



Conceptualizing POLARIS 21 and Strategic Interoperability Framework (SIF) in background of AUKUS and AWDC, NATO.

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Abstract.

Collecting information is at the heart of the intelligence and analysis process. The process of GIGO has been adopted, and the information provided is correct or at least correct as possible to understand the recent “POLARIS-21”. Polaris 21 is a high-intensity simulated combat scenario in the Mediterranean organized by France to ensure operational readiness. POLARIS 21 is an important event that took place in the recent days, the POLARIS-21 naval exercise has highlighted a number of issues that are needed to be seen in the backdrop of different events, including AUKUS that so created French diplomatic crisis with allied members. POLARIS 21, is a high-intensity combat exercise on board, Charles de Gaulle aircraft carrier which further led to US-French Strategic Interoperability Framework. As tensions rise in both the Indo-Pacific and the Black Sea, France is preparing for every eventuality in terms of conflict. The paper would tend to highlight if there is any rift that has been caused amongst the US-France relation in back drop of cancellation of deal between France and Australia regarding nuclear submarines that worth more than 50 billion Euros. The paper tends to highlight the concept of Standardization and Interoperability in warfare regimes. The role of NATO stays to an important element of consideration keeping in view the diplomatic crisis that took place due to the cancellation of earlier long made deals between France and Australia. The paper tends to analyze the future of naval warfare that has been neglected for too long. The collection is preceded by an introductory short essay formulated by different sources of information available to the date. The paper struggles through a journey of collection from various pieces of information to analysis mode and concluding remarks.

Introduction

The French Navy has defined POLARIS 21 as a situation, “In a confrontation situation, that would oppose them (adversaries) to a power using indirect strategies and having recent equipment, the French Armed Forces must be able to propose several military options, covering all environments and fields of conflict in a coordinated and synchronized manner. Acting simultaneously at sea, on land, in the air, in exo-atmospheric space and cyberspace, in the informational and electromagnetic fields.”¹ The situation referred as confrontation clearly depicts the importance of changing global world order and so does navies all over the world. The hegemon at sea was and shall remain the primary tool to control the world affairs. POLARIS 21 took place in two phases: ²

- Phase 1: Warm-up phase for specific high-strength know-how from November 18th to November 25th
- Phase 2: The LIVEX phase from November 25th to December 3rd, under realistic conditions, represents the army of the Mistral-class LHD Tonnerre (Task Force 472), a fictional country called “Mercury”. Air and terrestrial assets act as a ban / area denial (A2AD) to support OPFOR (a special unit tasked with emulating the enemy tactics for the purposes of military training) ³.

The Participating Units included some 6,000 French and foreign troops, including 4,000 French sailors, are involved POLARIS 21 including 1 nuclear-power aircraft carrier and its airwing (including 20 Rafale Marine and 2 E-2C Hawkeye aircraft), 13 surface combatants including 5 foreign vessels, 1 nuclear-powered attack submarine, 1 LHD and its amphibious units, 6 patrol vessels, 3 supply vessels, 3 flag admirals and their staff, naval special forces units, mine warfare units, several

¹ Naval News, “Here Is The Ship List For POLARIS 21: France’s High Intensity Combat Exercise”, 19 November, 2021, <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2021/11/here-is-the-ship-list-for-polaris-21-frances-high-intensity-combat-exercise/>

² Freddievauchelle, Worldakkam, “Here is the POLARIS 21 ship list: French high-intensity combat exercises”, November 19, 2021, <https://worldakkam.com/here-is-the-polaris-21-ship-list-french-high-intensity-combat-exercises/492620/>

³ “Georgia State Defense Force”, OPFOR Battalion, <https://paonews.net/units-map/opfor/>

air and anti-air assets.⁴ With help from the UK, US, Italy, Greece and Spain, POLARIS 21 simulated a battle at sea involving the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle.⁵ The aircraft carrier, was involved in a collision with a sailing boat off the French coast. It conducted an imaginary attack led by the amphibious helicopter carrier Tonnerre. The high end war games has bolstered other countries and navies to develop their capabilities at sea and look into accounts of modernizing Naval Warfare.

Strategic Interoperability Framework (SIF) and POLARIS 21.

“Know the enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles you will never be in peril. When you are ignorant of the enemy, but know yourself, your chances of winning or losing are equal. If ignorant both of your enemy and of yourself, you are certain in every battle to be in peril.”⁶

The US has recently made overtures to France in the name of improving interoperability, attempting to mend their military ties that have been strained because of the nuclear submarine deal.⁷ Recent history shows that during military contingencies and operations other than war, the U.S. Navy operates in coalitions with allied and friendly navies i.e. Kosovo is the most recent example of this fact.⁸ POLARIS-21 exercise which was conducted by the French Ministry of Armed Forces on November 22, 2021, Polaris – Préparation Opérationnelle en Lutte

⁴ Naval News, “Polaris 21: Participating Units”, “Here Is The Ship List For POLARIS 21: France’s High Intensity Combat Exercise”, 19 November, 2021, <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2021/11/here-is-the-ship-list-for-polaris-21-frances-high-intensity-combat-exercise/>

⁵ Anoncandanga, “The French Navy and the largest international exercise in many years, Polaris 21”, <https://www.anoncandanga.com/the-french-navy-and-the-largest-international-exercise-in-many-years-polaris-21/>

⁶ The Joe 2010, “United States Joint Forces Command”, “Joe Purser, 757-203-3928”, “pg no.41” February 18, 2010, <https://man.fas.org/eprint/joe2010.pdf>

Quoted in Robert Debs Heintz, Jr., Dictionary of Military and Naval Quotations (Annapolis, MD, 1967), p.320.

⁷ Lin Yuan, “US-France grudge hard to go away”, China Military Online, 30 December, 2021, http://english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2021-12/30/content_10119571.htm

⁸ Kenneth Gause, Catherine Lea, Daniel Whiteneck, Eric Thompson, “U.S. Navy Interoperability with its High-End Allies”, “Operations with coalition navies”, Center for Strategic Studies Center for Naval Analyses, http://www.dodccrp.org/events/5th_ICCRTS/papers/Track3/080.pdf

aéromaritime, Résilience, Innovation et Supériorité (POLARIS 21) with the United States, United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, and Greece in Western Mediterranean.⁹ The naval exercise encompassed operational readiness in naval-air warfare, resilience, innovation and superiority. This exercise is being considered an unparalleled workout for the French Navy in every aspect of combat at sea: carrier operations, anti-submarine warfare, mine clearance, amphibious landings, as well as cyber threats and the latest drone tech. The naval exercise encompassed every situation that can stand as potential threat and figured out the ways to eliminate any chance of adversary. The recent POLARIS 21, is considered as a major operational exercise and was meant to prepare forces for a high-intensity engagement,¹⁰ which also latter opened avenues to signing of US-French Strategic Interoperability Framework “SIF”.¹¹ POLARIS 21 is seen as a “laboratory” for tomorrow’s warfare thanks to the integration and synchronization of effects in several fields and environments of conflict.¹² The exercise enabled French soldiers to innovate technically as well as tactically, and thus to invent and test the techniques of tomorrow’s warfare.¹³ The interoperability framework has intent of 20 years of naval coalition against any possible threat.

The United States have long used navies to influence the behavior of allies and adversaries during times of peace.¹⁴ The U.S. Navy may not have the most ships of any country's fleet, but it is well established as the greatest power on the world's seas. The United States is one of only a handful of countries that have a so-called

⁹ Navy Recognition, “French Navy starts operational exercise POLARIS 21 with NATO partners”, 22 NOVEMBER 2021, <https://www.navyrecognition.com/index.php/naval-news/naval-news-archive/2021/november/11039-french-navy-starts-operational-exercise-polaris-21-with-nato-partners.html>.

¹⁰ Martin Manaranche, Naval News, “French Navy To Kick Off ‘POLARIS’: Its Largest Ever Exercise”, November 16, 2021, <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2021/11/french-navy-to-kick-off-polaris-largest-exercise/>.

¹¹ Xavier Vavasseur, Naval News, US Navy, French Navy Ink Strategic Interoperability Framework, December 18, 2021 <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2021/12/us-navy-french-navy-ink-strategic-interoperability-framework/>.

¹² Martin Manaranche, Naval News, “French Navy To Kick Off ‘POLARIS’: Its Largest Ever Exercise”, November 16, 2021, <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2021/11/french-navy-to-kick-off-polaris-largest-exercise/>.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Jonathan Masters, Council on Foreign Relations 100, “Sea Power: The U.S. Navy and Foreign Policy, How is the navy used for diplomacy?” August 19, 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/sea-power-us-navy-and-foreign-policy#chapter-title-0-3>

blue-water navy, which can operate across the open oceans.¹⁵ The U.S. Navy owns 11 of the world's 43 active aircraft carriers and that doesn't count its nearly two dozen flat decked amphibious ships that might well be considered carriers in their own right.¹⁶ The passion of ever growing naval power from the US is a threat to different nations and that would just increase the security concerns and more weaponry exercise at seas. The United States is a maritime superpower because, its heavily armed warships can travel thousands of miles in a matter of days and linger around points of strategic interest without imposing on another country's sovereignty.¹⁷ For this out of many reasons the U.S. considers the navy as an incredibly powerful tool, especially for responding to international crises. This is one of the major reasons that why US considers development of its naval forces as one of the most priority task of national security.

The U.S. Navy and the French Navy (Marine Nationale) inked a Strategic Interoperability Framework (SIF) on 17 December 2021.¹⁸ This plan sets objectives intended to improve interoperability between the two navies over the next 20 years, particularly at the top of the operational spectrum: mastery of ocean spaces and power projection.¹⁹ It facilitates contacts between staffs and provides for the establishment of the framework authorizing the exchange of information and classified data.²⁰ The Framework foresees to organize the two navies (US & French) to build upon mutual capability, capacity, and operational goals of moving

¹⁵ Jonathan Masters, Council on Foreign Relations 100, "Sea Power: The U.S. Navy and Foreign Policy, What is the Navy's role?" August 19, 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/sea-power-us-navy-and-foreign-policy#chapter-title-0-2>

¹⁶ Military.com, "Active Ships in the US Navy", June 23, 2021, <https://www.military.com/navy/us-navy-ships.html>

¹⁷ Jonathan Masters, Council on Foreign Relations 100, "Sea Power: The U.S. Navy and Foreign Policy, What are the Navy's advantages?" August 19, 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/sea-power-us-navy-and-foreign-policy#chapter-title-0-1>.

¹⁸ Xavier Vavasseur, Naval News, US Navy, French Navy Ink Strategic Interoperability Framework, December 18, 2021 <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2021/12/us-navy-french-navy-ink-strategic-interoperability-framework/>.

¹⁹ "Marine Nationale", Twitter, "December 17, 2021", <https://twitter.com/MarineNationale/status/1471888240621850633>.

²⁰ "Ministry of the Armed Forces", Management: SIRPA Marine, "Signature of the Strategic Interoperability Plan", "December 17, 2021" <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/marine/actu-marine/signature-du-plan-strategique-d-interoperabilite>.

forward.²¹ The SIF agreement facilitates coordinated, cooperative efforts across echelons and regional commands all over the world.²² The Strategic Interoperability Framework federates energies around concrete objectives to meet the operational challenges the two navies will face together.²³ SIF has proved to be a “breakthrough” in arms deal between US and France. The US Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) December 21 released a statement on its website saying that the US State Department had decided to approve the selling of Electromagnetic Aircraft Launch System (EMALS) and advanced interception devices to France, which will be mounted on French Navy’s next aircraft carrier.²⁴ The contract, estimated at USD 1,321 million, will mark the first time America selling carrier-based EMALS to a foreign country if it successfully comes through.²⁵

Interoperability does not necessarily require common military equipment yet, it is important that the equipment can share common facilities, and is able to interact, connect and communicate, exchange data and services with other equipment.²⁶ Interoperable solutions can only be achieved through the effective employment of standardization, training, exercises, lessons learned, demonstrations, tests and trials.²⁷ Strategic Interoperability Framework is the modern way of developing and enhancing diplomacy through naval cooperation. In such scenarios naval operations may be intended to support, reassure, deter, or threaten different actors and promote the sense of peace and mutual development at sea.²⁸ The

²¹ America’s Navy, “Navy, French Marine Nationale Sign Strategic Interoperability Frame”, December 18, 2021. <https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/News-Stories/Article/2878786/navy-french-marine-nationale-sign-strategic-interoperability-framework/>

²² *Ibid.*

²³ America’s Navy, “Navy, French Marine Nationale Sign Strategic Interoperability Frame”, December 18, 2021. <https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/News-Stories/Article/2878786/navy-french-marine-nationale-sign-strategic-interoperability-framework/>.

²⁴ Lin Yuan, “US-France grudge hard to go away”, China Military Online, 30 December, 2021, http://english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2021-12/30/content_10119571.htm

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ NATO, “Interoperability: Connecting NATO Forces”, “Components”, March 24, 2020, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_84112.htm.

²⁷ NATO, “Interoperability: Connecting NATO Forces”, “Mechanisms”, March 24, 2020, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_84112.htm.

²⁸ Jonathan Masters, Council on Foreign Relations 100, “Sea Power: The U.S. Navy and Foreign Policy, How is the navy used for diplomacy?” August 19, 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/background/sea-power-us-navy-and-foreign-policy#chapter-title-0-3>

recently signed SIF may also be deemed as “gunboat diplomacy”²⁹, the more coercive use of navies in future and conflict of maritime powers at the high seas if not territorial waters. The coercive use of navies might lead to a power competition amongst the major maritime nations that can disrupt the peace at sea and turn it into aquatic grounds of warfront.

Standardization and Strategic Interoperability.

‘Standardization’ refers to the overall, multilevel goal of increasing the operational effectiveness of coalition military forces through various similarities.³⁰ Standardization is applied primarily to the areas of doctrine, procedures (‘tactics’), and logistics (‘defense materiel and battlefield equipment’). It is ranked into the following four levels of increasing standardization:³¹

- A. Compatibility - to operate without mutual interference.
- B. Interoperability - to operate more effectively together by exchanging services.
- C. Interchangeability - equal performance, exchangeable with minor adjustment.
- D. Commonality - using the same doctrine, procedures, or equipment.

The American, British, and Canadian (ABC) Armies’ ‘*Plan to Effect Standardization*’ came about in 1947, to continue the close cooperation begun during WWII.³² The other “Interoperability” of systems is a key enabler of the overarching operational goal of force integration—the fusing of the services and coalition partners into a unified military force that achieves high military effectiveness, exploiting and coordinating the individual force capabilities.³³ Whilst, “The Operational Interoperability” is the ability of systems, units, or forces to provide services to

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ “MAJOR DEAN S. MILLS, USAF” Coalition Interoperability: An International Adventure, <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/ASPJ/journals/Chronicles/mills.pdf>

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² “MAJOR DEAN S. MILLS, USAF”, “PAST INTEROPERABILITY IMPERATIVES”, <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/ASPJ/journals/Chronicles/mills.pdf>

³³ The National Academies of Sciences, “Interoperability” Chapter 02, <https://www.nap.edu/read/6457/chapter/4>

and accept services from other systems, units, or forces and to use the services so exchanged to enable them to operate effectively together.³⁴ Similarly the term “Technical Interoperability” refers to the condition achieved among communications-electronics systems or items of communications-electronics equipment when information or services can be exchanged directly and satisfactorily between them and/or their users the degree of interoperability should be defined when referring to specific cases.³⁵ The U.S. Navy has three reasons to be interoperable with other navies:³⁶

- a. Interoperability allows the U.S. Navy to operate with foreign navies during a crises or a conflict.
- b. Interoperability requirements between navies result in harmonization programs that have the political benefit of shaping foreign navies.
- c. Interoperability with foreign navies is required by U.S. policy.

France reservation over AUKUS.

It all began in mid-September, when the United States, Britain and Australia announced a “historic” security pact (AUKUS) to strengthen military capabilities in the Pacific, allowing them to share advanced defence technologies and equipping Australian forces with the know-how to build nuclear-powered submarines.³⁷ On September 15, the Australian government announced the termination of the contract for 12 submarines signed in 2016 with France.³⁸ This proved to be a huge

³⁴ Definition (1) in Joint Chiefs of Staff, Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms, as amended through December 7, 1998 (Joint Publication 1-02) and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Instruction 6212.01A: Compatibility, Interoperability, and Integration of Command, Control, Communications, Computers, and Intelligence Systems, June 1995.

³⁵ Definition (2) in joint Chiefs of Staff, Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms, as amended through December 7, 1998 (Joint Publication 1-02).

³⁶ Kenneth Gause, Catherine Lea, Daniel Whiteneck, Eric Thompson, “U.S. Navy Interoperability with its High-End Allies”, “Why the U.S. Navy needs to be interoperable” Center for Strategic Studies Center for Naval Analyses, http://www.dodccrp.org/events/5th_ICCRTS/papers/Track3/080.pdf

³⁷ Melissa Zhu, “Aukus alliance: what is it, what does it have to do with China, and why is France angry?”, 10 Oct, 2021, https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3151700/aukus-alliance-what-it-what-does-it-have-do-china-and-why?module=perpetual_scroll_0&pgtype=article&campaign=3151700

³⁸“Pascal samama”, BFM Business, “SUBMARINE CRISIS: NATIONAL ASSEMBLY WANTS TO KNOW IF AUSTRALIA'S "BETRAYAL" WAS DETECTABLE”, 27September, 2021, https://www.bfmtv.com/economie/entreprises/industries/crise-des-sous-marins-l-assemblee-nationale-veut-savoir-si-la-trahison-de-l-australie-etait-detectable_AN-202109270191.html

Washington and Canberra for the first time in 243 years.⁴⁶ This agreement, described as the contract of the century, represented an amount of more than 50 billion euros, of which around 10% for Naval Group.⁴⁷ Its rupture gave rise to an extremely rare vocabulary and diplomatic reactions.⁴⁸ The Ministry of the Armed Forces spoke of “treason”, that of Foreign Affairs of “stab in the back”.⁴⁹ The reason of contract cancellation are both political and technical but yet the cancellation of deal has though opened ways for both France and the United States to strengthen their ties in all possible new ways. A senior official from the Biden administration said the Washington led AUKUS deal was part of larger steps to build cooperation with security partners in Asia “to sustain peace and stability across the entire Indo-Pacific region”.⁵⁰ However, defense analyst also consider that this accord will benefit India because it will help to counter Beijing’s military power in the Indo – Pacific region.⁵¹ Keeping in view the nuclear subs there are currently 129 indigenously built nuclear propelled subs operated by six countries including, US 68, Russia 29, China 12, UK 11, France 8 and India 1, with Australia set to become the seventh.⁵²

The submarine deal was an ideal deal and a win-win situation for France since Australia, a close and trusted alliance, was to expand its military capabilities, while the French defence industry was to increase its revenues and technical expertise.⁵³ As it is said “never to put all eggs in one basket, from the lessons

https://www.bfmtv.com/economie/international/l-affaire-des-sous-marins-australiens-ne-change-en-rien-la-strategie-indo-pacifique-de-la-france_AV-202109280179.html

⁴⁶ Harsh V Pant and Rahul Kamath, “SPECIAL Report 2021 Observer Research Foundation ORF.no. 173 AUKUS and the Indo-Pacific: Stakeholders Weigh their Wins and Losses”, December 2021, https://www.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/ORF_SpecialReport_173_AUKUS.pdf

⁴⁷“Pascal samama”, BFM Business, “SUBMARINE CRISIS: NATIONAL ASSEMBLY WANTS TO KNOW IF AUSTRALIA'S "BETRAYAL" WAS DETECTABLE”, 27September, 2021

, https://www.bfmtv.com/economie/entreprises/industries/crise-des-sous-marins-l-assemblee-nationale-veut-savoir-si-la-trahison-de-l-australie-etait-detectable_AN-202109270191.html

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ “Dr. Anjum Sarfaraz”, Modern Diplomacy, “AUKUS Leading to Nuclear Arms Race in Indo – Pacific Region”, December 26, 2021, <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2021/12/26/aukus-leading-to-nuclear-arms-race-in-indo-pacific-region/>

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Andrea Moreschi, “SPECIAL Report 2021 Observer Research Foundation ORF.no. 173 AUKUS and the Indo-Pacific: Stakeholders Weigh their Wins and Losses”, “France’s Unease in Sharp Relief”, December 2021, https://www.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/ORF_SpecialReport_173_AUKUS.pdf

learnt the hard way or the soft way France must not stake everything on major contracts.⁵⁴ France's defense industry is mature, and has pulled itself upwards by nuclear deterrence, France knows how to present very high-level offers, which are often attractive alternatives to the "all-American" approach.⁵⁵ Its logic of "strategic partnerships", by which it accompanies (almost) every major defense contract with dialogue and a relationship of trust, is the right one.⁵⁶ But France is not always the best when it comes to grasping the strategic fabric of its customers in greater depth.⁵⁷ The ill-fated cancelled nuclear subs deal faced a lot of its customer dissatisfaction on its course towards completion, now which never will.

AUKUS has also widened the divide in the trans-Atlantic relationship between the US and Europe, especially after Washington's unilateral decision to pull its troops out of Afghanistan without consulting its European allies.⁵⁸ Indonesia is negotiating a deal with France for the sale of 36 Rafale fighter jets which would allow Paris to increase its security footprint in the region as a compensatory measure after the cancellation of the France– Australia submarine deal.⁵⁹

AUKUS also fits in the UK's new Integrated Operating Concept (IOpC)⁶⁰ as it introduces two critical functions: engaging partners and constraining rivals through confrontation.⁶¹ The crucial challenge for the UK would be to normalise its relations with France and the EU, and develop a new transatlantic approach to the Indo-Pacific region to counter their common systemic rival.⁶² After the AUKUS, France has sought to look elsewhere in the Indo-Pacific to bolster its 2018

⁵⁴ Institut Montaigne, "After AUKUS: How Could France Reboot Its Indo-Pacific Strategy?", October 4, 2021, <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/blog/after-aukus-how-could-france-reboot-its-indo-pacific-strategy>

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Harsh V Pant and Rahul Kamath, "SPECIAL Report 2021 Observer Research Foundation ORF.no. 173 AUKUS and the Indo-Pacific: Stakeholders Weigh their Wins and Losses", December 2021, https://www.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/ORF_SpecialReport_173_AUKUS.pdf

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Sidharth Kaushal, "What does AUKUS deal provide its participants", RUSI, September 21, 2021, <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/what-does-aukus-deal-provide-its-participants-strategic-terms>

⁶¹ Rahul Kamath, "SPECIAL Report 2021 Observer Research Foundation ORF.no. 173 AUKUS and the Indo-Pacific: Stakeholders Weigh their Wins and Losses", "A Fit with the UK's 'Global Britain' Goals", December 2021, https://www.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/ORF_SpecialReport_173_AUKUS.pdf

⁶² *Ibid.*

Indo-Pacific Strategy especially after the AUKUS rift, leaving the French and the Europeans to ponder their strategic autonomy.⁶³ Undoubtedly the cancellation of nuclear subs deal is not only an economical loss to France rather its reputation has been tarnished by its own very allies, but as it is said in International Relations there are no permanent friends and there are no permanent foes. The reputational damage suffered by Naval Group can undoubtedly create ripple effects throughout France's global efforts.⁶⁴ In the words of Naval Group President Pierre Éric Pommellet, the deal "was not just a programme, it was a transformation for the company, we were projecting Naval Group into a new world, it was a transformation for France also."⁶⁵

Now is also the time for France to increase the frequency and intensity of its "Track 1.5 trilateral dialogues"⁶⁶, as part of a greater expansion of its soft power in the region.⁶⁷ France should diversify its portfolio of large strategic partnerships, strengthening its ties with Singapore, Indonesia, Vietnam, and establishing them with Malaysia and South Korea.⁶⁸ In view of the American-British precedent, France should no longer have any reservations about supplying nuclear submarines to interested clients.⁶⁹ The experience of a multi-level strategic dialogue with Australia, which began in 2010, has shown that this formula can contribute to the development of mutual understanding and trust, indispensable foundations for major concrete cooperation in the field of defense and security.⁷⁰

⁶³ Harsh V Pant and Rahul Kamath, "SPECIAL Report 2021 Observer Research Foundation ORF.no. 173 AUKUS and the Indo-Pacific: Stakeholders Weigh their Wins and Losses", December 2021, https://www.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/ORF_SpecialReport_173_AUKUS.pdf

⁶⁴ Andrea Moreschi, "SPECIAL Report 2021 Observer Research Foundation ORF.no. 173 AUKUS and the Indo-Pacific: Stakeholders Weigh their Wins and Losses", "France's Unease in Sharp Relief", December 2021, https://www.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/ORF_SpecialReport_173_AUKUS.pdf

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ "France Diplomacy", "India-France-Australia Joint Statement on the occasion of the Trilateral Ministerial Dialogue", 4 May 2021, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/asia-and-oceania/news/article/india-france-australia-joint-statement-on-the-occasion-of-the-trilateral>

⁶⁷ Institut Montaigne, "After AUKUS: How Could France Reboot Its Indo-Pacific Strategy?", "What strategic choices does France have?", 4 October 2021, <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/blog/after-aukus-how-could-france-reboot-its-indo-pacific-strategy>

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

But that alone is not enough: more intense and sustained support, political, diplomatic, parliamentary, cultural is needed.⁷¹

US STRATEGY IN THE INDO-PACIFIC amidst US-France rift over AUKUS.

The Indo-Pacific is the fastest growing region on the planet. It accounts for 60 percent of the world economy, two-thirds of all economic growth over the last five years.⁷² Its home to more than half the world's people, seven of the 15 biggest economies.⁷³ President Biden's remarks in announcing AUKUS agreement stated, "We need to be able to address both the current strategic environment in the region and how it may evolve. Because the future of each of our nations and indeed the world depends on a free and open Indo-Pacific enduring and flourishing in the decades ahead".⁷⁴ The US President's words for Indo Pacific are enough to understand the importance of this region and somehow evaluate the level of interest the US might further build in this region to aggrandize its hegemon over ocean. The Indo-Pacific has become a central region for the balance of the world, not only diplomatically – the East Asia Summit and ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting Plus, but also economically.⁷⁵ Maritime Security of Indo Pacific has always remained the core interest of regional countries and the world. Maritime security in the Indo-Pacific which is critical due to globalization and the so-called "maritimization," the Indo-Pacific highly relies on a free circulation of raw materials and consumer goods.⁷⁶ France is also the only EU country to have permanently pre-positioned forces in the Indo-Pacific and regular

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² "ANTHONY J. BLINKEN", US Department of State, "A Free and Open Indo-Pacific" December 14, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/a-free-and-open-indo-pacific/>

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ "Tom Corben, Ashley Townshend, Sussnah Paton", United States Study Center, "WHAT, IF ANYTHING, DOES THIS TELL US ABOUT THE DIRECTION OF US STRATEGY IN THE INDO-PACIFIC?"

,16 September, 2021, <https://www.ussc.edu.au/analysis/explainer-what-is-the-aucus-partnership>

⁷⁵ "Jérémy Bachelier and Eric Frécon", The Diplomat, "France's Defense Strategy in the Indo-Pacific", <https://thediplomat.com/2021/12/frances-defense-strategy-in-the-indo-pacific/>

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

warship, submarine, or aircraft deployments.⁷⁷ France is the only European nation to have a permanent military presence in both the Indian and Pacific Oceans, France is strengthening its relations with the major democracies in the region that share its vision of international security.⁷⁸ These ties ensure that France is able to understand and act appropriately in a region where the strategic balance is rapidly shifting. In October 2020, the French Pacific Command hosted in French Polynesia the PACIOS (Pacific and Indian Ocean Shipping) working group to share best practices regarding maritime security and MDA expertise between stakeholders.⁷⁹ The large numbers of French assets operating in the Indo-Pacific each year includes 7,000 military personnel, about 15 warships and 40 aircraft, as well as the diplomatic and military network in this area made up of 18 defense attachés accredited in 33 countries, who also contribute to the French MDA knowledge.⁸⁰ France intends to develop and accelerate its cooperation with the maritime industry, including overseas, through maritime cooperation protocols and to actively participate in the constitution of a network of trust with national or regional MDA/MARSEC (Maritime Security) centers.⁸¹ These are the reasons why following AUKUS, America's recent eagerness to cooperate to the best with France is driven by the considerations to maintain its hegemon in the indo-pacific i.e. Strategic Interoperability Framework and others. The US-France rift has been widening since the Trump administration. While the Biden administration has tried hard to patch up the cross-Atlantic partnership. Australia's recent nuclear submarine deal (AUKUS) and its abandonment of European helicopters have only poured oil on the flames.⁸² Therefore, the US is trying to mend the relationship with France starting with naval cooperation and SIFs. It is no doubt that U.S. wants to bring France onboard in its anti-Russia game but with a clear message of supreme naval strategist power. Ever since Biden has taken the office, US

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ "Permanent representation of France to the Conference on Disarmament", "DEFENCE AND NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGIC REVIEW 2017", <https://cd-geneve.delegfrance.org/Strategic-review-of-Defence-and-national-security-2017>

⁷⁹ "Jérémy Bachelier and Eric Frécon", *The Diplomat*, "France's Defense Strategy in the Indo-Pacific", <https://thediplomat.com/2021/12/frances-defense-strategy-in-the-indo-pacific/>

⁸⁰ *ibid*

⁸¹ *ibid*

⁸² Lin Yuan, "US-France grudge hard to go away", *China Military Online*, "Breaking Strategic Deadlock, 30 December, 2021, http://english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2021-12/30/content_10119571.htm

President hasn't stopped rallying NATO allies to continuously squeeze Russia's strategic space and expose the security situation around the country to grave challenges.⁸³ Nevertheless, Paris has been singing a different tune by publicly stressing the importance of working with Russia.⁸⁴ The latest move to strengthen military cooperation with France is not only to placate the European ally but also to pull it away from Russia and forge a strategic containment against it.⁸⁵

US-FRANCE rift and future NATO.

The United States and France share the goal of continuing to bolster deterrence as a core element of collective defense and to contribute to the indivisible security of the NATO Alliance.⁸⁶ NATO participation in POLARIS-21 includes the Italian Navy destroyer ITS Carlo Bergamini (F-590), the Spanish Navy destroyer SPS Méndez Nuñez (F 104), the Hellenic Navy Frigate HS Adrias (F-459), and U.K. Royal Navy destroyer HMS Dragon (D35).⁸⁷

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said "I fully understand France's disappointment. At the same time, NATO allies agree on the big picture, on the most important challenges, and that is that, we have to stand together to confront global challenges". France from historical perspective has always held an ambivalent corner for NATO. Keeping in view the former image of NATO by Former French President Charles De Gaulle, emphasized at a press conference on Feb. 21, 1966, that NATO had established an American protectorate in Europe, that the US had imposed American military strategies on Europe and France, and that it had forced the alliance members into wars they did not want to engage in.⁸⁸ Summoning the ambassadors of Washington and Canberra to Paris for consultations, this entente, secretly negotiated by the parties for 18 months,

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ THE WHITE HOUSE, "United States-France Joint Statement" OCTOBER 29, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/10/29/united-states-france-joint-statement/>

⁸⁷ America's Navy, "U.S. Sixth Fleet Joins France's Polaris 21 Exercise", 24 November, 2021

, <https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/News-Stories/Article/2853335/us-sixth-fleet-joins-frances-polaris-21-exercise/>

⁸⁸ Akin Ozcer, AA, "Would France withdraw from NATO's military wing?" 13.10.2021,

<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/analysis/analysis-would-france-withdraw-from-nato-s-military-wing/2391027>

means that France “stabbed in the back” by two NATO allies, in the words of French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian.⁸⁹ Foreign Minister Le Drian clearly expressed that France’s official exclusion from this region by two NATO allies is destroying the dream of becoming a great global power again by tightening the self-dependence of its former colonies, which it administratively classifies as overseas departments (DOM) and overseas territories (TOM).⁹⁰ President Macron and Jean Castex's government expressed their reaction to the exclusion of France by the US and the UK with AUKUS from the strategy of encircling China in the Indian Ocean and Pacific region through NATO.⁹¹ France has been targeting NATO for the last two years for not supporting its national/colonial interests in different parts of the world.⁹² There was seemingly another diplomatic and strategic factor that came afloat by France to the Trump administration in the United States when French President Emmanuel Macron suggested for the creation of separate nine-country military alliance.⁹³ French still hold a major position in NATO and newly appointed Supreme Allied Commander hails from France too. Post AUKUS deal, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg participated in the Change of Command at Allied Command Transformation in the United States on 23 September 2021⁹⁴ General Philippe Lavigne of the French Air and Space Force took over from General André Lanata as Supreme Allied Commander Transformation, one of NATO’s two strategic commanders.⁹⁵ The Supreme Allied Commander Transformation - or SACT - is one of NATO’s two strategic commanders.⁹⁶ SACT is at the head of Allied Command Transformation and, as such, is responsible to NATO’s highest military authority - the Military Committee - for promoting and overseeing the continuing transformation of Alliance forces

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ “Macron's European Army Proposal 'Very Insulting', Says Trump on Arriving in France,” France 24 (France 24, November 9, 2018), <https://www.france24.com/en/20181109-france-trump-macron-european-army-eu-insulting>.

⁹⁴ “NATO”, News, “NATO Secretary General welcomes new Supreme Allied Commander Transformation”, 23 September, 2021, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_186878.htm?selectedLocale=en

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ NATO, “Supreme Allied Commander Transformation (SACT)”, 23 September, 2021, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_50114.htm

and capabilities.⁹⁷ Recently, General Philippe Lavigne, has hosted the inaugural Alliance Warfare Development Conference (AWDC) at NATO's Allied Command Transformation from 7-9 December 2021.⁹⁸ The Alliance Warfare Development Conference replaces the Chiefs of Transformation Conference and was organized to bring together senior leadership from NATO nations responsible for warfare development in order to promote and explain NATO's warfare development activity, help align national warfare development efforts, build communities of interest and exchange best practice.⁹⁹ A dedicated programme was also developed for select Partner nations which got an opportunity to discuss Warfare Development Agenda and Multi-Domain Operations in an unclassified setting.¹⁰⁰ The theme of the 2021 Alliance Warfare Development Conference was "The Alliance Warfare Development Agenda: From Concept to Implementation" and the conference agenda focused on the Warfare Development Agenda from multiple perspectives.¹⁰¹ There is an inclusion of the point by the American military experts and officials that France's naval and military capacities are modern enough to deal with strategic and problems in swift ways, their demands must be discussed and a viable diplomatic solution must be adhered. The reasons for calling NATO's core position with position of being "Brain Death" by French President Macron is no doubt an escalating point and having lack of economic and political coordination when it comes to affairs of the NATO. There are some uncertainties from the side of Paris when it comes to deal with the distribution of military capacities for countering the potential traditional and non-traditional security threats, especially in domain of Maritime Security.¹⁰² As NATO's Secretary General also said that the alliance will cost much if the rifts over the submarine deal inside Indo-Pacific curtailed between France and member states of the AUKUS. Therefore, he also pointed out that AUKUS's ambitions are not directed against the Europe as well as the NATO, and NATO values its partnership with

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ NATO, "Alliance Warfare Development Conference 2021", Dec 15, 2021, <https://www.act.nato.int/articles/alliance-warfare-development-conference-2021>

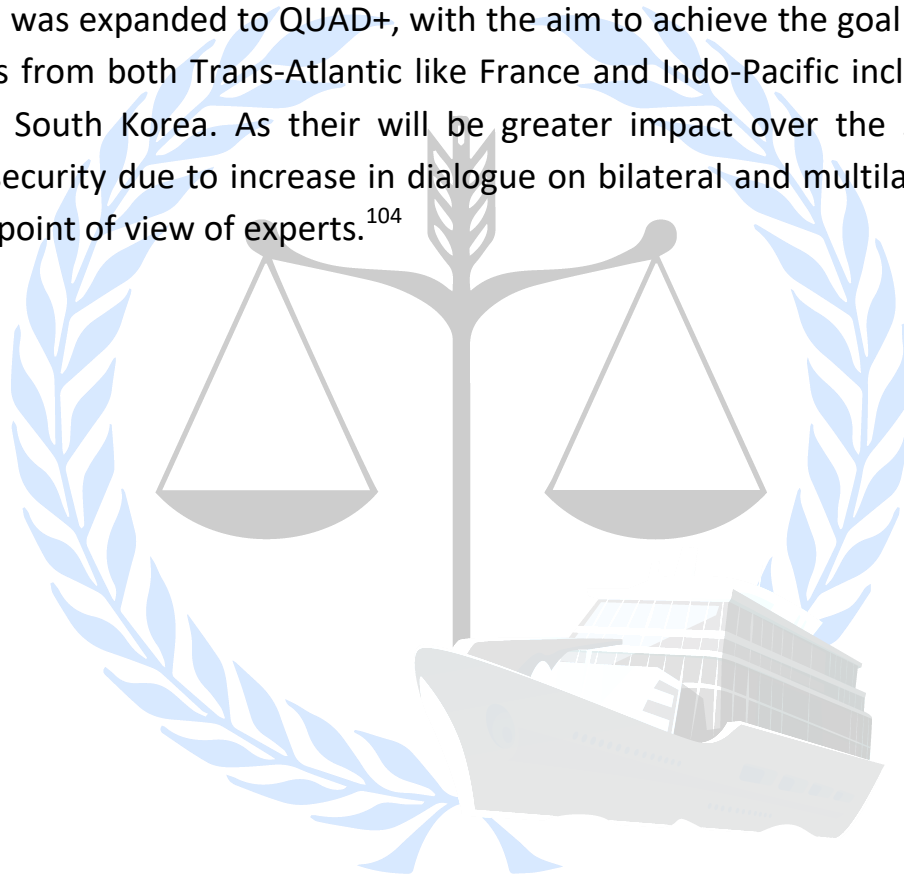
⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² Alice Pannier, "How to Keep France Engaged in Nato," Afficher la page d'accueil du site (IFRI, February 4, 2022), <https://www.ifri.org/en/publications/publications-ifri/articles-ifri/how-keep-france-engaged-nato>.

non-NATO/NATO allies inside Indo-Pacific including Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea.¹⁰³ The NATO will definitely need a serious partnership with these states to collaborate in domains of Cybersecurity and Maritime Security. The American President has also reached out European powers including France through smooth approaches to not let any aspect impact the position of NATO, and to realize them that AUKUS will not further hurt the interests of France as both AUKUS and NATO are foundational alliances to counter the spreading of influences of China and Russia. It is suggested that AUKUS must be expanded the way QUAD was expanded to QUAD+, with the aim to achieve the goal of inclusion of partners from both Trans-Atlantic like France and Indo-Pacific including India, Japan and South Korea. As their will be greater impact over the situation of maritime security due to increase in dialogue on bilateral and multilateral levels, as per the point of view of experts.¹⁰⁴



¹⁰³ Jagannath Panda, "Is 'Aukus plus' a Viable Option?," The Diplomat (for The Diplomat, January 26, 2022), <https://thediplomat.com/2022/01/is-aukus-plus-a-viable-option/>.

¹⁰⁴ Jagannath Panda, "Is 'Aukus plus' a Viable Option?," The Diplomat (for The Diplomat, January 26, 2022), <https://thediplomat.com/2022/01/is-aukus-plus-a-viable-option/>.

Conclusion.

Strategic autonomy remains a key objective of France defence policy, due to their decisive impact on their sovereignty and freedom of action. France's interests include all factors that contribute to its security, prosperity, and Influence. The concept of 'interests' has primarily been addressed in the French doctrine in terms of vital interests, closely connected with nuclear deterrence. Considering the noise over Australia scuttling the French submarine deal, it is not very difficult to understand why Canberra decided the nuclear option as it is a deterrent to Chinese Taiwan ambitions. The French Naval forces are directly engaged on the national territory, both overseas and on the mainland, to fulfill their deterrence role, protection mission, as well as maritime safety and air security. France apparently by no means seems to be interested in withdrawing from NATO keeping in view the historical lessons and the contemporary rifts in highly charged warfare regime, yet the diplomatic crises arising from recent events from AUKUS and then to POLARIS 21 and AWDC depict a canny lineage of strengthening naval powers at the world oceans strategically. France's implementation of its maritime defence posture and specific arrangements incorporating cross-government action has proved efficient on the mainland in terms of enhancing naval power, but still needs strengthening in its overseas territories and winning serious friends. POLARIS 21 which depicted the ability of US-France and other allied participating armed forces to operate across all domains and scenarios, justifies maintaining a full-spectrum and balanced force-model, as a prerequisite for their strategic autonomy and maintaining balance of power at sea. From the above paper we can conclude France's ability to act alone, should circumstances require, and to rally partners, will continue to depend on maintaining a full-spectrum and balanced military. Amidst, the rising of rift between France and the United States, it is to point out that the United States focuses more on the point of bringing the world to be integrated against the threats of Russia as well as of China. The AUKUS's ambitions are being explained by the US because of the fact that Indo-Pacific not only retains an importance on diplomatic basis, but also on economic basis and there should be an addressing of the core points in regard to Maritime Security in the region. Summoning the ambassadors of Washington and Canberra

to Paris for consultations, this entente, secretly negotiated by the parties for 18 months, means that France “stabbed in the back” by two NATO allies, in the words of French FM Le Drian, gives a remark that the rift may escalate to further diplomatic crisis. There are numerous factors that experts and military officials linked with NATO point out that France and the US rifts in shape of strategic competition between Polaris 21 and AUKUS has the potential to stay as a permanent factor of differences among these two important NATO partners. The reasons are clear and that are not addressing of the concerns of France, and revocation of Australia from the deal for nuclear submarines signed with Paris that costed France with millions of Euros. The NATO’s Secretary General had also pointed this concern and experts have suggested to expand the AUKUS platform the way QUAD was expanded to QUAD+, to sustain the common security goals of the NATO in long run. Therefore, both Washington D.C. and Paris are tended to give out the goal of continued encouragement towards deterrence as a core element of collective defense and to promote to the indissoluble security of the NATO Alliance.

