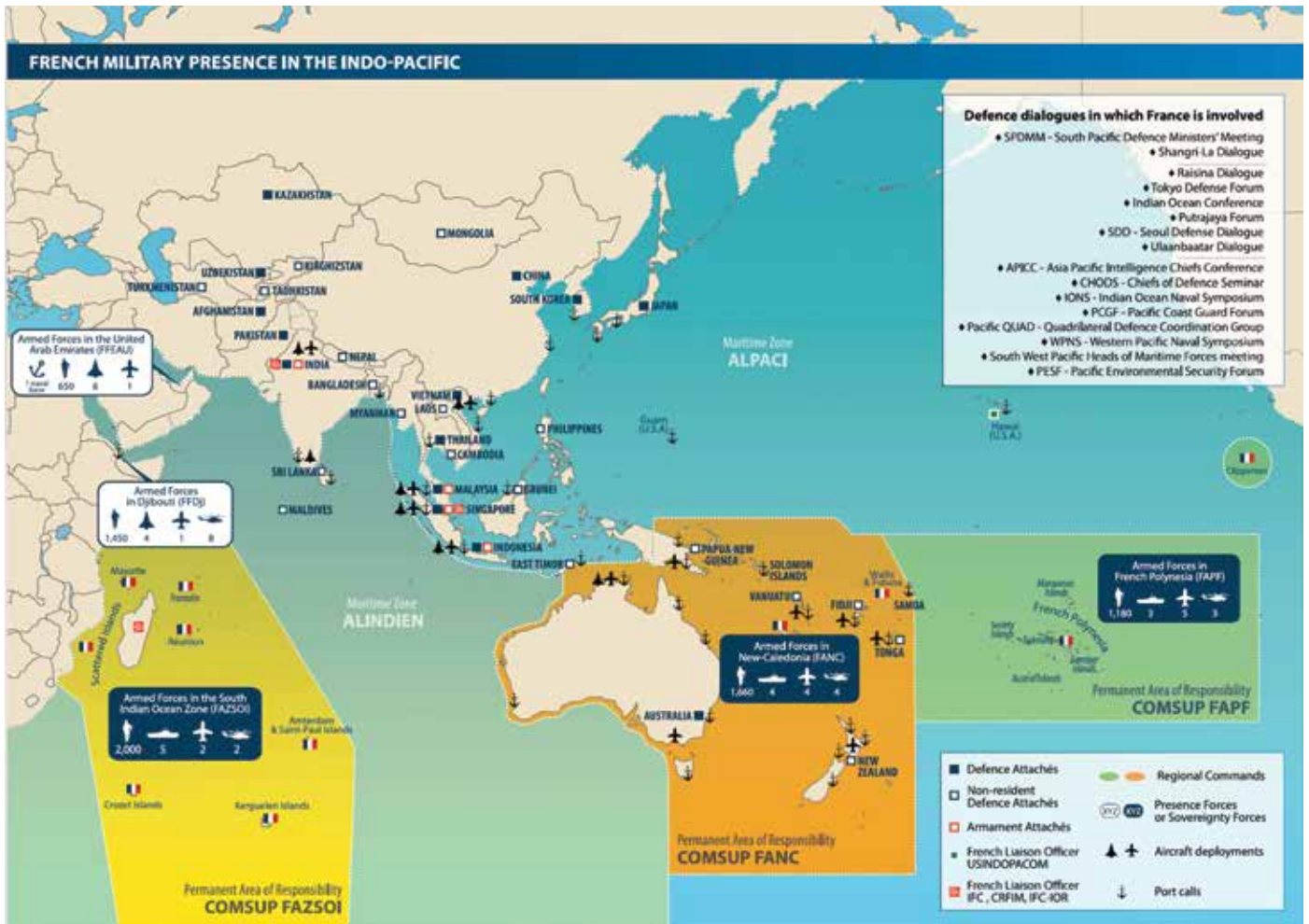
A French Strong Footprint in the Pacific

In the Indo-Pacific, France counts no less than five joint military commands: three sovereignty forces (French Armed Forces in the South Indian Ocean, French Armed Forces in New Caledonia, and French armed forces in French Polynesia) and two presence forces (French armed forces in the United Arab Emirates and French forces in Djibouti). They cover five maritime areas, of which two are ocean areas (Admiral in Charge of the Pacific and Admiral in charge of the Indian Ocean). These joint regional commands ensure full geographical coverage of the Indo-Pacific and guarantee the protection and security of French nationals and territories, the control of the French Exclusive Economic Zone, and France's regular participation in defense cooperation activities in all fields.

The commitment of ships and aircraft from metropolitan France punctually reinforced this permanent layout. Following the deployment of the Naval Air Group in 2019, *Mission Mariane*, conducted in 2021 and carried out by French nuclear attack submarine *L'Émeraude* and supply ship *La Seine*, displayed France's capacity to deploy strategic assets far



New French combat systems: Griffon (top) and Jaguar (bottom). (Photo provided by author.)



French military presence across the Indo-Pacific region. (Photo provided by author.)

from the metropolitan territory for a long period. France ensures the permanent deployment of a navy ship in the Pacific, either in partnership with its U.S. ally or within the multilateral framework of the Combined Maritime Forces. The Air and Space French Force equally enhances its presence in the Pacific, considering the exercise *Pitch Black 2018* (Australia) and the *Pégase 2018* (Southeast Asia) and *Skyros 2021* (Indian Ocean) missions. Such deployments represent opportunities to interact with allies and partners, namely India, Japan, and the United States. Furthermore, an important diplomatic network extends this footprint.

Cooperation between the French armed forces and U.S. Marine Corps in the Pacific does not start from scratch. On the contrary, there are already existing permanent relationships between

MARFOREUR and Admiral in Charge of the Pacific built up upon mutual commitment to operations (*Jeanne d'Arc Mission 2021* for example) and

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exercises (*Croix du Sud 2021*) or acknowledgment of the rich respective history (French troupes de marine annual celebration of the battle of Bazeilles). Marines are also regularly invited to

come and challenge themselves in the French local combat training facilities.

The French armed forces' strategic vision, capabilities, footprint, and pre-existing interoperability with the Marine Corps represent a real advantage for developing and experimenting with the Expeditionary Advance Based Operations and the Stand-in Force concepts (sensors integration, supply chain, local rules of engagement development, etc.).

