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The Military Invasion Of Ukraine**

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Russian National Ideology as An Impetus for The Military Invasion Of Ukraine

Dmytro Burtsev*

Abstract

The Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, became the most significant military conflicts in Europe since the Second World War. In fact, the conflict demonstrated the fundamental nature of the existing Russian political regime and its ambitions for reconstructing Russia as an empire in the modern world. The war became the last step after failed attempts to use the tools of soft power to realize in practice the growing ambitions of the Russian Federation. However, the war was just the tip of the Russian political iceberg. The hidden part of that iceberg was a political ideology, which became a background for aggression toward neighboring countries, which was called fraternal people before the aggression. The article makes a humble attempt to analyze the ideological roots of the Russian war in Ukraine as a key and fundamental factor of aggression towards a sovereign country. The article explores the key roots of

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the doctrine of the “Russian world” as one of the essential principles of modern Russian political thinking, which tries to justify the current aggression and, at the same time, works as a marker of particular virtues of the uprising Russian nation. However, this ideology is not something new in Russian national political tradition but a continuation of ideas from the period of the Russian Empire. The article describes the main development trends of Russian national ideology and thinking from the 16th century to modern times and explains the role of this ideology as one of impetus and driving powers while conducting open aggression toward Ukraine in February 2022.

Keywords: Russian Federation, Ukraine, war, ideology

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I. Introduction

The undeclared war by the Russian Federation against Ukraine raised numerous concerns, not only about the security situation in Europe, particularly for countries with a common border with the Russian Federation, but also about global security mechanisms in general. The situation dramatically demonstrates that it is a deep and firm ideological background for some international actors to see power as a critical instrument of foreign policy while seeking excuses in inner political explanations and arguments. The official and primary aim of the so-called Russian “Special Military Operation” calls for the protection of LDNR, separatist para-states in the territory of Ukrainian Lugansk and Donetsk regions. Actually, open military aggression was the last move in the long series of events and preparations that brought the Russian Federation to war with Ukraine. Possible consequences of the war for different regions of the globe are being extensively discussed. However, such a discussion of the current events leaves the motivational part of this aggression out of not only the public eye but also active international discussion, even though it remains one of the crucial aspects to understanding the conflict itself and preventing such hostile actions in the future by using possible preventive global actions toward a potential aggressor. This article explores the concept of Russia’s officially undeclared ideology, a key source of conducting aggression toward Ukraine, annexing the Autonomous Republic of Crimea

and supporting the separatist LDNR in 2014, and declaring a “special military operation” and waging an invasive war against Ukraine.

II. Research Methodology

This research is based on an analysis of Russia’s national policy in the sphere of the creation of a new ideology and partial recreation of the national ideology of the Soviet Union in modern Russia, which became a driving force for aggression toward Ukraine and, in fact, the driving force behind the inner and outer policy of the Russian Federation. Actual practice means providing the research in two interconnected dimensions: theoretical and practical.

The first one is to analyze the theoretical background created by ideologues and philosophers and their argumentation on the historical processes that created the modern Russian mentality and political approaches. The analysis provided in this area allows determination and comprehension of the fundamental methods used as a framework to develop solid inner-country argumentation for the Russian domestic population and the image of a “Great Russia” for the Russian domestic population and audiences abroad. The research in the sphere of theoretical background for explaining Russian aggression facilitates an understanding of the path and methods used by the Russian ideological machine to create such a powerful mindset. In this way, a logical and reasonable explanation for aggressive actions and rhetoric toward

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neighboring countries could be found. This study envisages a partially historiographic analysis as a tool for understanding the early preconditions of the current situation, which is rooted in the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of Russia as “the continuator state of the USSR,” not only in the legal aspect of such successorship but also in political and ideological tradition. It is also essential to make a historiographic analysis to underline the historical roots, which Russia, as a national state, tries to take into personal possession to highlight the national uniqueness as a particular civilizational cluster.

The solid theoretical background and factual ideological vacuum in the mid-1990s created conditions for practical amplification of the existing ideological fundament in reality. The particular amplification of ideology, as the object of research, consists of political declarations of Russian high-level political establishment and other valuable political figures, official and unofficial political programs, and general analysis of Russian propaganda and political agenda, which have been created due to the existing particular ideological fundament, and serve as its actual legislative support.

Another critical aspect is deriving a common understanding of the term “ideology.” The term has many very different definitions. However, the task of the writing is to use several that will be most appropriate for the description of this political phenomenon of ideology in Russia. The Encyclopedia Britannica

presents the following definition of ideology: “*Ideology, a form of social or political philosophy in which practical elements are as prominent as theoretical ones. It is a system of ideas that aspires both to explain the world and to change it*”.¹ The most important part of this definition is not only the descriptive function of ideology as a tool of social cognition but also demiurgic, which points to the creation of new forms of existence and interaction with existing realities. To be fair-minded, the second definition will be taken from an article by L.N. Martushov, “The State Ideology of The Russian Federation: What It Be?” the definition is presented the following way: “*National ideology is a system of views, concepts, ideas, which represent interests of a particular society or social community (group)*.”² While following the idea of Martushov, the ideology represents the system of social and political values. However, without clarification of the way of representation, there is still a direction of action. What is more vital is that the efforts are justified by ideas and values existing in a particular society and acted upon according to the moto *exitus acta probat* (lat., the end justifies the means).

Thus, ideology is a driving power of social and political development, no matter whether it has been officially proclaimed or not. In the Russian Federation, the ideology has never been

¹ Maurice Cranston. “Ideology Summary | Britannica,” Britannica, accessed December 26, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/summary/ideology-society>.

² Lev Martushov. “The state ideology of the Russian Federation: What it be?,” *Bulletin of the Ural Institute of Economics, Management and Law* 41, no. 4 (October 2017): 4–18.

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formally declared in modern Russian history, generally seen as beginning in 1991. Still, it exists as a modern driving power and social sentiment inside of Russian society. This control, though unofficial, is nevertheless powerful and exceptionally effective, employing media censorship and solid governmental control over the information that society “consumes.” The main idea of this ideology is to bring Russia back to the status of one of the world’s superpowers. According to this point, the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 had high support among the Russian population thanks to the existing way of thinking, and the invasion was just a tangible embodiment of the existing mindset of Russian society.

Thus, the central questions of the research are: *What are the ideological sources and narratives of the Russian invasion of Ukraine? What is the role of the non-proclaimed but strong Russian ideological background of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022?* Answering these questions will help us understand the fundamental driving forces behind the Russian invasion and the attitude toward Ukraine in a conceptual dimension of ideology rather than international relations or international security themselves.

III. Fundamentals of modern Russian ideology

The public discussion about the role and place of ideology in modern Russia started just after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. This debate was inevitable due to the change in the

whole political system, which existed before the collapse, and public society needed a beacon of development, which was actually lost when the Soviet Union as a country slipped into nonexistence. Nevertheless, if we follow the definition of ideology, in fact, for any society, it cannot but exist because, otherwise, society loses the goal of its existence as a whole.

Article 13 of the Constitution of Russia, adopted in December 1993, says that ideological diversity is recognized (accepted) in the Russian Federation, and any ideology cannot be applied to be national or obligatory. This paragraph was included in order to negate the influence of the heritage of the Soviet Union, particularly on the point of communist ideology, and also open the way for possible democratic reformation in post-Soviet Russia. However, the new “second Russian revolution” in terms of a change of political regime did not bring democracy per se. However, following Sakva, the regime transformed into an “authoritarian democracy,” and the society was not ready for such a dramatic transformation, which can be called a “revolution” in terms of the momentous changes in political, social, and economic regimes seen in the Russian Federation.³

This idea was not accepted widely by Russian society for several reasons. First, democracy itself was not an utterly understandable concept for Russian society, and the

³ Richard Sakva. “Regime System and Civil Society in Russia,” *Polis. Political Studies*, no. 1 (1997): 162–84.

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vertically-regulated solid social order was still more familiar, predictable, and understandable to most of the population. Second, a weak (and more formal than real) political opposition to the existing political regime during the first part of the 2000s had proposed an alternative political structure for society, but it did not have the tools for the practical realization of the proposed democratic political agenda and was regularly suppressed by the ruling elements of society.

Another problem of the Russian Federation on the way to declaring a liberal and democratic society was the lack of civil society and strong Soviet historical and social traditions. There was no space for an actual idea-amplification process of declared liberalization due to the lack of a thorough reformation process, strong Soviet mental tradition, and political and social leaders who had been “brought up” by the Communist Party.

The issue that the Russian government confronted was the need to keep the country from further territorial erosion. Only strong and centralized power could keep the Russian Federation from feather breaking into smaller republics and falling off the country into systematic inner conflicts, as happened in Chechnya. So, top-down, solid government-proposed policy and ideology at the beginning of the 2000s proved helpful in this goal. One more aspect can be seen in the attitudes of the political elites, who, in general, were not interested in importing the Western concept of democracy.

Richard Sakwa demonstrated that, in the wake of decommunization, Russia became an authoritarian democracy and backed a top-down national management system after becoming independent and claiming its own way of developing a model for democracy in the post-Soviet space. It might be argued that a solid vertical power system of governance was of great significance during the transfer period to stabilize development and create a new social value system, and while this usually evolved into a democratic system of values in many countries, this did not happen with Russia. From the current perspective, the transfer from a totalitarian regime to a democratic one through the authoritarian regime, in this case, does not look like the best and most successful option, especially in the case of deficient alternatives for society— particularly one with a pre-existing set of political and social values.

When Putin came to power in 2000, he did not solve the existing issues of political regime transition. Still, he created a situation in which the firm and particularly charismatic leader used all possible means, including the ideology of the “great state,” to centralize power into one vertical solid system. There was no democratic modernization of society but a strong return to a conservative political regime. Speaking straightforwardly, there

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was a solid administrative system of national governance without economic and political modernization.⁴

Because of the historically familiar experience, most of the population could easily accept a return to the solid centralized national governing system. However, at that time, the Russian citizens still needed further ideas and identity to explain the developmental direction further. Besides, the political elites, who had already come to power, needed mass ideology to give the right direction for social energy, generate ideas, and support the main direction of national development that the existing political elites provided. Society and political establishments needed ideology as a system of views and actions to help the elites to rule, to become an aspiration for the population, and to control the population, as it was during the Soviet era.

The question of Russia's modern national self-identification is deeply rooted in Eurasianism, the geopolitical and ideological concept that defines "Russian" as a distinct identity based on the unique geographical, national, and mental features of Slavic and other nations within the former Russian Empire. This concept not only emphasizes the historical and ideological basis of Russian national identity but also underscores the stark opposition of the Russian/ Slavic civilization to Western civilization.

⁴ Richard Sakwa. "Russia's Identity: Between the "Domestic" and the "International," *Europe-Asia Studies* 63, no. 6 (2011): 957–75.

One of the most prominent thinkers of this idea was Nikolay Danilevsky, a thinker and scientist of the Russian Empire who later emigrated to Europe. In addition, he raised the theory of historical-cultural types, which is, in fact, geopolitical. Using this theory, he tried to explain the contradictions between the Russian/Slavic and Western civilizations while grouping all nations of the former Russian Empire as a united notion with common and particular values. In his book, he saw Russia and Europe—in fact, the whole Western World during the 19th and early 20th centuries—as two contradictory forces. Furthermore, Western countries were depicted as countries that wanted to take advantage of Russia and the Eurasian world.⁵

Lidiya I. Chernyshova, in her article “Problem of the Relations between Russia and Europe in N.Ya. Danilevsky’s Works and Realities of the Modern World,” explains Danilevsky’s vision of current realities. “*An attempt to implant liberal ‘universal values’ interpreted by Western civilization as the highest values of humanity, which are a denial of all the traditional values on which humanity was based (the destruction of the institution of the family, same-sex marriage, juvenile justice, the idea of tolerance with the simultaneous persecution of those who do not share these ‘European values’), will inevitably destroy the Russian civilization, and after it the Russian state.*” In making

⁵ Nikolai Danilevskii. *Russia and Europe: The Slavic World’s Political and Cultural Relations with the Germanic-Roman West*. (Bloomington: Slavica Publishers, 2013).

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such a claim, the author levies several allegations. The first one is that Western countries have been continuously conducting acts of hostility toward Russia, or what is more possible, Russia has been taking Western attempts as hostile without considering its pose in those events. The second one is that Russia is the only protector of universal “orthodox” (read: “Biblical”) values. As a result, Chernyshova concludes that dialog between the Russian Federation and the Western world is possible only by using different means of power; in fact, we should understand another word, *force*, from the Russian side.⁶

Suppose the approach of early Eurasianism adepts was based on the cultural and mental differences between Russia and Eurasia. It told about the civilizational gap and contradictions between the two visions. This vision was based on an analysis of historical, cultural, and developmental differences of the populations in particular areas in an extensive scope and the influence of these developmental sites on the behavior of these civilizational clusters. This led author and geopolitician Pyotr Nikolayevich Savitsky to coin the term civilizational “developmental site” (in Russian: месторазвитие), allowing him to advocate it as an explanation

⁶ Lidiya Chernishova. “Problem of the Relations between Russia and Europe in N.Ya. Danilevsky’s Works and Realities of the Modern World,” *Humanities. Bulletin of the University of Finance* 6, no. 2 (June 10, 2016): 68–75, <https://doi.org/10.12737/18152>.

for the particularities of the Russian-Eurasian population and the particular place of this civilization, among others.⁷

However, modern Russian ideology is not just a theoretical construct based on historical Eurasianism. It is also deeply rooted in a powerful religious pillar – Eastern Orthodox Christianity. This faith, centered in the Russian Orthodox Church in Moscow, plays a significant role in the Russian national identity. The Church sees itself as the only successor of the Christian tradition of Kyivan Rus, and to some extent, Russia claims to be the only successor of the Byzantine Empire and Constantinople, the main center of the spread of Christianity in Eastern Europe during the existence of the Kyivan Rus.

However, the central concept of the core role of Russia and Moscow as a spiritual successor requires a more detailed explanation. After the fall of Constantinople in the second part of the 15th century, Moscow became the most significant center of Eastern Orthodox Christianity, the Third Rome, speaking in Russian terms. Then, in the 16th century, a monk, Philotheus (or Filofei), was the first to use the phrase, saying that after Constantinople, Muscovy became the Third Rome. In this formulation, “Rome” is not some particular place but the name of the most influential international power. The idea disappeared in the 17th century but reappeared again in the mid-19th. The

⁷Peter Savitsky. *Geographical features of Russia: Part 1: Vegetation and soils* (Prague, 1927), <https://www.prlib.ru/item/688200>.

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doctrine of the Third Rome merged with an imperial doctrine of the Russian Empire justified. It gained more weight for the imperial ambitions of the last one, yet did not work as an independent religious program itself. It was also used in views of Eurasianism for a more detailed explanation of their vision of Russia as a unique mental formation based on Christian values, and it was placed in a world with a unique spiritual atmosphere.⁸

Currently, the doctrine of Moscow as a Third Rome is mainly applied to support the idea of Russian messianism as the only possible model for Slavic countries and Russia as a country of sacred and spiritual traditions, which can contradict universal evil and save universal morals and values.⁹

In general, such an idea served for the following purposes:

a) substantiation of the need for both the “gathering” of lands and peoples as well as the spread of the Orthodox faith;

b) an instrument of sacralization and legitimization of political power and state institutions;

c) directly by the political development program (model), which actually represented an imperative requirement for the

⁸ Marshall Poe. “Moscow, the Third Rome: The Origins and Transformations of a ‘Pivotal Moment’,” *Jahrbücher Für Geschichte Osteuropas Neue Folge* 49, no. 3 (January 1, 2001): 412–29.

⁹ Sergey Resnyansky. “Moscow as the Third Rome” as an Archetype of Russian Orthodox Identity,” *Bulletin of the Moscow State Regional University (History and Political Science)*, no. 3 (2019): 41–49, <https://doi.org/10.18384/2310-676X-2019-3-41-49>.

government since the achievement of the universal salvation goal presupposed reliance on the coercive force of the state and a unity of purpose by church and state authorities.¹⁰

In addition, religion also belongs to one more thinking concept, which was created in the 19th century and is still used today. Moreover, it has strong support among Russian adepts of imperialism and neo-imperialism. It started in the 19th century from the report of Duke Sergey Uvarov (Russian name – Сергей Уваров), who proposed the concept of “Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality” as the three pillars of the Russian Empire. However, in his report, the stress from the “Orthodox faith” moves to “Autocracy” that “...saves Russia...”.¹¹ The third pillar, nationality (population), was taken as the glue that could connect Orthodoxy and Autocracy and create the possibility of making the Russian Empire a messiah state through the strong support of the population.¹²

The main difference between the ideological constructs of “Moscow being the Third Rome” and “Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality” doctrines lay in that the first was more spiritually

¹⁰ Svetlana Aleynikova. “*Russian world*”: the Belarusian look (Minsk: National Institute for Higher Education, 2017).

¹¹ Arsenii Zamostyanovv and Viktor Chumakov. “Duke S.S. Uvarov - Minister of Public Education,” *Public Education*, no. 5 (2013): 47–62.

¹² Victor Dubrovin. “Problems of Formation of the Idea of Messianism of the Russian State in Secular and Ecclesiastical Ideology. Prospects and Patterns of Modernization of Modern Society: New View (Economic, Social, Philosophical, Political, Legal General Scientific Aspects),” *Materials of the International Scientific and Practical Conference*, 2014, 158–61.

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oriented and heavily featured the messianic vision. In contrast, the second one was religion-political and pragmatically oriented, focusing on solving tasks for the existence of a powerful and united Russian Empire. More importantly, the common point of both visions was to unite the nation by using a particular idea and preparing a social mindset in advance.

The idea of Uvarov's "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality" was not only a direct contradiction to the ideas of the French Revolution: *Liberté, égalité, fraternité* (French for "liberty, equality, fraternity"), but also a direct contradiction to the civilizational views and approaches later underlined by representatives of Eurasianism during the early 20th century as well as representatives of neo-Eurasianism or neo-imperialism in the modern Russian Federation.

The concepts of Eurasianism and neo-Eurasianism are not equal. Eurasianism was a concept that tried to distinguish the difference between Europe and Russia in terms of civilizational differences and claimed the uniqueness of Russia-Eurasia as a territorial and civilizational unit formed by historical factors and saw the great Eurasian state as a combination of Eastern and Western. However, modern neo-Eurasianism works more crudely and aggressively. It considers the Russian national state as the core of Eurasia and other territories as important supplementary fragments of Eurasia with the domination of Russia and Russian as a concept on the whole territory of the former Soviet Union for

completing a special Russian historical mission. At the same time, classical Eurasianism of 1920-1930 claimed the contradictory natures of Russia, Eurasia, and Europe. Modern neo-Eurasianism picked up the basic ideas of Eurasianism but became a militant ideology that speaks not about contradictions but about the open conflict between the West and Russia. Another aspect is that Eurasianism mostly spoke about the unity of Eurasian nations based on a common historical background. In contrast, neo-Eurasianism talks about recovering the mighty Russian state by retaking control over the former Soviet territories by the Russian Federation as a core state.

IV. Modern Russian Ideology: A brief review of the Ideology of the *Russian World*. Russian Ideology as a justification for the war in Ukraine.

It is difficult to speak about the particular domination of specific ideology in the Russian Federation during the last decade of the 20th century after the Soviet system collapsed. The democratic and liberal reformation confronted numerous problems which needed not a democracy but a centralized mechanism of regulation. However, starting from the middle of the first decade of the 21st century and with change in the political leadership, Russian ideology began elaborating on the terms of geopolitical particularity of the Russian state, features of historical development, religious unity, and ideas of nationalistic origin together with a growing and evolving picture of the

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“Russian world” to create a solid background for developing the concept of Russian national rebuilding as one of the world’s superpowers. The overlapping approaches provide the background for forming modern Russian ideology, as we can see it now.

Geopolitics. Aleksandr Dugin, a Russian philosopher and sociologist, was one of the first to speak about the lack of ideology in Russian society that should be based on a geopolitical approach. He claimed that in the early 2000s, the Russian Federation did not have any meaningful ideology for the national development of the state, and that was true for that moment. Neo-Eurasianism was called by Dugin the best choice for Russia as a continuation of ideas of Eurasianism of the early 20th century as a geopolitical concept. First of all, it was an idea of contradiction between Eurasia (Russian Federation) as a civilization and Western civilization, the confrontation of the “Sea” (most of the Western countries) and “Land” (represented by Russia-Eurasian) powers.¹³ In addition, the prophets of neo-Eurasianism did not accept the classification of civilizations made by Samuel Huntington, who defined civilizations primarily through religion. Still, they put Russian-Eurasian civilization aside as a specific representative due to the presence of representatives of other faiths in Eurasian-Russian civilization.

¹³ Alexander Dugin. “Overview of Eurasian Ideology (Basic Concepts, Brief History),” in *Fundamentals of Eurasianism* (Moscow: Arctogea Center, 2002), 77–102.

Another critical aspect of proclaimed neo-Eurasianism is *ideocracy* – the presence of a strong and officially declared ideology that influences social, political, economic, and other spheres of life. The doctrine should become everything, as it was during the period of existence of the Soviet Union (an empire). Given this fact, the idea of the proposed ideocracy should bring the Russian Federation back to the status of an empire with a firm hold on vertical power. This is what Vladimir Putin actually did when he came to power as president of the Russian Federation and reconstructed Russian imperial conservatism. As for the early apologists of neo-Eurasian ideas, their importance should be underlined. Specifically, they draw to the Gathering of the Lands, indicating that returning all lands in all possible means going back under control of Great Russia (Velikorossiya, in Russian - Великороссия) as a spiritual center of Eurasian Orthodox civilization. Otherwise, the “Great Russia” project will not be able to exist as an idea, and Russia as a national state will have no future. It can have a future only if it shows its power to the West and declares its solid geopolitical project. Furthermore, this act of power can be realized only by creating one's own sphere of influence.

Ukraine's importance to the Russian Federation cannot be underestimated for cultural and historical reasons, previously existing productive chains, and ideological and geopolitical reasons. The Revolution in 2013-2014 and the change of political orientation in Ukraine also changed political relations with the

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Russian Federation and the perception of Ukraine in Russia. Moreover, the revolution of 2014 became “...a threat to the unity of the Russian World.”¹⁴ That is to say, political and ideological changes within Ukrainian society caused a real threat to the concept of Russian ideology, which was aimed at creating Russia’s subordinated order utilizing soft power tools like language and culture.

Apparently, Russian philosopher Dugin was one of the key personalities who created modern Russian political ideology. In his seminal work, *The Foundations of Geopolitics: The Geopolitical Future of Russia* (first published in 1997), the term “Russian world” was not mentioned directly. Instead, through the cultural and religious similarity with the Serbian population, he mentioned Great Eurasia (Russia) as a geopolitical construct, which is not limited by the factual borders of the Russian Federation that pretended on the whole post-Soviet space and even South-Eastern Europe (Balkans).

Ukraine has a unique place in the book mentioned above by Dugin. The word “Ukraine” was directly mentioned in his book 85 times. In comparison, Belarus was mentioned 18 times and Kazakhstan 27 times. According to Dugin's philosophy, Ukraine and Ukrainian territories are vital for the successful existence and

¹⁴ Andrej Koshkin and Valerij Cherdantsev. “Ukrainian problem in the context of the modern Russian ethnic politology,” *Russian Journal of Economics and Law* 1, no. 33 (2015): 32–38.

glory of the Russian Federation. Otherwise, Russia could not exist as a great national state. Indeed, Dugin denied the existence of Ukraine as a sovereign country and saw a direct threat to the existence of Ukraine for Russia. At the same time, he denied the existence of Ukrainian national characteristics and cultural uniqueness. In 1997, Dugin described Ukraine like this: “*The Ukrainian problem is the main and most serious problem facing Moscow.*” Another role that was foreseen for Ukraine was the role of sanitary cordon. This refers to the deconstruction of Ukraine as a state, with Russian control over the regions of Ukraine deemed crucial for the Russian Federation. First is the Black Sea littoral zone the East of Ukraine.¹⁵ Current active Russian propaganda, in fact, just conducts a more detailed and comprehensive vision of that process, but in a more particular way.

As the leading proponent of modern Russian ideology, Dugin has consistently argued that Ukraine is a crucial part of the Russian Eurasian project. His narrative, which predates the annexation of Crimea, is not a new concept. It echoes the observations of Zbigniew Brzezinski, who stated, “*Without Ukraine, Russia ceases to be an empire, but with Ukraine suborned and then subordinated, Russia automatically becomes an empire.*” This historical context underscores the weight of

¹⁵ Aleksandr Dugin. *Foundations of Geopolitics: The Geopolitical Future of Russia*, Big Space (Moscow: Arktogeta, 1997): 110-112.
<https://www.maieutiek.nl/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Foundations-of-Geopolitics.pdf>.

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Dugin's arguments and the long-standing significance of Ukraine in Russian geopolitics.¹⁶

Religion is a fundamental pillar of modern Russian geopolitical expansion and ideology. Eastern Orthodox Christianity, in particular, is a significant source of inspiration for neo-Eurasianism. It is not just a religious belief but a key value that shapes the mental and spiritual life of the Russian people, providing a solid foundation for the new Russian state. Despite Russia being a multi-religious state, the importance of other religions, such as Islam, does not diminish the critical role of Eastern Orthodox Christianity and the Moscow Patriarchate in preserving Russia's identity as a state.¹⁷

Dugin proposes the idea that while Eastern Orthodox Christianity is not the only religion in Russia, they put it at the core of Russian civilizational existence and claimed that Christianity was a key to the survival of Russia as a nation.

“The Church will actively interact with the State and the community, participate in the most important state decisions, and nurture the authorities not only spiritually but also conceptually, based on the system of values that forms the basis of the Orthodox

¹⁶ Zbigniew Brzezinski. *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*, Updated with a new epilogue (New York: Basic Books, 2016), 46.

¹⁷ Taglad Tadzhuiddin. “The Russians were not building an empire, but Eurasia, our common home,” in *Fundamentals of Eurasianism*, ed. Nikolai Agamaljan, (Moscow: Arktogeta Centr, 2002), 610–15.

worldview.” This citation shows which role neo-Eurasian prophets foresaw for the Church in 2001. Moreover, Dugin returns to the idea of Moscow as the Third Rome, only increasing the contradiction to the geopolitical West and Western cultural and geopolitical tradition.¹⁸

According to Russian legislation, religious institutions are independent of secular authorities. However, in reality, the situation is completely different. As we can see from historical examples, religion was a strong tool used by Russian officials to govern and expand national interests.

According to Danilevsky, it is essential to fulfilling three main tasks in the existence of the Russian-Eurasian state religion:

a) The sacralizing principle (the Baptism of Russia), which not only determines the “otherness” and uniqueness of a particular community (civilization) but also acts as a legitimizing basis;

b) mobilizing the foundations in the form of the image of the “enemy” (“essentially hostile” Europe), consolidating society, and building a tough opposition “friend-foe” (“friend-enemy”); and

c) the prospect of a bright future (of an all-Slavic Union),

The struggle is a prerequisite for its achievement and existence, which is also elevated to the rank of sacredness since it

¹⁸ Alexandr Dugin. “Orthodoxy and Geopolitics. Speech (thesis) at the section “Church, State, Nation” of the VI World Russian People’s Council,” in *Foundations of Eurasianism*, ed. N. Agamalian, National Idea (Moscow: Arctogea Center, 2002): 711–15, <http://med.org.ru/FTP/bumaga.pdf>.

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involves "...building the common good on the principles of Good and opposition to Evil."¹⁹

Patriarch Alexey II proposed a remarkably similar idea during his visit to the Diplomatic Academy of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2001. In his speech, several issues were considered, including help for Russian compatriots abroad, religious rights, the participation of the Russian Orthodox Church in peacekeeping missions, and a principle multi-polar world order.²⁰

The "Russian world." In 2004, it was proclaimed during the 7th Ecumenical Russian National Council that the "*Gathering of Lands of Russian World is a common work of the Russian Orthodox Church and Russian State.*"²¹ Such a claim or verbal declaration clearly demonstrates the existence of the concept of the so-called "Russian World," which first appeared officially in 2001 during Vladimir Putin's speech at the Congress of Compatriots. "*The concept of "Russian World" has always gone*

¹⁹ Sergey Emelyanov. *How Much Is the Russian Idea Worth? Practical Aspects of the Problem of Ideal and National* (Sankt-Peterburg: Алетейя, 2012), 47.

²⁰ Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad. "Religion and diplomacy. Interaction of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia. Report at the conference 'Religion and Diplomacy'," Magazine of the Moscow Patriarchy, July 2001, http://www-old.srcc.msu.ru/bib_roc/jmp/01/07-01/07.htm.

²¹ Sergei Ivanov. "Speech by the minister of foreign affairs of Russia I.S. Ivanov at the VIII World Russian People's council," Sergiev Posad, February 3, 2004', Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, April 2, 2004, https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/humanitarian_cooperation/1687631/.

far beyond the geographical borders of Russia and even far beyond the borders of the Russian ethnic group."²² The main stress was placed on the Russian international diaspora, and the impact of the diaspora could be made for the development of the Russian Federation into the international community. However, the citation tells us much about Russia's global ambitions from as far back as 2001.

For this point, according to the monograph "*Russian World: view from Belarus*," the Russian world can be defined as a geopolitical and cultural concept. This is a unique civilization (community of people and peoples), the main signs of belonging to which are:

- a) Common values, traditions, and customs
- b) Russian language and culture
- c) Common ideas about the common or shared historical memory.²³

The political core of this civilization, as well as the spiritual center of Eastern Orthodox Christianity, is in Russia.²⁴ However,

²² Vladimir Putin. "Speech at the opening of the Congress of Compatriots," President of Russian Federation official website, October 17, 2001, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21359>.

²³ Svetlana Aleynikova. "*Russian world*": *the Belarusian look* (Minsk: National Institute for Higher Education, 2017), 159. https://istmat.org/files/uploads/58775/russkiy_mir_tekst.pdf.

²⁴ Vladimir Putin. "Russia: A National Question," New Newspaper, January 23, 2012, https://www.ng.ru/politics/2012-01-23/1_national.html.

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some sources also claimed that countries like Ukraine and Belarus, along with Russia, are part of this core.²⁵

The ideology of the “Russian World” is a concept that satisfies inner and outer demands. In terms of the inner political and ideological demand, the idea of the “Russian World” works as a mechanism of social consolidation by proclaiming ideas of unity for protecting the “right” values and the concept of national messianism in the face of the Western “wrong values.” The “right” values mean the system of traditional and conservative values that contradict the developing system of new values in Western societies, especially same-sex relations and Western juvenile judiciary systems. Such social modernization and democratization ideas were mostly declined by conservators and the Russian Orthodox Church, one of the pillars of views of the “Russian world.”

In terms of the outer market, this idea tried to work as an integration magnet by using soft-power tools, such as religion, education, and media, to create a background for loyalty toward Russian ideas promoted by Russian officials and legitimize particular political projects.²⁶ In addition, the idea of the Russian

²⁵ Svetlana Aleynikova. “Image of the Republic of Belarus in Reports US State Department on the State of Religious Freedom: Dynamics and Priorities,” *Herald of Grodno State Yanki Kupala University* 1, no. 2 (2013): 150–54.

²⁶ Andrey Bobylo. “Soft Power in International Politics: Features of National Strategies,” *Bulletin of the Buryat State University*, no. 14 (2013): 129–35.

world works as an open declaration and a plan of political ambitions for expansion.

More specifically, the ideas, concepts, and ideologies of the Russian World were initially designed to contradict the ideas of Westernization and globalization, to spread the sphere of interest and influence further, and to gather the lands (a symbol of each successful empire), in fact, to create ideological justification for such contradiction. In Russian society, it also worked as an impulse for national mobilization and taking control over political opponents by using religious institutions, media, and tools of administrative control.²⁷

Language and culture. Russian language and culture were the most efficient tools adopted for Russian manipulations. The efficiency of this set of tools decreased after the events of the Russian annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and the support of separatists in the Donbas. Starting from early 2014, the attitude towards the Russian language and cultural products also changed as a natural reaction to hostile actions of aggression. Nevertheless, in the analysis provided in the article “*The Russian world of Ukraine. Realities and prospects of the post-Soviet period*”, we can see the qualitative and quantitative indicators of changes in the usage of Russian media products and the Russian language in Ukraine. In the article, these changes are shown as such, which

²⁷ Vladimir Ksenofontov. “Russian World and Globalization,” *Century of Globalization* 4, no. 2 (2009): 172–77.

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were mostly inoculated by the Ukrainian government that came to power after the Ukrainian revolution in 2014. However, those means were aimed at protecting Ukrainian national interests from the influence of Russian soft-power tools, including the Russian language as one of them, but not to oppress the population. Interestingly, although most of the population in the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine are Russian speaking, they do not welcome Russia as an occupier, especially after Russia's hostile behavior toward Ukraine. The conclusion of the article is even more interesting in terms of interpretation. On the one hand, it tells the reader about the questionable attractiveness of the European Union for Ukraine as a national and geopolitical project. On the other hand, it describes the incapability of Ukraine to survive in the international community after the events of 2014 in Ukraine. Moreover, Ukrainian civilizational choice would decide not only on the future of the Russian world in Ukraine (mentioned in the article) but also on the future of the Russian World as a non-cultural but geopolitical project itself.²⁸ Briefly speaking, the article turns out to be a brilliant example of ideological manipulation to show Ukraine's importance at the forefront of the Russian world.

Russian representatives used to claim that the national building process in Ukraine after the Revolution of Dignity in

²⁸ Sergey Suschij, "Russian World of Ukraine. Realities and Prospects of the Post-Soviet Period," *Free Thought*, no. 2 (2020): 137–60, <https://doi.org/10.24411/0869-4435-2020-00011>.

2013-2014 was considered a process of “*deconstruction of the Russian world in Ukraine*.” This brings us to the point that even if the construction process had not been finished, it at least took place in a specific period in Ukraine through soft power. Ukraine is called a part of the core of the Russian world because Ukraine was the source of Christianity in Eastern Europe, and Russia associates Kyiv as a part of Russian historical heritage as well as the Russian world, which not only overcomes the national borders of the Russian Federation but also includes territories together with Kyiv and Ukraine. However, Ukrainian national independence and pro-European orientation led to the failure of this project, leaving imperial geopolitical ambitions unsatisfied.²⁹

The “Russian World” project is a complex notion and requires a complex analysis. However, this does not change the fact that it harmoniously fits into the Russian neo-imperialistic political and geopolitical approach, as well as the project of rebuilding the “Great” modern Russia by using technologies of soft and hard power, tools of diplomacy, and hybrid and open aggressive warfare.

The events of 2014 in Ukraine became the first turning point in modern history in the relations between Ukraine and the Russian Federation. The Russian regime’s annexation of Crimea

²⁹ Victor Avksentiev and Boris Aksyumov. “Technologies of Deconstruction of the Russian World in Post-Maidan Ukraine,” *Scientific Thought of the Caucasus* 87, no. 3 (2016): 47–55, <https://doi.org/10.18522/2072-0181-2016-87-3-47-55>.

and support for separatist movements in the Donetsk and Lugansk regions mobilized Ukrainian patriotic and nationalistic movements. Though the official line from Moscow was that the regime in Ukraine was a Nazi one, and events during the Revolution in Ukraine from 2013 to 2014 amounted to an illegal change of power, it still acknowledged the legality of parliamentary and presidential elections in Ukraine in the following years.

The figure below demonstrates the buildup and results of the ideological background of Russian ideology in the particular case of Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022.

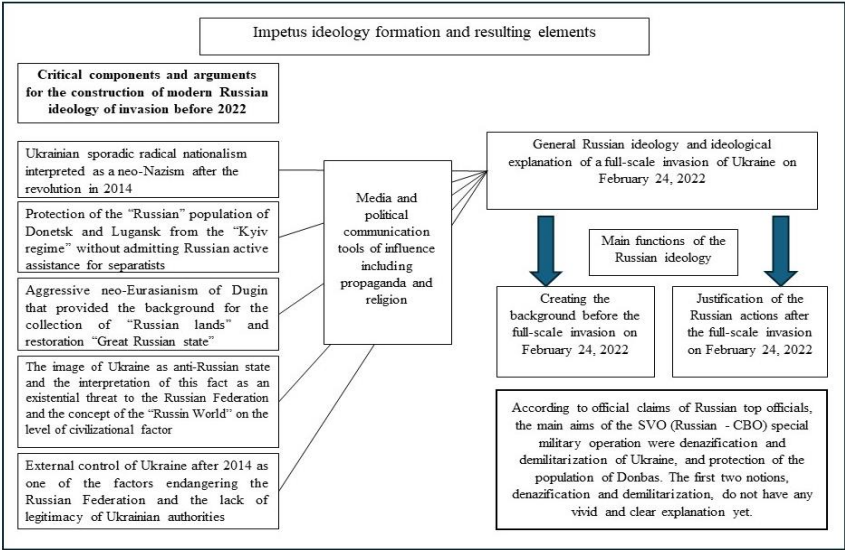


Figure 1: Impetus ideology formation and resulting elements.
Source: Author’s illustration

V. The official and media interpretations and explanations of the invasion

Official interpretation. Russian officials estimated the events of 2013-2014 in Ukraine as a nationalistic and illegal coup. The idea of a coup in Ukraine was a key argument Putin made during his speech in 2014 during his Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly. During the speech, Ukraine was already estimated to be within the sphere of direct Russian influence, especially from the strategic perspective of Crimea, which was claimed as a “...*place with a civilizational and sacral meaning for Russia...*” and “...*readiness of Russia to protect its interests unilaterally...*”.³⁰ This claim was not singular but one in a long line of such messages that are essential for understanding the place of Ukraine in the Russian system of values, ideology, and approach to conducting the geopolitical game.

Another significant message from the Russian president published on the official presidential website is the article “*On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians*” on July 12, 2021. The article claims the unity of the Russian, Belarusian, and Ukrainian nations. It also makes claims about input made by Russia on the formation of modern Ukraine in the current borders delineated in 1991. One of the more interesting facts is that it was

³⁰ Vladimir Putin. “Address of the President to the Federal Assembly,” President of Russia, December 8, 2014, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/47173>.

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published in the Russian and Ukrainian languages to show the closeness of the nations and, at the same time, point to discrimination of the Russian language in Ukraine for Russian readers who were not familiar with the present situation with the usage of the Russian language in Ukraine, and, perhaps, to get more sympathy from Ukrainian readers. The article includes numerous historical manipulations and, according to analysis, served several purposes:

1. Shows how closely modern Russia clings to old imperial tradition.
2. Point on willingness to keep Ukraine in the Russian orbit.
3. Showing the Russian population's readiness for actions and determination in foreign policy while simultaneously creating the negative image of Ukraine as "an anti-Russian state."³¹

All of these points have deep ideological connections with Dugin's thinking. Even though the message is not as radical in direct wording as Dugin's rhetoric, it still contains the same narratives and core thoughts about Ukraine's place as part of the greater Russian state. It is also important to mention that it was

³¹ Vladimir Putin. "Article by Vladimir Putin "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians," President of Russia, July 12, 2021, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>.

mainly delivered to Russian “consumers” and, to a lesser extent, to Ukrainians.

Another example of a deeply ideologically based material is the Message from the President of the Russian Federation on February 21, 2022, which is almost one hour long and directly says: “*Ukraine for us is not just a neighboring country. It is an integral part of our own history, culture, spiritual space*”. This statement confirms the Russian perception of Ukraine as a part of the Russian World. The message was made just before the invasion of Ukraine. The message tries to use separate facts to justify the right of Russia as a successor of the Soviet Union on all Ukrainian territories as a historical heritage and criticize national transformations in Ukraine, especially during the revolutionary events of 2013-2014.

According to the claims of Russian officials, the key points of the Russian invasion were:

- Denazification;
- Demilitarization;
- Protection of the population of Ukrainian Donbas;
- Protection of the Russian Federation;
- Stop the dominance of the United States.

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- Destruction of Ukrainian radical nationalistic groups (despite tolerating the existence of the same groups in Russian society).³²

On April 22, Russian military officials claimed that the second stage of the so-called “military operation” was to control the south of Ukraine and create a passage to Moldova and Transnistria. In reality, that means realizing Dugin's ideas about the necessity of maintaining Russian control over the whole north coast of the Black Sea under Russian control.³³

During the ceremony of signing agreements on the admission of the DPR, LPR, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson regions to Russia, Putin directly claimed that Russia disagrees with the existing world order and wants to challenge and change it: *“All we hear from all sides is that the West stands for the order based on rules. Where did they come from? Who even saw these rules? Who agreed?... Russia is a great millennial power, a country-civilization, and will not live by such rigged false rules”*.³⁴ Such a direct and unmasked claim proves that protecting

³² Vladimir Putin. “Address by the President of the Russian Federation,” President of Russia, February 22, 2022, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828>.

³³ Sergey Bobylev. “The Ministry of Defense called the tasks of the second stage of the special operation in Ukraine,” TASS, April 22, 2022, <https://tass.ru/armiya-i-opk/14446141>.

³⁴ Vladimir Putin. “Speech during the signing of agreements on the admission of the DPR, LPR, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson regions to Russia,” Website of the President of Russia, October 30, 2022, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/69465>.

the Russian-speaking population was just an excuse and a part of the plan to challenge an existing international world order.

Based on the general ideas and messages in these official speeches, Putin is one of the leading carriers of Russian ideology, even though his position in the early 2000s was much more liberal, at least in the official claims about cooperation with the USA and European countries and also building social order in Russia.

Another publicly prominent person who made a lot of notable remarks about the nature of the special military operation, SVO (Russian – СВО, специальная военная операция), is Vyacheslav Volodin, the chairman of the Russian parliament, or Duma. His remarks and claims can also be considered as a part of the ideological justification for war as long as they bring up the issues of the ideology of Ukraine, as seen by official Moscow. All following citations were taken from the official Telegram account of Volodin, which is one of the official communication channels for the above-mentioned official. Among them are the following:

1. *“...The United States had eight years to make Ukraine democratic, independent, sovereign and prosperous, when, after the coup, American advisers and instructors actually led the Kyiv regime. However, Ukraine, which has great potential, was plundered instead of being developed. Objectionable media outlets were shut down, independent journalists were killed, and political parties were banned.*

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And no one from the corrupt government thought about the Ukrainian people...”³⁵

2. *“Last week, a delegation of the DPR parliament paid an official visit to the State Duma. The issues of harmonization of our states' legislation were discussed. However, there is a norm in the DPR that it would be right to preserve. This is especially true in wartime conditions. We are talking about the death penalty. Every day we see crimes against humanity committed by the Kyiv neo-Nazi regime, shelling residential areas, hospitals, maternity hospitals, kindergartens, and schools. Old people, women, and children are dying.”³⁶*

3. *“The White House said it condemns Russia's airstrikes on critical infrastructure in Ukraine. And what has Washington done to stop the shelling of civilians in Donbas, where people have been living in fear, without water and light for more than eight years? What is Washington doing now to stop attacks on the Zaporizhia Nuclear Power Plant by Ukrainian formations that threaten a nuclear catastrophe? It only continues to militarize the Nazi Kyiv regime, pushing it to commit more and more crimes. It must be understood that all the goals of the special military*

³⁵ Vyacheslav Volodin. “Telegram Channel of Volodin Vyacheslav,” Telegram, June 2, 2022, https://t.me/vv_volodin/474.

³⁶ Vyacheslav Volodin. “Telegram Channel of Volodin Vyacheslav,” Telegram, June 15, 2022, https://t.me/vv_volodin/485.

operation will be achieved in any case. The Kyiv regime will be denazified, and Western military aid will be destroyed. And if Washington, continuing the war to the last Ukrainian, thinks that it will not affect him, then he is very mistaken.”³⁷

As we can see from the above-mentioned citations from a source that can be considered official, the claims are deeply ideologically colored and are in tune with Dugin’s and Putin’s ideological messages. They do, in fact, attempt to justify the aggression as the only possible way for the Russian Federation to behave in order to resist and stand-up to this modern Ukraine, which is an anti-Russian creation of the united geopolitical West.

It is also important to stress two articles, which can be counted as pure and concentrated statements of Russian ideological descriptions of the war because the Russian government-controlled media resource RIA Novosti published both. The first one is called *The (Advance) Arrival of Russia in a New World* (in Russian: *Наступление России и нового мира*). Notably, the word “*наступление*” also means “the attack or assault.” In this context, the title comes across as particularly hostile. The article was deleted soon after publication from the website of one of the biggest Russian informational agencies due

³⁷ Vyacheslav Volodin. “Telegram Channel of Volodin Vyacheslav,” Telegram, September 13, 2022, https://t.me/vv_volodin/542.

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to the failure of the Russian assault on Kyiv.³⁸ To be specific, the central message of the article can be summarized in several statements: The purpose of the Russian military campaign in Ukraine is to unify the Russian World in a format suitable for Moscow, lay down the gauntlet to Western powers in the new geopolitical confrontation, build a new world order, and reinforce the inner Russian pillars of the current regime. The claim is not perceived as being irregular from a revenge-seeking state.³⁹

Another article issued by the same informational agency is “*What should Russia do with Ukraine?*” The article itself talks about the necessity of conducting ethnic cleansing on Ukrainian national territories under the cover of the so-called Russian “denazification of Ukraine.”

Some parts of the article can be directly cited to understand the deepness of thinking and ideological approach or the source which published such material:

1. “...*However, besides the highest ranks, a significant number of common people are also guilty of being passive*

³⁸ The article was deleted from official website of news agency several hours later, but still can be accessed by using tools, which archive all online publications.

³⁹ Petr Akopov. “The arrival of Russia in a new world,” RIA NEWS. Internet Archive Wayback Machine, February 26, 2022, <https://web.archive.org/web/20220226051154/https://ria.ru/20220226/rossiya-1775162336.html>.

Nazis and Nazi accomplices. They supported the Nazi authorities and pandered to them...”;

2. *“...The further denazification of this bulk of the population will take the form of re-education through ideological repressions (suppression) of Nazi paradigms and harsh censorship not only in the political sphere but also in the spheres of culture and education.”.*

The author suggested destroying even the slightest idea of possible Ukrainian national sovereignty together with the entire population, which is discordant with the impending Russian world. From this standpoint, it is not only an idea of deconstruction of the national state but also an idea of national genocide proclaimed in the government-controlled media.⁴⁰ Dugin articulated very similar ideas in his numerous works before 2022.

The main ideologist of the Russian Federation has his own perspectives on the war in Ukraine. This point of view openly declares that the Russian Federation needs total control of modern Ukraine in order to prevent the expansion of Western ideology and enforcement by the West. Ukraine is also called anti-Russia in his book *The Foundations of Geopolitics: The Geopolitical Future of Russia*, which was published in 1997 before Putin was elected president. Several chapter citations related to Ukraine

⁴⁰ Timofei Sergeitsev. “What should Russia do with Ukraine,” RIA News, April 3, 2022, <https://ria.ru/20220403/ukraina-1781469605.html>.

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better emphasize Dugin's ideological position and explain the full-scale invasion of 2022. *"The sovereignty of Ukraine is such a negative phenomenon for Russian geopolitics that, in principle, it can easily provoke an armed conflict. Without the Black Sea coast from Izmail to Kerch, Russia gets such an extended coastal strip, really controlled by no one knows who, that its very existence as a normal and independent state is questioned..."* and *"...Ukraine, as an independent state with some territorial ambitions, poses a considerable danger to the whole of Eurasia, and without solving the Ukrainian problem, it is pointless to talk about continental geopolitics at all. This does not mean that Ukraine's cultural, linguistic, or economic autonomy should be limited and that it should become a purely administrative sector of the Russian centralized state (as, to some extent, things were in the Tsarist Empire or under the USSR). But strategically, Ukraine should be strictly a projection of Moscow in the south and west..."*.⁴¹

According to these words, if Ukraine ceases to be a sovereign state, demilitarization alone will prove unfruitful.⁴² This idea does not need a further detailed explanation, though its appearance and successful existence depend upon a strong,

⁴¹ Dugin, *Foundations of Geopolitics*.

⁴² Aleksandr Dugin. "What Is the Essence and Meaning of the Russian Armed Forces' Special Operation in Ukraine," *Geopolitica.RU*, April 4, 2022, <https://www.geopolitika.ru/en/article/what-essence-and-meaning-russian-armed-forces-special-operation-ukraine>.

reliable, government-supported ideological and propagandistic background.

Other evidence of existing and profound ideology is the support of the invasion by society. Russian society strongly supported the Russian invasion on the level of regular citizens and the circulation of key narratives in society. This can be seen from the research conducted by the Russia Public Opinion Center (Russian ВЦИОМ - VCIOM) in 2022. The following citation was taken from the website of this organization:

“The level of support by the Russian society for a special military operation has remained at a consistently high level for three months of monitoring — 72% of citizens support the decision to conduct a special military operation by Russia in Ukraine, 18% do not support it. It was difficult to answer — 10%.

The understanding of its goals does not change either: in the first place — to protect Russia, disarm Ukraine and prevent the deployment of NATO military bases on its territory (40%), one in five believes that the goal is to change the political course of Ukraine and clear it of the Nazis (20%), 18% name protection as the goals of the special operation of the population of Donbas (DPR and LPR), 7% believe that the goal is to occupy Ukraine and annex it to Russia.”⁴³

⁴³ VCIOM. “Special military operation: monitoring,” Official website, Russian Public Opinion Research Center, May 30, 2022,

VI. Conclusions

Russia's aggression against Ukraine would not have been successful, in part because of Russian citizens' perception of it, without long and detailed preparations from the side of Russian national top management and national ideologists. The idea of the “Russian World” as the concept of social integrational formation for one of the great international powers does not seem to have been unsuccessful from an ideological perspective. However, its practical implementation was catastrophic and led to a long, drawn-out war in Ukraine, which has already lasted more than two years.

However, it is vital to admit several essential points of Russian ideology. The modern ideology of the Russian Federation has been created from several parts, which were finalized into unprovoked open aggression and hostility towards Ukraine. An excuse for this was the protection of the population of Donbas from Ukraine and the expansion of NATO. That is very similar to Hitler's claims before the annexation of Sudetenland.

The first part is revenge-seeking ambitions for losing the Cold War. It might look a bit far into history. However, the nationalistic powers turned political and intellectual elites did not accept the loss of their might and influence that existed during the

Soviet Union era. They were lost after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The second is the Russian ideology, which is based on the cult of national sanctitude and deep religious belief in one's own country, as well as a last stronghold of *right* (conservative Orthodox Christianity) universal values rather than Western end-of-empire decadence. In fact, it is an attempt to exploit the conservative values of orthodox Christianity “written in the Bible” as the only right ones compared to developing modern liberal values as seen in Western societies. The Russian religious intuitions of different confessions are national ideology promotion and creation tools while being officially separated from the national government structures. On the one hand, they protect conservative social values, which are, in fact, one of the pillars of Russian ideology itself.

The third is the idea of modern Russian neo-imperialism. Russian ambitions are based on the principal idea of the great and mighty Russia as one of the centers of global power with revenge-seeking dreams. Though the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, the imperial ideology was not within the circles of politicians and social activists. The idea of re-gathering lands of the ex-Soviet Union under Russian control went through several stages after the collapse of the Soviet Union by creating different integration structures, such as the Commonwealth of Independent States, Eurasian Union, and Collective Security Treaty

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Organization. Indeed, none of these were as successful as expected. Among all Russian-centered integration initiatives, “The Union State of Russia and Belarus” can be counted as the most successful because of Belarus’s total support of Russian aggression in Ukraine.

The fourth is that the decade of the unipolar world was over a long time ago, at the beginning of 2000, and the Russian Federation became a respectful country, albeit far from the power that the Soviet Union used to be. Currently, the Russian Federation in Ukraine is seeking to revise the current international order employing force, to which the articles and speeches cited herein can attest. The Russian Federation uses a non-official ideology to develop its promotion vision of the international order and the place of Russia in it.

The fifth one is the double negation of Ukraine. The first factor of dissolution is the solid national and Europe-oriented forces in Ukraine (called Nazis by official Russian propaganda), the existence of which did not allow the Russian Federation to use soft power tools and created the background for regime change in Ukraine in 2014 from pro-Russian to pro-European. That also includes seeking ways of adapting Western democratic values to Ukrainian society. The combination of these two notions (Western values and Russian opposition to the West) brought about a perilous, explosive situation.

Thus, the strong support for the war among the Russian population and the continuous high-scale war and violence in Ukraine proves the Kremlin's high efficiency in creating particular national ideological thinking. The existing ideology of the Russian World not only supports and legitimates the Russian aggression against Ukraine but also creates a background for further hostility conducted by the Russian Federation. The ideology of hostile contradiction for the West and reconstruction of the "Great Russian State" as a way of thinking spread and popularized among the Russian population, then found its practical realization in the invasion of Ukraine.

Also, the idea of building the "Russian world" as a sphere of Russian influence became one of the key tools for spreading Russian influence on Ukraine, and Ukraine's unwillingness to follow Russian narratives and ideology became one of the real reasons for the invasion. The proofs can be seen in different original Russian sources mentioned and cited in this article.

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Beware of Entrapment: Alliance Politics and French Indo-Pacific Strategy

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Abstract

In 2018, the French Government announced two strategic documents titled “French Strategy in the Indo-Pacific” (La stratégie de la France dans l’Indopacifique) and the “French Defense Strategy in the Indo-Pacific (La Stratégie de Defense Française en Indo-Pacifique). It mainly contained France’s extraterritorial vision of the Indo-Pacific and underlined France

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as the “genuine Indo-Pacific power.” The publication of the strategic document that follows a series of speeches by the French President Macron coincides with the height of the geopolitical contest between China and the United States that defined themselves as the “Indo-Pacific great power” and brought France, previously an outlier in the region and lesser power, as an independent key player within the contest. This situation raised a question on the consideration of France in forming a separate Indo-Pacific narrative and initiative despite its bilateral alliance with the United States and through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). This paper attempts to shed light on France's strategic concerns, including its independent perspective in defining its transcontinental interest in the Indo-Pacific region, particularly in strategic sectors such as economics, defense and security, and maritime development. Consequently, this paper argues that, by looking into the French foreign policy tradition of maintaining its identity of being part of the West while avoiding a total alignment with the United States on foreign policy issues, French endeavors in the Indo-Pacific are designed to give France more independent foreign policy initiatives in the region. From its perspective, France also tries to avoid any enigmatic situation in the Indo-Pacific that might rise along with the upcoming great power competition between the United States and China—that may impact French national interest – by trying to balance its relations with both superpowers while also spreading its influence

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independently to emerging Indo-Pacific countries, most notably India and Indonesia, by leveraging its mature armament industry.

Keywords: Alliance Dilemma, Entrapment, Indo-Pacific, Strategy, France, Alliance Politics

I. Introduction

France has an extensive transcontinental region. Metropolitan France—the core region of France where its national capital, Paris, is located, covers only 88 percent of France’s total area. The remains are called *France d’Outre Mer* or Overseas France, encompassing 13 dependencies and collectivities, four of them located in the Indo-Pacific region.¹ Besides the different stratification of their political status, the French Government considers these overseas regions part of “France sovereignty,” including assigning their inhabitant as citizens of France. Hence, the French Government believes that it has the sovereign right to assert its interest and maintain footprints in the Indo-Pacific, which encompassing various sectors, including defense and security, economics, investments, and the rule of law. This eventually made France one of the significant actors in the region.

The current dynamic of the Indo-Pacific, from the rise of China—both as a political and economic power—to the United States’ reaction by enacting its Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) narrative, mainly became a stimulus for France to re-assess its lukewarmness and sought to be more assertive on its Indo-Pacific regional possession. In 2018, French President Emmanuel Macron

¹ Among 13 regions, 11 of them are inhabited and two of them are uninhabited. Four France’s region in the Indo-Pacific including French Polynesia, Wallis and Futuna, New Caledonia, and Clipperton Island

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delivered speeches in Canberra and Reunion, aiming to re-assert its identity as an “Indo-Pacific power” and affirm France's broader role in the region.² His administration also set out and published a strategic document called *La stratégie de la France dans l'Indo-Pacifique* (French Strategy in the Indo-Pacific) which underlines France's critical strategy to maintain its presence in the area by comprehensive actions, including “to maintain stability and inclusivity, involve further in economic and regional development, and promote effective multilateralism to reduce tensions and encourage cooperation.”³ . The further development of regional alliances and alignments, indicated by the formation of mini-lateral forums such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) and AUKUS—in 2020 and 2021,⁴ respectively, further pushed France to underline its “third-way” strategy in independently projecting its geopolitical interest, as both initiatives excluded France from its membership. However, the relations between France and both initiatives' members have

² Eric Frécon. “France's Third Path” for the Indo-Pacific? Credentials and Challenges,” *ISEAS Perspective*, no. 12 (2022).

³ Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères [Ministry of European and Foreign Affairs, “La Stratégie de La France Dans l'Indo-Pacifique [French Strategy in the Indo-Pacific] (Paris: Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères, 2019), https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/fr_a4_indopacifique_022022_dcp_v1-10-web_cle017d22.pdf.

⁴ C Raja Mohan and Darshana M Baruah. “Deepening the India-France Maritime Partnership,” Carnegie India, 2018.

generally improved after a short disenchantment regarding Australia's cancellation of submarine procurement.

Although France considers itself a “Western power,” working side-by-side through various strategic forums with the United States and one of the founding members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) under the formal alliance treaty, the country opted for an independent action regarding its interest in the Indo-Pacific. Moreover, the government also considers the Chinese expansion in the Indo-Pacific to be a challenge to its regional interests, as mentioned in various President Macron speeches.⁵ Also, the opinion of French people toward China in the past three years has been worsening. A survey conducted by the French Institute of International Relations (*Institut français des Relations Internationales/IFRI*) in 2020-2021 stated that more than 60 percent of respondents expressed a “negative” tone towards China, accentuating its expansionist policy, dictatorship, and COVID-19 pandemic, and believes that their country should align its foreign policy towards the EU or the United States.⁶ These tendencies should support the closer US-France strategic alliance, especially in handling

⁵ Jérémy Bachelier and Celine Pajon. “France and AUKUS: Bouncing Back to Live Up to Pacific Challenges,” Paris: Institut français des relations internationales, (2022).

⁶ Marc Julienne et al. “French Public Opinion on China in the Age of COVID-19,” Paris: Institut français des relations internationales, (2021), https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/fr_poll_report.pdf.

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common geopolitical interests, but the reality is often different than expected.

From this situation, this journal intended to answer several questions: why is France choosing and implementing its autonomous strategy in the Indo-Pacific, albeit still being one of the strategic allies of the United States? What are the considerations of the French Government underlining to independently define its Indo-Pacific interests rather than buck-pass its regional responsibility to its principal ally? And the broader concern: How is France's perspective of the Indo-Pacific, and how important is the region for France? This research will utilize the alliance formation concept, arguing that France tends to avoid any unnecessary political disarray that might be malignant to its existence by forming an independent Indo-Pacific grand strategy apart from the US-based geopolitical narrative. This research will take into account several aspects, including the historical framework of France's possession in the Indo-Pacific and its independent geopolitical narrative, its relations with the United States regarding their political alliance, and France's Indo-Pacific interests and strategy implementation based on the French Strategy in the Indo-Pacific (*La stratégie de la France dans l'Indopacifique*).

The analysis of France's Indo-Pacific strategy from the perspective of alliance politics and a broader strategic lens remains under-explored. Previous research mainly focuses on

relatively narrow policy implementation, such as France's initiatives to create strategic partnerships with several Indo-Pacific middle powers. The study by Mohan and Baruah specifically mentioned bilateral initiatives to strengthen the strategic partnership between France and India and the "possibility of including like-minded countries," such as expanding naval reach, defense industrial development, and security dialogue.⁷ Although nudging the Indo-Pacific as a common interest of the two countries and pictured India and France as fellow "formidable middle power," the paper generally does not explain France's strategic independence further.

Another research by Bachelier and Pajon underlined the relations between France and AUKUS. This research focuses on the links between France and AUKUS members, especially regarding the rift dynamics between them due to the annulment of the joint submarine project between France and Australia.⁸ Meanwhile, Erice Frecon's work on ISEAS mainly shed light on France's engagement in the Indo-Pacific due to its historical and political footprint in the Indo-Pacific.⁹ Despite these studies comprehensively underlined France's independent Indo-Pacific

⁷ Mohan and Baruah. "Deepening The India-France Maritime Partnership."

⁸ Bachelier and Pajon. "France and AUKUS: Bouncing Back to Live Up to Pacific Challenges."

⁹ Eric Frecon. "'France's Third Path' for the Indo-Pacific? Credentials and Challenges," accessed July 20, 2023,

<https://www.iseas.edu.sg/articles-commentaries/iseas-perspective/2022-12-frances-third-path-for-the-indo-pacific-credentials-and-challenges-by-eric-frecon/>.

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vision, France's right to assert sovereignty on its Indo-Pacific territorial possession, its position as a "balancing power" between the US and China, and the solid explanation of France's *raison d'être* to create and develop its independent Indo-Pacific strategy remain disregarded.

This research sought to fill the research gap by analyzing the *raison d'être* of France's independent grand strategy of Indo-Pacific from a bigger picture, using the lens of alliance formation and the position of France within the "Western geopolitical sphere" and its relations with NATO as a security alliance it participates. The paper is divided into several essential parts. First, the theoretical framework will underline the alliance theory, focused on how the geopolitical alliance is formed and why certain countries sought to join or take distance from the alliance. Several perspectives are utilized, including Stephen Walt's definition of political alliance and Snyder's explanation of entrapment and why countries tend to avoid it. It will be followed by a profound explanation of France's *raison d'être* on avoiding entrapment that might emerge along with forming the Indo-Pacific alliance from a historical and political context. The next part explains the French Indo-Pacific strategy and how the French Government will implement it as a basis for its autonomous definition of the Indo-Pacific region, including France's views on broadening partnerships with several Indo-Pacific strategic powers.

II. Theoretical Framework: Alliance Theory

Scholars have defined alliances in broad or narrow ways. Stephen Walt defines an alliance as “a formal or informal arrangement for security cooperation between two or more sovereign states.”¹⁰ He used the terms alliance and alignment interchangeably because, although there was no formal treaty, states cooperated and committed to each other. Meanwhile, Glenn Snyder defines alliances as “formal associations of states for the use (or non-use) of military force, intended for either the security or the aggrandizement of their members, against specific other states, whether or not these other are explicitly identified.” According to him, alliances are only the formal subset of alignment.¹¹ Recently, based on Snyder’s definition, Iain Henry argues that “an alliance can be epitomized not by a treaty text but by an ongoing pattern of security cooperation.”¹²

Each definition has its merits and demerits in research on alliances. In the case of France and the US, their relationship fits in into a narrow definition of an alliance. Both countries are parties to the North Atlantic Treaty, the founding treaty of NATO.

¹⁰ Stephen Walt. *The Origins of Alliances*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, (1990): 12.

¹¹ Glenn Snyder. “Alliance Theory: A Neorealist First Cut,” *Journal of International Affairs* 44, no. 1 (1990): 104-5.

¹² Iain Henry. *Reliability and Alliance Interdependence: The United States and Its Allies in Asia, 1949-1969*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, (2022): 14.

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The phenomena of alliance formation and management/politics attract the interest of several scholars. Some of them explain that the structure of the international system and the distribution of power in it affect the formation and management of alliances. Kenneth Waltz explains that the structure of a system, both national and international, conditions the behavior of units inside it. The international system is anarchic, which means no entity organizes states' behavior and their relations with each other. While states function the same, they have different capabilities. In this situation, states continuously worry about their survival and the relative gain from cooperation because there is uncertainty about the intentions and actions of others.¹³ They attempt to create or maintain the balance of power against the strongest state by internal balancing, increasing their economic and military capability and developing strategies, and external balancing, allying with other states or enticing states from the opposing alliance to defect.¹⁴ However, some states do not have the resources to face any potential opponent, so the only way to increase their security is by pooling their military capability with other states.

Walt recognizes that there are anomalies in alliance formation that the balance of power theory could not explain. Some alliances grow larger and stronger over time, often

¹³ Kenneth Waltz. *Theory of International Politics*, Reading: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, (1979): 104-7.

¹⁴ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 118.

surpassing their opponents. He then argued that states form alliances as a response to the threats they perceive rather than the power of others.¹⁵ The level of threat that states pose to others will depend on their aggregate power, geographic proximity, offensive power, and aggressive intentions.¹⁶ However, states will form alliances against the most threatening state only if they can achieve a balance of power and allies are available.¹⁷ Existing alliances will collapse because of two changes. One of them is a significant shift in the level of threat that alliance members face as a result of a change in the balance of power, a change of beliefs about other states' intentions, or there are other means to achieve security.¹⁸ The other is doubt about whether the alliance can guarantee the security of its members either due to the lack of capabilities to deter and defeat opponents or whether allies assist.¹⁹

Snyder is also a scholar who explained that the international system's structure influences the formation of alliances and intra-alliance politics. Anarchy creates such insecurity for states that they increase their power relative to each other. States can achieve security by increasing military strength, but some countries formed alliances because they were unsatisfied with

¹⁵ Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, ix-x.

¹⁶ Walt, *The Origins of Alliance*, 22.

¹⁷ Walt, *The Origins of Alliance*, 29-31.

¹⁸ Stephen Walt. "Why Alliances Endure or Collapse," *Survival* 39, no. 1 (1997): 158-59.

¹⁹ Walt, "Why Alliances Endure or Collapse," 160.

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moderate security. In addition, countries form alliances to avoid isolation or prevent other countries from allying with them. Forming alliances involves a bargaining process in which countries compete for the most net benefit the alliance can offer. Each country has two main goals in the bargain: to become the most powerful party in the alliance and maximize their share of net benefit from the alliance.²⁰ Conflicts and commonalities of interests among potential allies also influenced bargaining in forming alliances. Commonalities of interest increase the value of an alliance, whereas conflicts of interest decrease it because compromises must be made for the alliance to be formed.²¹ More comprehensively, Snyder explained that the benefits and costs (value) of an alliance would be influenced by the needs of countries for the alliance, the extent to which potential partners meet those needs, and the provisions in the agreement underlying the alliance.²²

Once countries form alliances, their security concerns shift to commitments to support partners and how much support is given to partners in conflict with adversaries. One of the concerns of countries in the alliance is abandoned by allies (abandonment), either in the form of allies switching to opposing parties, allies leaving alliances, allies failing to show commitment, or allies

²⁰ Glenn Snyder. "The Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics," *World Politics* 36, no. 4 (1984): 462-63.

²¹ Snyder, "The Security Dilemma," 465.

²² Snyder, "Alliance Theory," 110.

failing to provide support when needed. Another concern is that allies are involved in a conflict where they have different interests (entrapment). These two dilemmas are interconnected because a strong commitment and support to an ally can reduce the risk of abandonment but make the ally more emboldened in conflict with the adversary, thus increasing the likelihood of entrapment. Meanwhile, weak commitment and support to allies reduce the likelihood of engaging in unwanted conflicts. However, this increases the risk of being abandoned by allies because loyalties in the alliance become questionable.²³

Intra-alliance politics or alliance management, like forming alliances, involves states calculating benefits and costs. Snyder explained that the cost of abandonment depends on a country's dependence on the alliance concerning its conflict with the adversary. Meanwhile, the cost of entrapment depended on the extent to which allies shared interests. Countries seek to reduce both risks and costs to maximize an alliance's benefits. The country with the lowest dependence on the alliance will have more bargaining power than its partners. In this case, it does not need to adapt its policies to the wishes of its allies and can even tolerate the risk of the dissolution of the alliance.²⁴ Snyder's theory of alliances can be used to understand French behavior in its alliance with the US. Both countries have different interests, and France tries to reduce the risk of entrapment. Those lead to

²³ Snyder, "The Security Dilemma," 466-67.

²⁴ Snyder, "Alliance Theory," 113-14.

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the two countries' relatively different foreign policies in the Indo-Pacific and toward China.

III. French Indo-Pacific Policy: Avoiding Entrapment

A. *Politique de Grandeur*: Introduction and Brief History

The current French policy in the Indo-Pacific could be traced all the way to the presidency of Charles de Gaulle, the French national hero who served as the President of France from 1959 until 1969. Named *politique de grandeur*,²⁵ it is designed to ensure the considerable influence of France akin to that of a world superpower during the colonial era. In the past, French's superpower was buttressed by the fact that it was a colonial power by having colonies in Africa (most notably Algeria) to Indochina (Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos).

However, after the advent of decolonization, the humiliating French defeat in Dien Bien Phu, and the long-running colonial war in Algeria, France lost its colonies one by one. De Gaulle realized that France would need a new source of power to maintain its status as a major power in its own right, with the ability to independently carry out its foreign policy that suits its interests instead of depending on and following the US and

²⁵ It is difficult to translate "*politique de grandeur*" into English that could accurately reflect its true meaning. Its rough translation could be those of "greatness policy." Due to this difficulty, this paper would only use the original French term

NATO lead all the time. In the words of de Gaulle, one of the problems facing France is France's foreign policy "[i]n the Western world to which we belong, *without having to confine ourselves to it*, to take our proper place, to take an action that is our own, to serve peace and security simultaneously [emphasis added]." ²⁶

This does not mean that France would abandon NATO and one of its longest-standing ally, the United States. On the contrary, France remains in NATO and remains one of the US longest-standing allies. Consequently, the French foreign policy is those of hedging: even though France will stay in the West and consider itself part of the West, it would not mindlessly follow the US and NATO (in de Gaulle's words, "Anglo-Saxon hegemony"). Consequently, France strives to have the best of both worlds: a place as a member of the collective West and maintaining great autonomy in foreign affairs as wide as possible.

The following three events are the clearest manifestation of France's *politique de grandeur*: its quest to become the world's fourth state with nuclear weapons, its withdrawal from the NATO

²⁶ Charles de Gaulle. "Allocution Prononcee Par Le General de Gaulle à La Radio-Television Francaise [Speech by General de Gaulle in French Radio and Television]," Gaumont Pathe Archives (Gaumont Pathe Archives, June 13, 1958), https://gparchives.com/media/doc_acc/0312/5825GJ_00001_ds.PDF. The exact quotation is «...*Dans le monde occidental auquel nous appartenons, sans devoir nous y confiner, prendre une place qui nous soit propre, mener une action qui soit notre action, en vue de servir à la fois la paix et la sécurité.*»

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unified command, and its opposition to the Iraq war. These events will be described and analyzed in detail to give a concrete example of France's *politique de grandeur*.

The biggest public demonstration of France's *politique de grandeur* would be France's usage of its nuclear weapons. At first, having its own separate nuclear deterrent makes little sense. France is a member of NATO and is, therefore, protected by US and UK nuclear umbrella through NATO's infamous Article 5, which considers an attack on one member as an attack against all members of the alliance. In other words, guaranteeing France's security would have been enough without possessing an independent nuclear deterrent. Indeed, France's nuclear program was initially conducted without a proper strategy and that "... technological means were driving the strategic ends..."²⁷ However, over time, the nuclear program and procurement were used as a means to secure France's foreign policy independence. In a speech before the French military school (*École-Militaire*), President de Gaulle declared that:

France's defense needs to be French... A country like France, when it is time for her to go to war, the war must be a French war. France's effort must be a French effort. Otherwise, our country would

²⁷ Benoît Pelopidas and Sébastien Philippe. "Unfit for Purpose: Reassessing the Development and Deployment of French Nuclear Weapons (1956–1974)," *Cold War History* 21, no. 3 (2020): 3-4, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2020.1832472>.

*be in contradiction with everything since its beginning, with its role, with its capabilities, with its soul. Naturally, French defense would be carried out in collaboration with others. It is the nature of things. However, it is necessary that France defend itself, for itself, and in its own way.*²⁸

The only way for France to secure its autonomy is to have a nuclear deterrent independent of those of the UK and the US. De Gaulle links the idea of a French nuclear deterrent as an absolute necessity for France to maximize the independence of its foreign policy decision.²⁹ To realize this desire, de Gaulle supercharged France's nuclear program and successfully tested a nuclear bomb in the Algerian desert on 13 February 1960.³⁰

²⁸ Charles de Gaulle, quoted in Lucien Poirier. *Des Strategies Nucleaires* [Nuclear Strategies], Paris: Editions Complexe, (1988): 294-95. The exact quotation is «*Il faut que la defense de la France soit Française... Un pays comme la France, s'il lui arrive de faire la guerre, il faut que ce soit sa guerre. Il faut que son effort soit son effort. S'il en était autrement, notre pays serait en contradiction avec tout ce qu'il est depuis ses origines, avec son role, avec l'estime qu'il a de lui-même, avec son âme. Naturellement, la defense française serait, le cas échéant, conjugée avec celle d'autres pays. Cela est dans la nature des choses. Mais, il est dispensable qu'elle nous soit propre, que la France sa defense par elle-même, pour elle-même, et à sa façon* »

²⁹ André Passeron. "Une Constante de La Politique Du Général de Gaulle : Doter La France Des Moyens d'Assurer Sa Sécurité [A Constant Theme in the Policies of General de Gaulle: Providing France with the means to assure its security]," *Le Monde diplomatique*, December 1, 1964, <https://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/1964/12/PASSERON/26344>.

³⁰ Poirier, *Des Strategies Nucleaires*, 295

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The successful French nuclear program also allowed France to take another step in implementing the *politique de grandeur*: withdrawing from the NATO unified command. An independent nuclear deterrent is necessary as one of the main reasons to depend on NATO was the American and British nuclear umbrella that protects Europe through NATO's Article 5. After several tests to ensure the reliability of the French nuclear deterrent, de Gaulle wrote a letter to the President of the United States, Lyndon B. Johnson, on March 7, 1966, announcing France's withdrawal from the NATO unified command. However, it would remain a member of the alliance.³¹ In the letter, de Gaulle justified the withdrawal on the basis that France needed to exercise sovereignty over the whole of its territory, and this exercise of sovereignty was constrained by the presence of foreign troops on French soil.³² De Gaulle had other reasons, such as reforming the NATO alliance. However, the dominating motive was the need to exercise France's autonomy to its fullest.³³ France would not rejoin NATO's unified command until 2009.

³¹ Poirier, *Des Strategies Nucleaires*, 297

³² Thomas Wieder. "1966 : La France Tourne Le Dos à L'OTAN [France Turns its Back on NATO]," *Le Monde*, March 10, 2009, https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2009/03/10/1966-la-france-tourne-le-dos-a-l-otan_1165992_3210.html.

³³ Dominique Vidal. "Ce Que Voulait de Gaulle En Quittant L'OTAN [This is What de Gaulle Wants in Quitting NATO]," *Le Monde diplomatique*, April 1, 2008, <https://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2008/04/VIDAL/15800>. The title, we must argue, is an inaccurate representation of the event as France never left NATO completely, only its unified command structure.

Moving closer to the present day, one can also see France's *politique de grandeur* in action in the lead-up to the Iraq War in 2003. The United States, believing that Iraq had Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), sought its allies' commitment and international legitimacy to fight against Iraq, including France. France's acquiescence was also vital in another way: it is a permanent member of the UN Security Council with the power to block any resolution. Consequently, the United States needed, at least, a French abstention to pass a resolution granting legitimacy to its war in Iraq.³⁴ Due to its policy of cultivating friendly relations with countries in the Middle East and the minuscule French interests in going to war against Iraq, President Jacques Chirac announced on national television on March 10, 2003, that it opposed the US-led invasion of Iraq.³⁵

However, the *politique de grandeur* is not universally welcomed across Europe. In particular, Eastern European countries often conflict with France over France's efforts to cultivate a more independent Europe free from the clutches of the United States. Zięba, in particular, offers an illustration and analysis of Franco-Polish relations, which the author described as

³⁴ Assuming, of course, that the other 3, most notably China and Russia, also abstained, at least, and the resolution had a majority vote from the ten non-permanent members.

³⁵ Henri Vernet, Christophe Bourdoiseau, and Marion L'Hour. "Jacques Chirac, l'Homme Qui a Dit Non à La Guerre En Irak [Jacques Chirac: The Man Who Said 'No' to the War in Iraq]," *Le Parisien*, September 26, 2019, <https://www.leparisien.fr/politique/jacques-chirac-l-homme-qui-a-dit-non-a-la-guerre-en-irak-26-09-2019-8160591.php>.

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“meandering, changeable and even complicated.”³⁶ This is due to the different perceptions of maintaining their security in Eastern European capitals and Paris (i.e., different threat perceptions). The former, after gaining its true independence in 1991, believes that its security and independence could only be secured by joining NATO and having US military protection, and (particularly for the Baltic states) France’s strategic autonomy could come at the risk of the Euro-Atlantic alliance.³⁷ This is due to the perception in Eastern European capitals that Europe’s most significant threat would come from Russia. France, however, saw things differently. After the collapse of the Berlin Wall, France believed that Europe’s threats would come from Africa and the Middle East and was not initially very enthusiastic about expanding NATO to the East.³⁸

To conclude this subpart, the *politique de grandeur* is a policy that prioritizes French independence in its foreign and defense policy and is independent of the US and the UK for its protection. Free from the US’ constraints, France has considerable freedom in determining its foreign policy goals and strategies.

³⁶ Ryszard Zięba. “France–Poland Security Relations,” *French Politics* 20, no. 1, (2021): 71–94, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41253-021-00161-x>.

³⁷ Marie Robin. “La Perception de La France Par Les Pays Baltes : Quels Obstacles Pour Parvenir à Un Rapprochement Sécuritaire ? [Perception of France by the Baltic States: What Obstacles to Achieving Security Rapprochement],” *Le Rubicon*, July 11, 2023, <https://lerubicon.org/la-perception-de-la-france-par-les-pays-baltes-quels-obstacles-pour-parvenir-a-un-rapprochement-securitaire/>.

³⁸ Zięba, “France–Poland Security Relations”

The French nuclear program, the withdrawal of France from NATO's unified command, and its opposition to the Iraq War could be traced to the decade-long presidency of General de Gaulle in the 1960s. However, as the previous paragraph has demonstrated, France's quest for a more independent Europe is not universally shared, especially in Eastern Europe. The next subpart would discuss French interests in the Indo-Pacific region to determine the basis of French foreign policy in the Indo-Pacific.

B. France's Interests in the Indo-Pacific

In much literature on world history, France is almost always considered a solely European power, and for good reason. The significant historical events that shaped France happened in Europe: the French Revolution, the Napoleonic wars, Franco-German War, World War I, and World War II to the Cold War. All of the things that are associated with France – the Eiffel Tower, the Louvre, the Paris Notre-Dame Cathedral, Arc de Triomphe, Champs-Élysée, and many others – are located in Metropolitan France (or, in casual French, *l'hexagone*). Indeed, when one thinks about France, one would normally associate their thoughts with Metropolitan France.

Such characterization, however, overlooks that France's territory is not only comprised of the territory in the European continent but also overseas France (*outré-mer*), a collection of far-flung French territories spread across the globe. Thanks to

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these far-flung territories, France is the only member of the European Union to have territories in the Indo-Pacific.

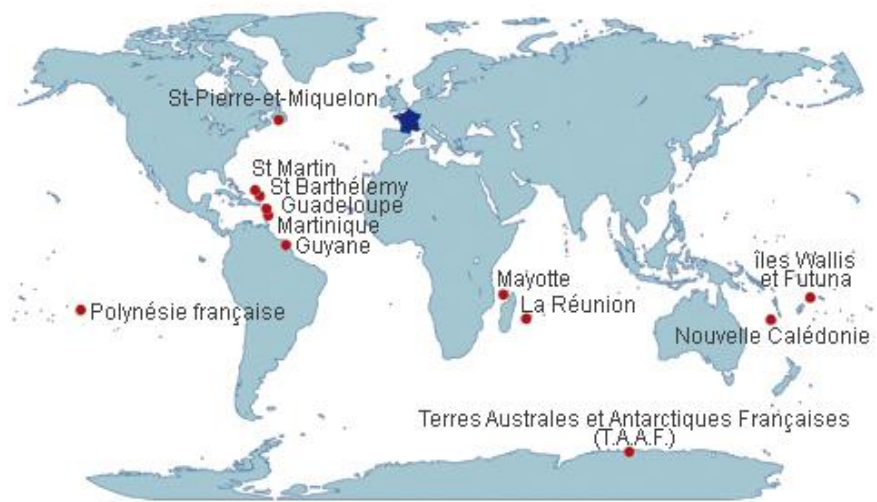


Figure 1: Map of Metropolitan France and Overseas France.

Source: Réunionnais du Monde

Therefore, France's overriding interest in the Indo-Pacific is the maintenance of its sovereignty and territorial integrity over its territories in the Indo-Pacific (Mayotte, Reunion, New Caledonia, Wallis and Futuna, and Clipperton Island). Therefore, France has a direct high political interest in maintaining the survival of its nation in the Indo-Pacific. No wonder that, in the French Indo-Pacific Strategy and the French Defense Strategy in the Indo-Pacific, defending French sovereignty and territorial integrity ranks first in France's objectives in being involved in the

region.³⁹ Thanks to international maritime law under the UN Convention on the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS), the small archipelagos that made up the French Indo-Pacific territories also attribute France to the world's largest economic zone and 93% of the French Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) is located in the Indo-Pacific region, thanks to the archipelagic waters of France's Indo-Pacific territories.⁴⁰ In this regard, France has more legitimacy to be more militarily and politically involved in the Indo-Pacific than any other member of the EU.

In recent years, the French government has exploited the status as the only EU member to have territories in the Indo-Pacific as a basis for a new construction of French foreign policy. From now, France would have an identity as a European power *and* an Indo-Pacific power. In a speech in Montevideo on France's maritime policy on December 3, 2019, French President Emmanuel Macron declared that "this maritime union gives France the status of a global partner, a European power, and also

³⁹ Ministère des Armées [Ministry of the Armed Forces]. "La Stratégie de Défense Française En Indopacifique [French Defense Strategy in the Indo-Pacific]" Paris: Ministère des Armées (2019), <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/dgris/enjeux-regionaux/strategie-francaise-indopacifique>.; Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères, "La Stratégie de La France Dans l'Indo-Pacifique"

⁴⁰ Bruno Sat. "L'Indo-Pacifique Rapproche Inéluctablement France et Australie Grâce Notamment à l'Outre-Mer [Indo-Pacific Inevitably Brings France and Australia Together Thanks to the French Overseas Territories]," *Outre-mer la 1ère*, February 22, 2019,

<https://la1ere.francetvinfo.fr/indo-pacifique-rapproche-ineluctablement-france-australie-grace-notamment-outre-mer-682995.html>.

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an Indo-Pacific power...”⁴¹ One could argue that such a reorientation could be made to offset France’s relative decline of influence in Europe. A reorientation to the Indo-Pacific region offer France an opportunity to reaffirm its role as a European major power⁴² as France would have more disposition to lead European political, economic, or military forays into the Indo-Pacific region.

The second reason for French’s forays into the Indo-Pacific region would be economic. The Indo-Pacific region is increasingly becoming the center of the world supply chain with newly-emerging economies such as China, Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, Indonesia, and others. Due to the rising purchasing power of Indo-Pacific residents, many European, including French companies, have an interest in investing in the region. French trade with member states of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) totaled 264 billion euros, representing a

⁴¹ Emmanuel Macron. “Déclaration de M. Emmanuel Macron, Président de La République, Sur La Politique de La Mer, à Montpellier Le 3 Décembre 2019 [Declaration by Emmanuel Macron, President of the Republic, on Maritime Policy in Montpellier on 3 December 2019],” Vie-publique.fr, 2023, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/272249-emmanuel-macron-03122019-politique-de-la-mer>. The exact quotation is: «*Ce trait d’union maritime fait de la France un partenaire mondial, puissance européenne autant que puissance indopacifique...*»

⁴² Paco Milhiet. *Géopolitique de l’Indo-Pacifique: Enjeux Internationaux, Perspectives Français [Geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific: International Challenges, French Perspectives]*, Paris: Le Cavalier Bleu, (2022): 81.

quarter of all France's overseas trade.⁴³ Additionally, French Foreign Direct Investment in the Indo-Pacific region totaled 108 billion euros as of early 2023⁴⁴, and French investment in China makes up a majority of Chinese investment in the region.⁴⁵

However, the true extent of the interlinkages between France and the Indo-Pacific lay beyond those numbers. Those numbers only include trade conducted directly between France and China, and it does not consider when a component is shipped from the Indo-Pacific to a third country to be assembled before being exported to Europe and France. These interlinkages would make the degree of interdependence between France and Asia higher than the numbers suggest. One must also remember that France is

⁴³ Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères [Ministry of European and Foreign Affairs]. "Coopérations Dans Le Domaine Économique [Cooperation in the Economic Domain]," Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères, accessed July 4, 2023, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/dossiers-pays/strategies-regionales/indopacifique/la-france-en-action-dans-l-indopacifique/article/cooperations-dans-le-domaine-economique#:~:text=Les%20C3%A9changes%20commerciaux%20entre%20la>.

⁴⁴ Cedric Perrin et al. "La Stratégie Française Pour l'Indopacifique : Des Ambitions à La Réalité [the French Strategy for the Indo-Pacific: From Ambitions to Reality]," Sénat, April 7, 2023, https://www.senat.fr/rap/r22-285/r22-285_mono.html.

⁴⁵ Ministère de l'Économie, des Finances et de la Souveraineté industrielle et numérique de la France [Ministry of Finance, Industry, and Industrial and Digital Sovereignty of France]. "Échanges Bilatéraux Entre La France et La Chine [Bilateral Exchanges between France and China]," Ministère de l'Économie, des Finances et de la Souveraineté industrielle et numérique de la France, March 22, 2023, <https://www.tresor.economie.gouv.fr/Pays/CN/echanges-bilateraux-entre-la-france-et-la-chine#:~:text=D>.

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part of the Schengen Area, where goods, people, and money can move freely between its members without a customs check or even a visible border. In this regard, a product can be exported from, say, Vietnam to Poland before being re-exported to France. Consequently, given the great interlinkages of the global supply chain, Europe's interest in the Indo-Pacific region is way higher than the numbers suggest.

One material, in particular, is essential for France's – and Europe's – economic well-being: semiconductors. More than 60% of the world's semiconductors are manufactured by the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) in Taiwan.⁴⁶ Additionally, nearly all of the world's most advanced chips are made by TSMC.⁴⁷ However, China claimed Taiwan as part of its sovereign territory and will not hesitate to use force if it ever declares its independence. If China ever invades Taiwan, the world's electronic supply chain will grind to a halt, given the centrality of semiconductors in electronic devices. The shortage of semiconductors during the COVID-19 pandemic has forced

⁴⁶ Etienne Meyer-Vacherand. "TSMC, Ces Puces Qui Font Tourner Le Monde [TSMC, the Chips That Makes the World Turn]," *Le Temps*, June 11, 2023, <https://www.letemps.ch/economie/tsmc-ces-puces-qui-font-tourner-le-monde>.

⁴⁷ Kevin Coldiron. "The World's Most Important Product and the Only Two Companies That Can Make It," *Forbes*, December 15, 2022, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kevincoldiron/2022/12/15/the-worlds-most-important-product-and-the-only-two-companies-that-can-make-it/?sh=48d1b5255824>.

many France companies, such as Renault, to review their production line.⁴⁸

To mitigate this issue, the French government has tried to wean itself off its dependence on Asian-made semiconductors. In June 2023, the French Government officially opened a semiconductor mega-factory in Grenoble to double French semiconductor production by 2028.⁴⁹ However, it is far from certain that France's efforts to increase its semiconductor independence would pay off. For one, assuming that the project is successful, it would take at least a few years for France to wean itself off its dependence on TSMC. For another, the research and development of semiconductors is subject to "Moore's Law" which stipulates that the capacity of semiconductors would double every two years.⁵⁰ It would take a herculean financial effort on the part of France to sustain and finance research to

⁴⁸ Forbes France. "Crise Des Semi-Conducteurs : Pénurie et Recherche de Souveraineté Technologique [Semiconductor Crisis: Shortage and Research for Technological Sovereignty]," Forbes France, October 16, 2022, <https://www.forbes.fr/technologie/crise-des-semi-conducteurs-penurie-et-recherche-de-souverainete-technologique/>.

⁴⁹ Ministre de l'Économie, des Finances et de la Souveraineté industrielle et numérique de la France [Ministry of Finance, Industry, and Industrial and Digital Sovereignty of France]. "La Méga-Usine de Semi-Conducteurs a Officiellement Commencé Sa Production [Semi-Conductor Mega-Factory Has Officially Begun Its Production]," Ministre de l'Économie, des Finances et de la Souveraineté industrielle et numérique de la France, June 5, 2023, <https://www.entreprises.gouv.fr/fr/actualites/france-2030/la-mega-usine-de-semi-conducteurs-officiellement-commence-production>.

⁵⁰ Christopher Miller. *Chip War: The Fight for the World's Most Critical Technology*, New York: Simon & Schuster, (2022): xix.

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engineer ever-more powerful chips every several years to provide an alternative to TSMC for French companies. Consequently, for the medium-term, France would still depend on the TSMC for semiconductors and, as an extension, peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait. France's position on Taiwan would be discussed in greater detail in the upcoming subpart.

To conclude this subpart, France's vital interests in the Indo-Pacific are defending its sovereignty and ensuring economic stability. We recognize that there are other interests, such as protecting and promoting human rights and protecting the environment. However, we consider these interests to be trivial as they do not pose a direct threat to France's security and stability.

C. French Indo-Pacific Endeavors**D. The French Indo-Pacific Strategy**

In 2018, the French Foreign Ministry officially launched its Indo-Pacific strategy, a set of guidelines that would serve as the basis for French economic, political, and social engagements in the Indo-Pacific region (henceforth referred to as the Indo-Pacific Strategy). It is the first Indo-Pacific strategy published by a European country. This was followed by the publication of the French Defense Strategy in the Indo-Pacific region by the Ministry of the Armed Forces in the following year (henceforth referred to as the Indo-Pacific Defense Strategy).

According to the Indo-Pacific strategy, France's goals in the region rest on four pillars: defense and security; economy, connectivity, research, and innovation; multilateralism and the rule of law; and climate change, biodiversity, and sustainable maritime management.⁵¹ As already mentioned, the first of these pillars deals directly with upholding French sovereignty over the French Indo-Pacific territories. The second one, economy, refers to promoting economic cooperation and reducing economic dependency on any Indo-Pacific country. The Third one, multilateralism and the rule of law, refers to the French way of doing business in the region: multilateralism and upholding international law in the region, particularly UNCLOS. The last one focuses on the efforts to help energy transition and stem the rate of climate change, threatening the survival of countries and territories in Oceania, including France.

It is also enlightening to see the French conception of the Indo-Pacific region. The US conception of the Indo-Pacific region does not include the western part of the Indian Ocean. In this regard, the US is more focused on including India, the country, into the broader geopolitical game in the Asia-Pacific.⁵² However, the French conception of the Indo-Pacific region is way more

⁵¹ Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères. "La Stratégie de La France Dans l'Indo-Pacifique"

⁵² The White House. "Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States," Washington DC: The White House, (2022): 1,

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/U.S.-Indo-Pacific-Strategy.pdf>.

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extensive than the US as it also considers the countries in East Africa as part of the Indo-Pacific region. In this regard, the French version of the Indo-Pacific region is concerned about including the Indian Ocean. At the same time, the US conception is more concerned about bringing India into the geopolitical game in South and Southeast Asia, as well as Oceania. Such a wide geographical conception of the Indo-Pacific region would also include the French territories of Mayotte and Réunion in the western part of the Indian Ocean.



Figure 2: Side-by-side comparison of the French Conception of the Indo-Pacific (left) Next to the US Conception of the

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Indo-Pacific (right) on the cover page of both countries' Indo-Pacific Strategy. Source: Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères (left) and The White House (right)

The Indo-Pacific Strategy also lays out the role that France would like to play in the region. President Macron explicitly stated that France would be a 'stabilizing power' (*puissance stabilisatrice*). In his own words: "...France wants to be a stabilising power, that brings the values of freedom and rule of law."⁵³ In this regard, France would like to offer itself as a 'third way' for neutral Indo-Pacific countries in East, South, and Southeast Asia. However, French officials also use the term *puissance d'équilibre*⁵⁴ in speeches and public declarations to characterize its role in the Indo-Pacific.⁵⁵ Additionally, in the

⁵³ Emmanuel Macron, quoted in Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères, "La Stratégie de La France Dans l'Indo-Pacifique," 3. The exact quotation is: «*la France veut également être une puissance stabilisatrice, qui porte les valeurs de liberté et de respect du droit*»

⁵⁴ It is quite difficult to translate that term into English that accurately reflects its meaning in French. Its literal translation would be 'balancing power,' which is more similar to the realist conception of a balancer in the balance of power. See Antoine Bondaz, "Reconceptualiser La Politique Étrangère et de Sécurité Française En Indo-Pacifique [Reconceptualizing the French Foreign and Security Policy in the Indo-Pacific]," La Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique, 2023,

<https://www.frstrategie.org/publications/notes/reconceptualiser-politique-etrange-securite-francaise-indo-pacifique-2023>.

⁵⁵ See, for example, Elysée. "Discours Du Président de La République à La Conférence Des Ambassadeurs [Speech by the President of the Republic at the Conference of Ambassadors]," Élysée, August 27, 2019,

<https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2019/08/27/discours-du-president-de-la-republique-a-la-conference-des-ambassadeurs-1>.

competition between the US and China, France would like to present itself as an alternate choice for neutral Southeast Asian countries to avoid overtly choosing between the US and China. For them, France presents itself as a good choice as it is a NATO member (hence its weapons would more or less be interoperable with those of another NATO member) and politically safe as it does not always follow the United States come what may. This could also benefit France economically, given that its defense industries would receive more orders from Indo-Pacific countries.

To present itself as a ‘third choice’ and a “stabilizing power” in the Indo-Pacific region for neutral Southeast Asian countries, the Indo-Pacific Strategy overtly portrays the region as the battleground for the great power competition between the US and China.

The Indo-Pacific today is the theatre of profound strategic evolutions. The increasing power and territorial revendications of China, expressed in more asserted ways, the intensification of the Sino-American competition, the tensions in the Sino-Indian border, in the Taiwan Strait, and the Korean Peninsula have modified the regional balance

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*and rendered strategic equations more complex.*⁵⁶

Given such characterization, the Indo-Pacific strategy lays out France's preferred way to engage with countries in the region in the middle of the great power competition. In this case, France is not looking to become the United States' 'deputy sheriff,' but as an independent Western entity following its own interests.

Consequently, it could be argued that the French Indo-Pacific Strategy is a masterpiece of French hedge between the US and China to present itself more favorable to neutral Indo-Pacific countries for its own benefit and to defend its insular territories in the Indo-Pacific region. It is designed to be complementary to the US' Indo-Pacific strategy as it shares the same objectives that the US wants to uphold in the Indo-Pacific region:⁵⁷ the rule of law, especially maritime law, and the upholding of UNCLOS, and regional stability, particularly in the South and East China Seas as well as the Taiwan Strait. Therefore, France is not alienating or extricating itself from the US in the region. However, contrary to

⁵⁶ Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères. "La Stratégie de La France Dans l'Indo-Pacifique," 3. The exact quotation is «*L'Indopacifique est aujourd'hui le théâtre de profondes évolutions stratégiques. La montée en puissance et les revendications territoriales de la Chine, exprimées de façon chaque fois plus appuyée, l'intensification de la compétition sino-américaine, les tensions à la frontière sino-indienne, dans le détroit de Taïwan et dans la péninsule coréenne, modifient les équilibres régionaux et rendent l'équation stratégique plus complexe.*»

⁵⁷ Milhiet, *Géopolitique de l'Indo-Pacifique*, 81

the US Indo-Pacific region, France does not provocatively single out China as the ‘enemy’ in the region in the same way as in the US’ Indo-Pacific Strategy,⁵⁸ as France underlines engagement and multilateralism with the region.

France, therefore, has its own strategy to have an independent ‘map’ to navigate the turbulent Indo-Pacific region. It does not want to follow the US’ lead blindly come what may. To be more explicit, it does not want to follow the US into a hypothetical war with China if French interests are not at stake. If French goes to war against China to blindly follow the US’ lead when its own interests are not at stake, it would undermine its interests in the region. Therefore, to avoid this, France needs its own strategy that gives itself a “path” to protecting and achieving its interests in the region in the middle of the great power competition.

In conclusion, the French Indo-Pacific lays out what France *intends* to do and *how* it intends to do them. Based on characterizing the Indo-Pacific region as the center of the US-China competition, France would like to present itself as a “third way” for neutral South, East, and Southeast Asian countries. The next subpart would analyze what France *has done* and argue that it endeavors to avoid being entrapped in an alliance with the United States.

⁵⁸ For example, see The White House, “Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States,” 5

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E. Reality Check

In conducting its foreign affairs with countries in the Indo-Pacific region, France has repeatedly ensured that the endeavors are based upon careful considerations of its national interests and not blindly following the US lead. Consequently, it has tried to build an image of independence, neutrality, and as a ‘third way’ between the United States and China by, among other things, cultivating its own defense partnerships independent of the US and NATO, notably with India and Indonesia, and is willing to disregard the US’ leads when following them is not in French national interests. Above all, its endeavors are consistent with its Indo-Pacific strategy.

In the former, French attempts to cultivate its independent partnerships with countries in the region, most notably with India and Indonesia, mostly focused on defense matters. This is helped by, among other things, the relatively advanced French armament industry, especially in aerospace and sea, and the image of France as a neutral party in the region (a NATO member while not actually a US blind follower) also helps. In 2015, India announced that it would be acquiring 36 French Rafale fighter jets.⁵⁹ Additionally, the Indian Prime Minister was invited as a guest of honor to attend

⁵⁹ Le Journal du Dimanche. “L’Inde Commande 36 Rafale à La France [India Ordered 36 Rafale to France],” Le Journal du Dimanche, April 10, 2015, <https://www.lejdd.fr/International/L-Inde-commande-36-Rafale-a-la-France-727286>.

the Bastille Day parade, where it was rumored that India would purchase a further 26 Rafale and 6 Scorpene submarines.⁶⁰ This will have an immediate economic benefit for France as its factories will generate jobs and economic growth for the French economy by fulfilling the armament orders.

This kind of defense cooperation between France and India would help concretize the relationship between India and France. This is especially important for France, given India's status as an emerging major power and a major Indo-Pacific power in its own right. Furthermore, France has another reason to form a strong partnership with India: its major role in the Indian Ocean, where two French territories are located. Consequently, it would be in the interest of France to maintain a strong partnership with India to independently safeguard its national interests in maintaining its sovereignty. If, for example, France chose to approach India through the United States, NATO, or the United Kingdom, then France's room for maneuver would be limited as France would have to coordinate its actions with the third party. The other party may not consider France's interests with India (such as reducing the rate of climate change to prevent the sinking of its insular island territories) as a great concern. For India, the relationship with

⁶⁰ Pascal Samama. "Rafale, Sous-Marins: Un Méga Contrat Avec l'Inde Pointe à l'Horizon Du 14 Juillet [Rafale, Submarines: A Mega-Contract with India on the Horizon for 14 July]," BFM BUSINESS, July 6, 2023, https://www.bfmtv.com/economie/entreprises/defense/rafale-sous-marins-un-mega-contrat-avec-l-inde-pointe-a-l-horizon-du-14-juillet_AN-202307060520.html.

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France is neither transactional, as with the case with the United States, nor impeded by colonial memories, as with the case with the United Kingdom.⁶¹

In addition to India, France has also cultivated good relations with the other major power in the Indo-Pacific region: Indonesia. Indonesia's position in the region is extremely central: it is located between the Indian and Pacific Oceans and at the entrance to the South China Sea. In addition, it is one of the world's emerging economies with 270 million people, most of whom are working age. In addition, Indonesia is also considered one of the 'informal leaders' of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Consequently, to gain Indonesia's goodwill, France has agreed to sell 42 Rafale to Indonesia⁶² and two Scorpene submarines.⁶³ For

⁶¹ Manoj Babu Buraga. "La France, La Sécurité Environnementale et l'Océan Indien : Perspectives Pour La Coopération Franco-Indienne Dans Le Domaine Maritime [France, Environmental Security, and the Indian Ocean: Perspectives for Franco-Indian Cooperation in the Maritime Domain]," Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique, November 24, 2022, <https://www.frstrategie.org/publications/notes/france-securite-environnementale-ocean-indien-perspectives-pour-cooperation-franco-indienne-dans-domaine-maritime-2022>.

⁶² France 24. "L'Indonésie Signe Avec La France Pour Six Premiers Rafale [Indonesia Signs a Deal with France for First Six Rafales]," France 24, February 10, 2022, <https://www.france24.com/fr/asie-pacifique/20220210-l-indon%C3%A9sie-signe-avec-la-france-pour-six-premiers-rafale>.

⁶³ Michel Cabirol. "L'Indonésie Souhaite Aussi Acheter Deux Sous-Marins Scorpène à La France [Indonesia Also Wants to Buy Two French Scorpene Submarines]," La Tribune, 2022, <https://www.latribune.fr/entreprises-finance/industrie/aeronautique-defense/l-in>

Indonesia, France is a politically safe choice given Indonesia's policy of staying neutral between the United States and China in the upcoming great power competition.

As with India, France's efforts to woo Indonesia are based on the French need for an independent presence and influence in the Indo-Pacific region. The need to intensify its relations with ASEAN on maritime security and defense is France's top priority in Southeast Asia, according to the French Indo-Pacific strategy.⁶⁴ Additionally, given its territorial size and economic influence, Indonesia is considered one of the 'informal leaders' of ASEAN.⁶⁵ Therefore, France needs Indonesia to ensure the fulfillment of its interests with ASEAN, and it tries to woo Indonesia through one of its most renowned industries: defense. An ASEAN approach through the US or NATO would not work. Given its overwhelming focus in Europe, the latter is not even considered a player in the ASEAN region. The former is seen as a party to the great power competition, and France could be seen as America's agent if France approached ASEAN with the help of the US. Therefore, France would have to approach ASEAN independently, and Indonesia could be France's gateway to participating in the organization.

[donesie-souhaite-aussi-acheter-deux-sous-marins-scorpene-a-la-france-903795.html](https://www.diesse.com/fr/actualites/donesie-souhaite-aussi-acheter-deux-sous-marins-scorpene-a-la-france-903795.html).

⁶⁴ Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères. "La Stratégie de La France Dans l'Indo-Pacifique," 43.

⁶⁵ Kishore Mahbubani and Jeffrey Sng. *The ASEAN Miracle: A Catalyst for Peace*, Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, (2017): 165.

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However, France could not be completely independent from the United States in upholding its interests in the Indo-Pacific. The United States is still, after all, France's formal military ally that Indo-Pacific countries could not replace for the time being. Therefore, in addition to conducting friendly outreach to the major emerging nations of the Indo-Pacific, France has also conducted joint military exercises with its US ally in the Indo-Pacific, either through Indonesia-organized 'Super Garuda Shield' ⁶⁶ or the US-organized RIMPAC. ⁶⁷

Of course, French participation has apparent benefits from the military point of view, namely interoperability between French navy vessels and the US Pacific Fleet. However, it also serves the political purpose of keeping the US at arm's length and assuring the country of France's commitment to the Franco-American alliance. It may not help France much in avoiding US entrapment, but it helps France in avoiding US abandonment, especially if France needs America's support when its interests in the Indo-Pacific are being threatened. In short, France is trying to have it both ways:

⁶⁶ Gusty Da Costa. "Indonesia Hosts Super Garuda Shield 2023 to Promote Regional Stability," Indo-Pacific Defense Forum, September 12, 2023, <https://ipdefenseforum.com/2023/09/indonesia-hosts-super-garuda-shield-2023-to-promote-regional-stability/>.

⁶⁷ Xavier Vavasseur. "French Navy FREMM Set to Take Part in RIMPAC, Shoot Missile for the First Time," Naval News, May 31, 2024, <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2024/05/french-navy-freem-set-to-take-part-in-rimpac-shoot-missile-for-the-first-time/>.

being able to operate independently in the Indo-Pacific while having the United States to back it up as a last resort.

While the outreaches to India and Indonesia may not put France in a position that contradicts US policies in the region, as arming US partners to be able to defend itself against a potential Chinese attack is not against US interests, France has also conducted outreaches and released statements that may run into the opposition of the United States. One such outreach is Emmanuel Macron's visit to China in April 2023 and his interview with *Politico Europe* and *Les Echos* about his aspirations and views regarding Taiwan.

In visiting China, Macron brought an entourage of French business leaders, giving an impression that France did not entirely subscribe to the US' attempt to decouple or 'derisk' its economy from China. In a joint statement with the Chinese President, Xi Jinping, the two leaders stated that the two countries will continue to maintain their cooperation in the aerospace industry.⁶⁸ This cooperation may run counter to the US interests as China has a blur separation between the civil and military domains, and French technology could find itself being applied to Chinese military

⁶⁸ Elysée. "Déclaration Conjointe Entre La République Française et La République Populaire de Chine [Joint Statement between the French Republic and the People's Republic of China]," [elysee.fr](https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2023/04/07/declaration-conjointe-entre-la-republique-francaise-et-la-republique-populaire-de-chine#moduleAnchor-210672), April 7, 2023, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2023/04/07/declaration-conjointe-entre-la-republique-francaise-et-la-republique-populaire-de-chine#moduleAnchor-210672>.

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armaments and be used against the US military.⁶⁹ However, given that China is one of Airbus's largest markets, France put its economic interests first instead of following the US's wishes. Additionally, given that the likelihood of a war between China and the United States is infinitely greater than between China and France, France has fewer worries about its technology being used against it in a war.

However, Macron's interview with *Politico* and *Les Echos* solicited the most explosive reaction. While aboard the Cotam Unité (France's Air Force One) to return to Paris, President Macron gave an interview to the two media outlets regarding his views on a potential US-China conflict over Taiwan. His answer gives the most substantial possible proof of his intention for France and Europe to look at the conflict and decide whether to intervene based on a rational calculation of their interests. For Macron, the most significant risk for Europe and France is when they find themselves in "a conflict that is not ours" and that "it is us that prevents the establishment of strategic autonomy."⁷⁰ His views

⁶⁹ For more explanation on the civil-military fusion in China see Audrey Fritz. "China's Evolving Conception of Civil-Military Collaboration," Center for Strategic and International Studies, August 2, 2019, <https://www.csis.org/blogs/trustee-china-hand/chinas-evolving-conception-civil-military-collaboration>.

⁷⁰ Jamil Anderlini and Clea Caulcutt. "Macron Incite Les Européens à Ne Pas Se Penser En 'Suiveurs' Des Etats-Unis [Macron Pushes Europeans Not to Think as the United States' Followers]," *POLITICO*, April 9, 2023, <https://www.politico.eu/article/emmanuel-macron-incite-europeens-etats-unis-c-hine/>. The exact quotation is: «Pour le président, "le grand risque" pour

may be significantly influenced by the Russian invasion of Ukraine as “Europe has not managed the crisis in Ukraine, how could we be credible on Taiwan: ‘Attention, if you something bad, we will be there?’ If you really want to increase the tension, this is the best way to do it.”⁷¹ If his propositions are already bad, the disclaimer put forth by *Politico* that “certain parts of the interview, where the President talked in a more direct way on Taiwan and Europe’s strategic autonomy, has been cut by the Elysée [the French Presidential Palace]”⁷² garner suspicions that his real views on Taiwan are likely to be even worse, at least from the US point of view. In any case, Macron’s propositions are clear: the United States should not take French and European support for its war over Taiwan for granted, and French and European involvement in a hypothetical war over Taiwan would be based upon careful consideration of their interests.

One may find Macron’s view on Taiwan confusing. For one, given that France is one of US’ NATO allies and its oldest partner, shouldn’t France and the US have a synergic view on Taiwan?

l’Europe serait “de se retrouver entraînée dans des crises qui ne sont pas les nôtres, ce qui nous empêcherait de construire notre autonomie stratégique,” a-t-il déclaré à bord du vol présidentiel entre Pékin et Canton, dans le sud de la Chine.»

⁷¹ Anderlini and Caulcutt, “Macron Incite Les Européens à Ne Pas Se Penser En ‘Suiveurs’ Des Etats-Unis”

⁷² Anderlini and Caulcutt, “Macron Incite Les Européens à Ne Pas Se Penser En ‘Suiveurs’ Des Etats-Unis.” The exact quotations are: «...certaines parties de l’entretien, au cours desquelles le président a parlé de manière encore plus directe de Taïwan et de l’autonomie stratégique de l’Europe, ont été coupées par l’Elysée.»

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Shouldn't France follow the US' lead on Taiwan? Understandably, Macron's comments have solicited criticisms from the US and Eastern Europe.⁷³ However, if one considers the *politique de grandeur* and the history of French foreign relations, then Macron's comments on Taiwan should come as no surprise. Macron's statements and comments on Taiwan are just a continuation of French foreign policy that dates back to the years of Charles de Gaulle. If French interests are not at stake, then France should not blindly follow the United States's foreign policy forays. Militarily allying itself during a hypothetical US-China war over Taiwan can lead to a loss of the Chinese market for French companies, as China will almost certainly put heavy restrictions on US companies and the companies of US allies. Additionally, if France joined the US in sanctioning Taiwan, then French companies would lose one of its biggest markets and sources of revenue.

Worse, French intervention in a US-China war over Taiwan could endanger its own territories in the Pacific Ocean. If France and the US use the French territories of New Caledonia or Wallies and Futuna to conduct military operations against China, those territories would be legitimate targets for a Chinese military attack that could cause the loss of life of French citizens. This will not be

⁷³ Luke McGee. "Analysis: 'Tone Deaf' Macron Faces Backlash over Taiwan Comments," CNN, April 13, 2023, <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/04/13/europe/macron-taiwan-comments-transatlantic-relationship-intl-cmd/index.html>.

in accordance with one of the pillars of the French Indo-Pacific strategy: maintaining the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and security of French territories in the region. Therefore, perhaps France thinks that absent an attack on French interests, going to war against China or participating non-militarily against China in the event of a Taiwan invasion will be detrimental to French interests in the region.

However, it does not mean France would need to accommodate Chinese influence in the region significantly. The French government, especially President Macron, has cautioned the region against the increasing Chinese influence, albeit subtly and indirectly. During a visit to Vanuatu in July 2023, President Macron warned that “in the Indo-Pacific, especially in Oceania, there are new imperialists that appear, and the logic of power that will threaten the sovereignty of many states, the smallest ones and, often times, the most fragile ones [emphasis added].”⁷⁴ Given that China is a relative newcomer in the region, it is undeniable that Macron was referring to it when warning Oceanic states of the dangers of Chinese presence in the region. This proves that, even though France would like to maintain a positive relationship with China, France is also following its own interests of combating Chinese influence in the region to uphold its own interests.

⁷⁴ Elysée. “Déplacement Au Vanuatu [Trip to Vanuatu],” Elysée, July 27, 2023, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2023/07/27/deplacement-au-vanuatu>.

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Still, it would not be prudent to assume that France could be a viable ‘third pole’ for countries in the Indo-Pacific. If anything, one could argue that the strength of the *politique de grandeur* is limited. For example, France and its EU partners opposed the US withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal in May 2018. France, Germany, and the United Kingdom then endorsed the establishment of the Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (Instex), ostensibly to circumvent US sanctions on Iran.⁷⁵ However, in the end, the alternative payment facilitation is only used for facilitating payment of food and medicine. French companies were still forced to leave Iran due to the fear of secondary US sanctions, and, in this regard, it could be argued that Paris has failed to protect the interests of French companies.⁷⁶

France’s ambitions in the Indo-Pacific could be proven as a big ambition with little capability actually to realize it. Bondaz criticized the usage of the term *puissance d’équilibre* in official speeches and declarations as it could be perceived as France being a ‘third balancing power’ in the Indo-Pacific, a role that France is ill-equipped to play.⁷⁷ With only a few thousand soldiers and a few

⁷⁵ Agathe Demarais. *Backfire: How Sanctions Reshape the World against U.S. Interests*, New York: Columbia University Press, (2022): 176.

⁷⁶ Hadi Dolatabadi. “Franco-Iranian Economic Relations: A Study of the Ebb and Flow of Multi-Level Factors,” *French Politics* 20, no. 1, (2021), 68, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41253-021-00156-8>.

⁷⁷ Bondaz, “Reconceptualiser La Politique Étrangère et de Sécurité Française En Indo-Pacifique [Reconceptualizing the French Foreign and Security Policy in the Indo-Pacific],” 3

aircraft and submarines, it would be near-impossible for French forces to pose as a credible fighting force in the region, especially compared to regional powers such as the United States, China, and Japan. Laksmana also warned of an “illusion of strategic centrality” when analyzing French outreach in the Indo-Pacific, especially concerning its arms sales, as French arms sales to India and Indonesia could be perceived as an upsurge of French influence in the region.⁷⁸

IV. Conclusion

France’s decision to form, announce, and implement its autonomous Indo-Pacific grand strategy is a substantial step by its government to avoid the risk of entrapment within alliance politics while retaining its alliance with the United States. Due to several concerns, France chooses the “politically safe” option regarding its regional interest in the Indo-Pacific. First are its historical footprints and its vision to protect the territorial integrity of its Indo-Pacific territories and dependencies, especially from any risk of confrontation between China and the United States. Its autonomous grand strategy enables France to independently define its territorial integrity and deploy forces to protect its people in Indo-Pacific territories with minimal concerns from the region’s great powers.

⁷⁸ Evan Laksmana. Twitter Post. August 29, 2023, 3:29 PM.
<https://twitter.com/EvanLaksmana/status/1696439849539252726?s=20>

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Second is France's economic concern, especially regarding the risk of Chinese invasion of Taiwan. Blindly participating in every US narrative of the Indo-Pacific will put France into a risky position within China's perspective, as the country will be remarked as a "US alliance" and, most importantly, increasing the risk of being associated as a proponent of Taiwan's independence. Therefore, in the case of the rising risk of the invasion of Taiwan, France is using its independent strategy to lower the risk impact for its interest, especially in the technological sector. This consideration also explains why France considers regional stability to be the foremost priority of its Indo-Pacific strategy. For France, political stability in the Indo-Pacific will ensure the security of its strategic sea lanes of communication and investments, especially with its strategic partner in the region.

Third, its autonomous grand strategy also supports France's cultivation of independent partnerships, especially with the Indo-Pacific's emerging powers, such as Indonesia and India. Consequently, this benefit will make it easier for France to navigate itself within the Indo-Pacific tight geopolitical space by independently safeguarding its national interest without any requirements to coordinate with a third party. Furthermore, a broader partnership with various countries will widen France's options to avoid any adverse circumstances from instability caused by the US-China rivalry in the region while still garnering further benefits from its investments and political footprints in its partners.

However, France's Indo-Pacific strategy, positioning itself as an alternative power to the United States and China, faces several challenges. Beyond concerns about its capacity to effectively implement the strategy, there is a significant risk that diminishing its involvement in the US-China conflict could increase perceptions of France as an unreliable ally within the US alliance. This perception might lead to the US potentially abandoning France in future geopolitical crises. This is a critical issue for France, which depends on US support to protect its regional interests due to its limited power projection capabilities. To mitigate the risks of entrapment and abandonment, France is conducting joint military exercises with the US in the region. This strategy is crucial for maintaining a close relationship with its "larger ally" and ensuring reliability. Therefore, this research underscores that countries with moderate power projection capacities are still heavily influenced by their relationships with larger powers, even in managing geopolitical risks.

With the growing presence of European states in Indo-Pacific geopolitical dynamics over the past decade, this research provides a robust analysis of how these states manage their regional interests—focusing on gaining benefits, avoiding losses, and addressing potential threats and risks. We suggest that while European states, exemplified by France, remain committed to their alliance treaty with the US, they also adopt an independent and unique approach, which serves as a risk management strategy. France, with its territories in the region, has a distinct interest

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compared to other European states like Germany and the Netherlands, which have developed their Indo-Pacific strategies without any territorial possession in the region. This distinction highlights a gap in the existing research that future studies can explore.

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China factor in India-Vietnam Defense and Security Relations

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Abstract

Both India and Vietnam demonstrate ambivalence in their relations with China. Given China's revisionist policies, the strategic partnership between India and Vietnam has intensified, motivated by mutual apprehensions regarding Chinese assertiveness. The primary focus of the research paper lies in scrutinizing the defense and security aspects of the India-Vietnam relationship, with specific attention to the influence exerted by China. However, the paper highlights a disparity between the actual trajectory of bilateral relations between Vietnam and India and the anticipated outcomes, underscoring the imperative for diversification in their relationship.

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I. Introduction

India and Vietnam have a rich history of diplomatic relations. India and Vietnam were close allies of the USSR during the Cold War. Initially, it was India and Vietnam's socialist ideological inclination that made them huddle together. As Vietnam started building relations with various countries globally, the relationship between India and Vietnam began growing in strength, coupled with several high-level visits by leaders from both countries. India's Look East Policy and Vietnam's renewed interest in a relationship with Asian Superpowers like India incentivized the relationship's growth between the two countries. Vietnam is an important regional partner in India's Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The two countries work together in many regional forums, like the ASEAN, East Asia Summit, Mekong Ganga Cooperation, Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM), and the United Nations Organization.¹ Further, 2021 marked the 5th anniversary of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between India and Vietnam. Earlier in 2022, both countries celebrated 50 years of creating diplomatic ties.

¹ "India-Vietnam Relations," Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 2017, https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Bilateral_Relations_Website__Sept_17_.pdf and "India-Vietnam trade and economic relations," Embassy of India in Hanoi, 2022, <https://www.indembassyhanoi.gov.in/page/economic-and-commercial/#:~:text=INDIA%20VIETNAM%20TRADE%20AND%20ECONOMIC%20RELATIONS&text=According%20to%20Indian%20data%20during,amounted%20to%20USD%208.79%20billion.>

However, China's adversarial attitude towards India and Vietnam is one of the flashpoints for India-Vietnam bonding. India and Vietnam have acrimonious relations with China, which seems to be constantly widening and causing consternation in India and Vietnam's internal stability and political sovereignty. Therefore, China has proven to be an essential contributing factor to the growing relations between India and Vietnam. Over time, China exponentially increased its defense and security budget, followed by its military modernization, establishing it at par with other advanced countries like the U.S. and Russia. Likewise, in 2022, China's defense spending spiked to 7.1 percent year-on-year. It is an increase to outpace the GDP growth target of 5.5 percent.²

This alarming trend in China's increasing defense and security budget threatens many countries worldwide, including India and Vietnam. Given this background, India and Vietnam committed to enhancing their collaboration. For example, Vietnamese Defense Minister General Phan Van Giang visited India on June 18, 2023, and discussed with India's Defense Minister Rajnath Singh focusing on industry cooperation and maritime security considering China's dominance in the South China Sea and the Indo-Pacific region.³ In this context, the

² Yew Lun Tian. "China Plans 7.1% Defence Spending Rise This Year, Outpacing GDP Target," *Reuters*, 2022.

³ "India, Vietnam agree to amplify defence cooperation," *The Hindu Business line*, June 19, 2023,

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research article's objective is to explore India and Vietnam's defense and security relations vis-a-vis possible China's role. The article expounds on the role of defense and security in strengthening India-Vietnam relations. The research paper explains how and where India and Vietnam could cooperate for a win-win situation in the emerging and complicated international order to counter China's influence on India and Vietnam's defense and security relations.

The study delves into examining the impact of China on India-Vietnam defense and security relations. This article begins by reviewing the existing literature on India-Vietnam relations and the China factor to gain insight into the defense and security aspects of India and Vietnam relations. Later, the paper will discuss the historical evolution of India and Vietnam relations. It later emphasizes how India and Vietnam enhanced their defense and security relations with the growing threat of China's presence as their neighbor. Finally, the article discusses the possible ramifications of growing India and Vietnam's defense and security relations. Thus, the study rigorously reviewed pertinent articles and documents focusing on defense and security roles and their impact on India and Vietnam relations and how, particularly, how much influence China has on India and Vietnam's defense and security relations. Primarily, two critical limitations of the

study are: (i) no primary data or surveys were used, and (ii) it is confined to examining the impact of China at the regional level only.

The first section introduces India's and Vietnam's defense and security relations. The second section rigorously studies the existing literature on India and Vietnam's defense and security ties and the role of China in it. The third section focuses on giving the theoretical perceptions of the relations between India and Vietnam relations by using realist theory and hedging strategy. The fourth section talks about the historical evolution of India and Vietnam relations. The fifth section highlights the role of China in India and Vietnam's defense and security relations. The sixth section underscores the ongoing defense and security relations between India and Vietnam. The final section emphasizes that India and Vietnam must diversify and enhance their relations in growing more complicated emerging regional and international order.

II. Literature review

India and Vietnam have a long history of relations. These relations have been upgraded yearly regarding socio-political, cultural, economic, trade, and strategic turns it has taken. However, it must prioritize AI's importance in defense and security relations for mutual benefits. For example, bilateral political ties increased from a partnership in 2003 to strategic and comprehensive relationships in 2007 and 2016. However, there

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has been a growing security threat to the freedom of navigation and overflight in the South China Sea, including the other non-traditional security issues in the maritime area, particularly piracy and terrorism.⁴ Scholar Temjenmeren Ao observed that,

*“Defence cooperation between India and Vietnam is multi-faceted in scope and intensity and includes defence dialogues, training and exercises, collaboration in capacity building and Navy and Coast Guard ship visits. Vietnam at the same time is following a pragmatic and diversified foreign policy approach and has strengthened relations with other major countries such as Japan, South Korea and Russia.”*⁵

The revisionist approach of China has been causing concern in the South China Sea and Asia Pacific region. Therefore, Vietnam’s approach towards China has become complex and a mixture of challenge and opportunity due to Vietnam’s geographic proximity to China and overwhelming power. More

⁴ Thi Bich Tran and Yoichiro Sato. “Vietnam’s Post- Cold War Hedging Strategy: A Changing Mix of Realist and Liberal Ingredients,” *Asian Politics & Policy*, 10, no. 1 (January 1, 2018): 73–99, <https://doi.org/10.1111/aspp.12368>. Also see, Xuan Vinh Vo, “Vietnam–India Maritime Cooperation,” *Maritime Affairs*, 13, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 63–72, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09733159.2017.1315888>.

⁵ “India-Vietnam Defence Partnership Gaining Ground,” *IDSa*, June 26, 2023, <https://idsa.in/issuebrief/india-vietnam-defence-partnership-t-ao-260623>.

precisely, China is a perennial strategic challenge that cannot be avoided due to historical reasons. The relations between Vietnam and China involved cooperation and struggle and not confronting but finding a way to live with China and benefit from its resources and power.⁶

Considering this, Vietnam initiated the process of improvising its relations from a strategic angle. As part of this, the India-Vietnam Strategic Partnership Agreement 2007 should be regarded as a formalization of strategic ties between both countries. Likewise, India and Russia had enhanced strategic relations with Vietnam. After that, Vietnam signed a strategic partnership with countries like Japan and the Philippines. Further, Vietnam has more strategic alliances in the Indo-Pacific region than any other country in the Southeast Asian area. The more important reason is due to its domestic compulsion and the external environment.⁷

Further, relations between Vietnam and China have changed drastically, and they have evolved from strategic antagonism to ideology-shared partnership and later from economic cooperation to security rivalry. Moreover, the Vietnam-China worldview has been significantly widened. Due to the geographical proximity

⁶ Vo. "Vietnam–India Maritime Cooperation."

⁷ Lena Le and Khac Nam Hoang. "Forging Strategic Partnership in the Indo–Pacific Region: Vietnam's Diplomatic Direction," *Political Science*, 73, no. 3 (September 2, 2021): 270–89, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00323187.2021.1957955>.

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between the two countries, relations between Vietnam and China are determined by four factors. They include the security environment, internal factional politics, economic calculations, and rising nationalism.⁸ These factors will play a significant role in determining the relationship between Vietnam and China.

Later, China changed its foreign policy strategies. China's aggressive enhancement of security cooperation with Pakistan, active participation in Indian Ocean Affairs, and regular skirmishes in the South China Sea are reasons for India's worrisome situation. As several scholars and policymakers intended, China's growing relations with Pakistan are always a threat to India's foreign policy. Therefore, to counter China's moves and hostility, India needs to boost its relations with Southeast Asian Countries.⁹ For that purpose, India may diversify its relations with ASEAN region countries. Similarly, Vietnam will adopt the same strategy to strengthen its relations.

Therefore, for Vietnam, India is a critical partner in emerging international relations. Likewise, Vietnam is a crucial stakeholder in India's foreign policy towards the Indo-Pacific region. However, other critical pillars are responsible for increasing the

⁸ Đỗ Thanh Hải. "Vietnam and China: Ideological Bedfellows, Strange Dreamers," *Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies*, 10, no. 2 (May 26, 2021): 162–82, <https://doi.org/10.1080/24761028.2021.1932018>.

⁹ Aditi Malhotra. "Indo-Vietnam Relations: An Answer to Sino-Pak Partnership?" *Maritime Affairs: Journal of the National Maritime Foundation of India*, 8, no. 1 (2012): 71-92.

relations between India and Vietnam, for example, the rise of China, the leading role of the U.S. in both the country's strategic areas, and the evolving Indo-Pacific architecture.¹⁰

The importance of India in Vietnam's policymaking is reflected in action because, before Vietnam's first strategic partnership with Russia in 2001, Vietnamese state president Tran Duc Luong used the term 'strategic' in 1999 while describing India-Vietnam relations. Mr. Tran Duc Luong even expressed it to the then-Indian foreign minister, Jaswant Singh, in mid-November 2000.¹¹ That clearly shows how significant India-Vietnam ties have been evolving.

China's biggest strategic policy in international relations, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is regarded as a geo-economic strategy. China has pledged to invest billions of dollars in infrastructure and industrial sectors in the Eurasian and Indo-Pacific regions. It has the potential for geostrategic consequences in international relations. This colossal investment in the region under BRI policy will change China's stature and international security. It may lead to security competition between China and other major powers of the Eurasia and Indo-Pacific

¹⁰ "V.N.'s trade with India sees strong growth," Viet Nam News, 2018, <https://vietnamnews.vn/economy/464534/vns-trade-with-india-sees-strong-growth.html>.

¹¹ Xuan Vinh Vo. "India in Vietnam's Foreign Policy," *Strategic Analysis/Strategic Analysis*, 44, no. 1 (December 25, 2019): 31–44, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09700161.2020.1699997>.

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region.¹² This policy poses a potential threat to India and Vietnam's security architecture. Therefore, it can be considered another primary reason for India and Vietnam to huddle together regarding defense and security.

Scholar Harsh V Pant¹³ pointed out that India and Vietnam should be alarmed at China's aggressive stand in the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea. Therefore, India is helping Vietnam to build its capacity to repair and maintain its defense platforms. The armed forces of both countries have started cooperating with Vietnamese army personnel's information technology and English language training. Moreover, both India and Vietnam have a familiar friend called the United States of America, which is trying hard to counter China's assertiveness in this region. Hence, these three countries can cooperate to contain China's domination in the Indian Ocean region.¹⁴

That is why Vietnam's growing tensions with assertive China's historical claims concerning the South China Sea have

¹² Mingjiang Li. "The Belt and Road Initiative: Geo-economics and Indo-Pacific Security Competition," *International Affairs* 96, no. 1 (January 1, 2020): 169–87, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiz240>. Also see, Nguyễn Thị Hoà and Phạm Thảo Nguyễn. "The Reception and Implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative in Vietnam," *Strategic Analysis*, 45, no. 2 (March 4, 2021): 128–43, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09700161.2021.1893507>.

¹³ Hoà and Nguyễn. "The Reception and Implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative in Vietnam."

¹⁴ Srinath Raghavan. "The Security Dilemma and India–China Relations," *Asian Security*, 15, no. 1 (November 2, 2018): 60–72, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14799855.2019.1539818>.

made Vietnam alter its foreign policy objectives and defense policy. Therefore, Vietnam started vocalizing its animosity towards China. In the process, Vietnam is widening its options and hobnobbing with countries like the U.S. and India, allowing them some space in the South China Sea.¹⁵ Due to China's overarching position in the South China Sea, expanding infrastructural investments in India's periphery region have caused a security dilemma in the Indian Ocean Region. Therefore, India has been exploring opportunities and avenues to counter China's foreign policy in the region. Therefore, Vietnam has become one of its key allies of India in the Act East Policy.¹⁶

However, it is not the recent aspect of thickening relations between India and Vietnam, rather, it started from the 1990s. Both countries have made strategic readjustments to enhance their cooperation with various countries that can walk along with them and develop commonalities in their politico-strategic visions and policies. More importantly, just like the way India did, Vietnam diversified its foreign policy in the Indo-Pacific calculations by maintaining warm ties with Japan and the US. Due to growing uncertainties between Vietnam and China, it is apparent that India

¹⁵ Apila Sangtam. "Vietnam's Strategic Engagement in the South China Sea," *Maritime Affairs*, 17, no. 1 (January 2, 2021): 41–57, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09733159.2021.1939868>.

¹⁶ R. S. Aswani, Shambhu Sajith, and Mohammad Younus Bhat. "Realigning India's Vietnam Policy Through Cooperative Sustainable Development: A Geostrategic Counterbalancing to China in Indo-Pacific," *East Asia*, 39, no. 2 (July 13, 2021): 97–115, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12140-021-09371-0>.

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and Vietnam further emphasize their defense and security cooperation while deepening their ties with Japan and the US in emerging international relations.¹⁷

III. Theoretical underpinning

The relationship between India and Vietnam is a complex phenomenon due to China's impact. China is aimed to become one of the dominant powers in emerging international relations. Likewise, India aims to become one of the prominent players in contemporary international relations. Both are the fastest emerging countries with highly ambitious targets. However, both countries are adopting different pathways. Therefore, there is a possibility of differences between India and China, causing skirmishes and practicing a balancing act while engaging with each other. To understand the nature of defense and security relations between India and Vietnam and the role of China, the author used realism and hedging strategy. The reason for using these two theories is because of the dominance of the realist phenomenon in India-Vietnam defense and security relations. Moreover, realism is very much relevant in contemporary international relations. Further, the other factor for adopting the Hedging strategy is to study the defense and security relations of

¹⁷ Rahul Mishra. "Vietnam's Regional Security Perceptions and Priorities: Role of India," *India Quarterly* (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1177/09749284211004983>.

India and Vietnam to explore how small power countries adopt their strategies to keep themselves in a stable position.

The classical realist school of thought believes that human nature is the driving force of international relations. Whereas Structural realists like Kenneth Waltz argue that the international relations system will always be in anarchic condition. Anarchy leads to jealousy, suspicion, and insecurity. In such a scenario, the states will maximize their security¹⁸ and focus on building strategic alliances.¹⁹ Due to China's location, revisionist strategy, and aggressive move towards the Indian Ocean and South China area deeply caused concern for both India and Vietnam. Apart from that, China's political and economic support for Pakistan is another trouble in India's backyard. China's one-sided claim in the South China Sea and its involvement in neighboring countries triggered a rising temperature in the foreign policy circles of Vietnam. Therefore, India and Vietnam are trying to hobnob and diversify their relations. To further elaborate on the defense and security relations of India and Vietnam, another critical realist scholar, Mearsheimer,²⁰ in his book called "The Tragedy of Great Power Politics," observed that there would be lawlessness (anarchic) in the international system. As there is disorderliness in

¹⁸ S. Telbami. "Kenneth Waltz, Neorealism, and Foreign Policy," *Security Studies*, 11, no. 3 (March 1, 2002): 158–70, <https://doi.org/10.1080/714005344>.

¹⁹ John Baylis and Steve Smith. *Globalization of World Politics*. Oxford University Press (2001): 149

²⁰ John J. Mearsheimer. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. W. W. Norton & Company (2003).

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the system, as an individual country, it will go for self-help in the first step and later try to maximize its relative position in the international system. Thus, it will be in a safer place.²¹ It is called the offensive realism theory, as India and Vietnam are vulnerable due to neighboring China's moves. Hence, it naturally makes India and Vietnam feel insecure and forces them to strengthen their defense and security apparatus.

Another vital strategy that Vietnam has been adopting is the 'hedging strategy', while dealing with other countries. The concept of 'hedging' in international relations started being used in the recent past. The word hedging is used in the context of national security or alignment strategy adopted by one state on another. It essentially implies that states adopt a mixture of cooperative and confrontation features. However, there is a difference in balancing or bandwagoning concepts prevalent during the Cold War. During the Cold War time, it was adopted by small states to resist great powers and mighty powers. Conversely, the hedging strategy of states started becoming important in the post-Cold War period.²² However, the contemporary literature on hedging strategy debunked that it can be used only in economic strategy, rather it can be used in other states' strategies to understand the behavior of small states in international relations.

²¹ Mearsheimer. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 20.

²² John D. Ciorciari and Jürgen Haacke. "Hedging in International Relations: An Introduction," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, 19, no. 3 (September 1, 2019): 367–74, <https://doi.org/10.1093/irap/lcz017>.

The hedging strategy is being used as a third strategic choice of any state in parallel with balancing and bandwagoning.²³ Though the term hedging strategy is a commonly used element, it has been a less explored concept in international relations. However, the hedging strategy aptly applies to understanding Southeast Asia and smaller states' foreign policy choices in international relations.²⁴ Vietnam has adopted a hedging strategy in its foreign policy since the normalization of ties between Vietnam and China in 1991. It is best described as a multi-tiered and omnidirectional hedging strategy. Further, the hedging strategy of Vietnam is comprised of four elements, and they are economic pragmatism, direct engagement, hard balancing, and soft balancing.²⁵ Studying the foreign policy objectives of Vietnam in dealing is still in a quagmire due to India, China, and the US's role in Southeast Asian countries.²⁶ Moreover, Vietnam has its own needs and requirements with all three powers in international

²³ Yuzhu Wang. "Hedging Strategy: Concept, Behavior, and Implications for China-ASEAN Relations." *East Asian Affairs*, 1, no. 02 (2021): 2150012.

²⁴ Cheng-Chwee Kuik. "Getting Hedging Right: A Small-state Perspective," *China International Strategy Review*, 3, no. 2 (November 23, 2021): 300–315, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42533-021-00089-5>. Also see, David Martin Jones and Nicole Jenne, "Hedging and Grand Strategy in Southeast Asian Foreign Policy," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, 22, no. 2 (February 23, 2021): 205–35, <https://doi.org/10.1093/irap/lcab003>.

²⁵ Le Hong Hiep. "Vietnam's Hedging Strategy Against China Since Normalization," *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 35, no. 3 (January 1, 2013): 333, <https://doi.org/10.1355/cs35-3b>. Also see, Tran and Sato, "Vietnam's Post-Cold War Hedging Strategy."

²⁶ Ngo Di Lan and Truong-Minh Vu. "The Sino-US-Vietnam Triangle in a Belt and Road Era," *East Asia*, 36, no. 3 (September 1, 2019): 229–41, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12140-019-09318-6>.

relations. That is how Vietnam's foreign policy tools reflect the hedging strategy adopted by small power states. Nonetheless, the hedging strategy has much more to be explored in international relations.

IV. Evolution of India and Vietnam relations

India and Vietnam have had a long history of good relations. The Hindu kingdom of *Cham Pa* existed along the southern and central coast of present-day Vietnam from the 7th to 18th Century. This kingdom had excellent trade relations with India.²⁷ In recent history, the first phase of India and Vietnam relations predates India's *Look East Policy*. The relationship between the countries became stronger after the end of the Cold War in 1991 when both countries accepted the liberalization policy. Later, bilateral trade spiked immediately. Until 2000, it was US\$200 million. Bilateral trade between the two has been steadily increasing over the years. The statistics say that, during the Financial Year April 2020-March 2021, bilateral trade between India and Vietnam reached US\$11.12 billion. India's exports were U.S. \$4.99 billion, and the imports from Vietnam were U.S. \$6.12 billion. However, it indicated a decreasing trend of 22.47 percent in bilateral trade yearly. Probably, it is due to the COVID-19-induced disruptions. One optimistic takeout from this is that India's trade deficit with

²⁷ See Seng Tan. "Faced With the Dragon: Perils and Prospects in Singapore's Ambivalent Relationship With China," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 5, no. 3 (July 26, 2012): 245–65, <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjip/pos012>.

Vietnam reduced from U.S. \$2.22 billion during the Financial Year 2019-2020 to U.S. \$1.12 in the Financial Year 2020-21. This led to Vietnam becoming the 15th largest trading partner globally and the 4th largest within the ASEAN group countries in 202-21. India became Vietnam's 10th largest trading partner globally.²⁸ However, slowly the trade recovery took place from 2021-22 onwards.

These figures clearly show the existence of strong trade relations between the two countries since 1991. However, apart from focusing on trade and economy, both India and Vietnam slowly tilted into a more comprehensive strategic and security-related relationship. At the same time, China has been constantly obstructing India-Vietnam relations by discomforting them in various ways. The methods like strategically encircling both countries through maritime agreements with the neighboring countries of India and Vietnam. For example, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and several others. Hence, India and Vietnam have concerns about energy security and open maritime communication issues with China. Further, China has been aggressively creating inroads into the strategic regions of India and Vietnam in the Indian Ocean and Asia Pacific area. China became a significant threat to India and

²⁸ "India-Vietnam trade and economic cooperation," Embassy of India in Hanoi, Vietnam, 2021, <https://www.indembassyhanoi.gov.in/page/economic-and-commercial/>.

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Vietnam as far as navigational freedom was concerned.²⁹ Because of China's aggressive positions in the Indian Ocean and Asia Pacific region during the last few decades, India and Vietnam have installed sophisticated defense systems, including anti-missile systems, in their strategic areas. The creation of the artificial islands in the South China Sea indicated to India and Vietnam that China has sinister intentions in this region.³⁰ Moreover, China made Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Maldives, and several other countries the biggest debtors to China. It observed that Pakistan owes the U.S. \$77.3 billion of external debts to China, Sri Lanka owes the U.S. \$6.8 billion, Angola 36.3 billion, Ethiopia at U.S. \$7.9 billion, and Kenya at U.S. \$ 7.4 billion.³¹ The Chinese interventions in Maldives and Sri Lanka's political

²⁹ “Joint Declaration of India and Vietnam, May 1, 2003, Joint Declaration on the Framework of Comprehensive Cooperation between the Republic of India and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam as they enter the 21st Century,” *Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India*, May 1, 2003,

<http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateraldocuments.htm?dtl/7658/Joint+Declaration+on+the+Framework+of+Comprehensive+Cooperation+between+the+Republic+of+India+and+the+Socialist+Republic+of+Vietnam+as+they+enter+the+21st+Century>, Also see, Kunal Mukherjee, “Assessing Security Relations in the Asia Pacific: The Cases of China, India and Pakistan,” *Canadian Foreign Policy*, 24, no. 1 (June 8, 2017): 56–73, <https://doi.org/10.1080/11926422.2017.1331174>.

³⁰ Harsh V Pant. “India and Vietnam: A truly strategic partnership,” *Observer Research Foundation*, 2018, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/india-and-vietnam-a-truly-strategic-partnership/>, Also see, Mukherjee, “Assessing Security Relations in the Asia Pacific.”

³¹ Ani. “Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Maldives Stand Neck-deep in Chinese Debt: Forbes,” *Www.Business-Standard.Com*, September 12, 2022, https://www.business-standard.com/article/international/sri-lanka-pakistan-maldives-stand-neck-deep-in-chinese-debt-forbes-122091200675_1.html.

and economic affairs, besides unilateral claims on the South China Sea, helped India and Vietnam become closer to each other and paved the way for more strategic cooperation.

India and Vietnam signed a memorandum of understanding on defense cooperation to strengthen bilateral relations in 2009. Further, the relationship between the two countries has sought new avenues of cooperation and friendship. Indian ships have called on Vietnamese ports on numerous visits. Vietnamese boats participated in the *International Fleet Review* at Visakhapatnam in February 2016.³² Apart from this, there are continuous engagements by the leaders of India and Vietnam on many shared concerns. For instance, when COVID-19 struck in March 2020, the government asked India's Foreign Secretary, Harsh Shringla, to engage with select countries between March 20, 2020, and May 15, 2020. This engagement aimed to share ideas and the best practices to prevent the spreading of COVID-19. Vietnam was a recipient of this engagement.³³ This illustrates how the two countries have nurtured their cooperation by creating friendly gestures for strengthening their bilateral relations. The two countries are constantly upgrading and maintaining their defense

³² "India-Vietnam Relations," Ministry of External Affairs of India, 2017, https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Bilateral_Relations_Website___Sept_17_.pdf.

³³ "Cooperation among select countries of the Indo-Pacific in fighting COVID-19 pandemic," Ministry of External Affairs of India, May 14, 2020, <https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/32691/cooperation+among+select+countries+of+the+indopacific+in+fighting+covid19+pandemic>.

cooperation to meet future security needs and enhance India and Vietnam's connections and engagements.

V. Defense and Security Cooperation

The relationship between India and Vietnam has rapidly advanced, focusing increasingly on practical cooperation in defense and security. The signing of a Defense Protocol in 2000 marked the beginning of this collaboration, enabling India to sell military helicopters to Vietnam, supply maintenance equipment for Vietnamese aircraft, and offer training for Vietnamese military personnel. To enhance their defense and security capabilities, the two states have started sharing intelligence regularly, and their coastguards participate in joint training exercises to combat piracy in the Indian Ocean. Additionally, to prepare for potential challenges, India has supported Vietnam with jungle warfare and counter-insurgency training, and in the maintenance of aircraft and helicopters. India has also trained numerous Vietnamese pilots and assisted in the production of small and medium-scale arms.³⁴ As their relationship has diversified, both states have strengthened their defense and security ties.

³⁴ David Brewster. "India's Defense Strategy and the India-ASEAN Relationship." *India Review* 12, no. 3 (2013): 151-164. Also see, David Brewster. "The Strategic Relations between India and Vietnam: The Search for a Diamond on the South China Sea?" *ANU Open Research Paper*. (2008), <https://>

Expanding beyond bilateral cooperation, India has integrated Vietnam into MILAN, a multinational naval exercise. India further strengthens this partnership by offering 50 annual scholarships to Vietnamese defense cadets through the Indian Technological and Economic Cooperation Program, fostering a future generation of defense leaders. A significant contribution came in the form of four offshore patrol vessels sold by India to Vietnam. These vessels enhance Vietnam's ability to secure its interests in the strategically important South China Sea. Standardization plays a key role in their cooperation, as both nations utilize similar Russian platforms for much of their defense equipment. This compatibility simplifies maintenance and logistics.³⁵

Furthermore, driven by the complexities and uncertainties of the global political landscape, particularly in their volatile region, both India and Vietnam have recognized the need for stronger strategic partnerships. This strategic imperative manifested during Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 2016 visit. The visit resulted in a commitment to implement both India's "Joint Vision" statement and Vietnam's "Defense Relations" strategy, established in May 2015. Underscoring India's interest in deeper

openresearchrepository.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/13058/1/Brewster,%20D.%20India's%20Strategic%20Partnership%20with%20Vietnam%202009.pdf

³⁵ "V.N.'s trade with India sees strong growth," Viet Nam News, 2018, <https://vietnamnews.vn/economy/464534/vns-trade-with-india-sees-strong-growth.html> Also see, Pant, "India and Vietnam."

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collaboration, Prime Minister Modi pledged a new line of credit specifically for defense industry cooperation. This commitment materialized with a contract signed between Larsen & Toubro (India) and the Vietnam Border Guards for offshore patrol boats, utilizing the \$100 million credit line extended by India.³⁶ Further strengthening ties, India offered Vietnam a \$5 million grant to establish an Army Software Park at the Telecommunications University in Nha Trang.³⁷ The focus of this partnership has shifted towards regional security and trade cooperation, especially in the face of China's growing assertiveness. This necessitates a stronger foundation of mutual trust and coordination to address shared concerns. Both India and Vietnam, acknowledging the importance of each other's maritime security, established a strategic partnership. Vietnam granted India access to its port in Nha Trang, situated close to the strategically significant Cam Ranh Bay. This move has allowed for regular visits by the Indian Navy.

Besides, Vietnam, seeking to develop its naval capabilities, requested India's assistance in upgrading the Nha Trang port facilities. This decision, made despite US presence in the region,

³⁶ Pant. "India and Vietnam: A truly strategic partnership."

³⁷ Pant. "India and Vietnam: A truly strategic partnership." Also see, "L&T Bags Major Order from Vietnam Border Guard for High-Speed Patrol Vessels," *L&T Press Release*, September 22, 2016, <http://www.larsentoubro.com/media/33614/2016-09-22-lt-bags-prestigious-defence-export-order-from-vietnam.pdf>

reflects Vietnam's strategic calculus in a complex geopolitical environment. Since 2011, Vietnam has sought extensive Indian training for its personnel, including submarine warfare for sailors and pilot conversion training for Sukhoi-30 fighter pilots. Additionally, Vietnam expressed interest in acquiring medium-sized warships and cruise missiles from India. India has demonstrably responded positively to these requests. The Indian Navy trains 500 Vietnamese sailors in submarine warfare at INS Satavaham, while the Indian Air Force provides pilot conversion training for Vietnamese Sukhoi-30 pilots.³⁸

To further relations between India and Vietnam, India's President, H.E. Ramnath Kovind, visited Vietnam on November 21, 2018. He and Vietnam's President, H.E. Nguyen Phu Trong, issued a joint statement during the visit. The leaders discussed key aspects of defense and security cooperation between the two countries and expressed satisfaction with the progress made in these areas. They praised the successful organization of defense cooperation mechanisms such as the annual Deputy Ministerial Defense Policy Dialogue and the First Security Dialogue held in July 2018. The presidents also welcomed the ongoing mutual

³⁸ Ritu Sharma. "Jet set no go: Plan to train Vietnam Sukhoi pilots grounded," *The New Indian Express*, 2016, <http://www.newindianexpress.com/thesundaystandard/2016/nov/19/jet-set-no-go-plan-to-train-vietnam-sukhoi-pilots-grounded-1540496.html/> Also see, Dinakar Peri. "India to train Vietnam's Sukhoi fighter pilots," *The Hindu*, 2016, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/India-to-train-Vietnam%E2%80%99s-Sukhoi-fighter-pilots/article16765719.ece> and Pant, "India and Vietnam."

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visits by naval and coast guard vessels and agreed to advance human resources training. They emphasized promoting collaboration between the Army, Air Force, Navy, and Coast Guards and decided to enhance cybersecurity and information-sharing networks to strengthen their partnership further. The two leaders agreed to share experiences in personnel training for United Nations peacekeeping operations and cooperation in addressing war legacies in Vietnam. They also agreed to enhance the exchange of criminal information and law enforcement experiences. A key aspect of their joint statement was their commitment to actively support each other and increase coordination through multilateral defense and security cooperation frameworks. They emphasized the importance of maritime cooperation, including anti-piracy measures, sea lane security, and the exchange of white shipping information.³⁹

However, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic soon after this agreement impacted global relations. Despite the restrictions imposed by COVID-19 lockdowns, India and Vietnam regularly held virtual meetings to discuss various bilateral and multilateral issues. After the lockdown hiatus, on September 13, 2022, the

³⁹ “India-Vietnam Joint Statement during State Visit of President to Vietnam, At the invitation of H.E. Mr. Nguyen Phu Trong, President of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, H.E. Shri. Ram Nath Kovind, President of the Republic of India, paid a State visit to Viet Nam from 18 - 20 November 2018,” Ministry of External Affairs of India, 2018, https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/30615/IndiaVietnam_Joint_Statement_during_State_Visit_of_President_to_Vietnam.

Vietnamese delegation, led by Deputy Minister of Public Security Sen. Lie. Luong Tam Quang, and the Indian delegation, led by Deputy National Security Advisor Vikram Misri, held the second India-Vietnam Security Dialogue. During this dialogue, the two countries reiterated their shared concerns, and India emphasized the importance of the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) initiated by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. This initiative aims to collaborate on preserving, maintaining, and protecting the maritime industry. Additionally, India offered to train Vietnamese military forces for participation in UN Peacekeeping operations. Both countries resolved to combat terrorism, extremism, and the illegal production and trafficking of drugs and weapons in the Indo-Pacific region.⁴⁰ While there is potential for further improving relations by focusing on natural calamities, pandemics, the blue economy, and the importance of AI, the influence of China will remain a significant factor in India-Vietnam relations.

VI. The China factor

The threat perception of China has been there in this region of Asia for a long time. China's aggressive actions towards India and Vietnam during the Cold War. Even after the Cold War, this attitude did not change and increased recently, as evidenced by

⁴⁰ Hannah Nguyen. "Vietnam, India held second security dialogue held in New Delhi," *Vietnam Times*, September 14, 2022, [ht/vietnamtimes.org.vn/vietnam-india-held-second-security-dialogue-held-in-new-delhi-46835.html](http://vietnamtimes.org.vn/vietnam-india-held-second-security-dialogue-held-in-new-delhi-46835.html)

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China's aggressive behavior in international affairs. In fact, during the 1970s, Vietnam requested India to include the defense aspect in the bilateral treaties between the two countries because Vietnam noticed China's increasing stature as a severe threat to the existence of their nation. For instance, in 1978, General Giap of Vietnam, enroute to Moscow to negotiate Vietnam's friendship treaty with the Soviet Union, made an unpublicized stop in New Delhi, where he requested the Indian government's assistance in establishing local arms manufacturing capability to reduce their dependence on the USSR. However, India politely rejected this offer because of the geopolitical situation.⁴¹ That shows how potent the China factor is in between India and Vietnam relations. But the fact of the matter is for India and Vietnam to bolster their defense and security relations, the recent adventures of China in the Indo-Pacific region, and China's footprints in the strategic areas of India and Vietnam causing consternation.⁴² To be more specific, for India, it is South Asia, and for Vietnam, it is the South China Sea. Therefore, to neutralize China's potential threat India and Vietnam have strengthened their relations. Consequently, the strategic partnership between India and Vietnam softened the Chinese threat somewhat. Further, India and Vietnam have launched various mechanisms to institutionalize their relations to

⁴¹ Nayan Chanda. *Brother enemy: The war after the war*. Harcourt, (1986).

⁴² Ralf Emmers and Huong Le Thu. "Vietnam and the Search for Security Leadership in ASEAN," *Asian Security*, 17, no. 1 (June 7, 2020): 64–78, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14799855.2020.1769068>.

cement their cooperation. It led to the deepening convergence between India and Vietnam in defense and security.

Both India and Vietnam promulgated a *Joint Declaration on Comprehensive Cooperation* in 2003. The two countries have envisaged building an 'Arc of Advantage and Prosperity' in Southeast Asia and thus paved the way for establishing strategic dialogues in 2009.⁴³ Likewise, through the Joint Declaration on the Vietnam-India Strategic Partnership in 2007, these two countries agreed to develop strategic discussions at the vice-ministerial level in the Foreign Office. Until now five such strategic dialogues have already been conducted. Since 2007, the two countries have been working on annual defense policy dialogues, and the latest one was held in March 2017. Furthermore, in 2015, the two countries signed a Joint Vision Statement for 2015-20, paving the way for regular defense exchanges and interactions, defense trade, training, and cooperation in developing new technologies.⁴⁴ Consequently, the 13th Defense Secretary-level Annual Defense Policy Dialogue was held virtually on January 12, 2021. This indicates that both countries want to strengthen their defense and security relations further.

At the same time, Vietnam cannot depend on other countries to seek any help if at a war takes place between Vietnam and

⁴³ Pant. "India and Vietnam: A truly strategic partnership."

⁴⁴ Pant. "India and Vietnam: A truly strategic partnership."

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China. This is why it has focused on increasing its partnership with India concerning security issues.⁴⁵ This partnership is suitable for Vietnam and the other countries in the Indian Ocean region, constantly affected by China's bullying tactics. This is why the leaders of both countries have been engaged continuously in strengthening the relations. Apart from this, China's military and defense budget has been increasing year after year in the recent past. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)⁴⁶ said that a few countries military spending increased during the pandemic year. The SIPRI report says that a 2.6 percent increase in world military spending came when the plethora of countries' GDP shrank by 4.4 percent. It was primarily due to COVID-19 as the world economy was shattered. However, military spending as a share of the country's GDP of nations, the military burden reached a global average of 2.4 percent in 2020, up from 2.2 percent in 2019. It says that it was the most significant increase in countries military spending since the global financial and economic crisis in 2009. Likewise, the world's second-largest spender on its military, China, is projected to have totaled \$252 billion in 2020. China's spending has therefore

⁴⁵ Ralph Jennings. "Vietnam Is Chasing India To Escape The Grip Of China," *Forbes*, 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ralphjennings/2017/07/10/vietnam-is-chasing-india-in-a-new-gambit-to-resist-china/#19b191f35f59>.

⁴⁶ "World Military Spending Rises to Almost \$2 Trillion in 2020," SIPRI, April 26, 2021, <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2021/world-military-spending-rises-almost-2-trillion-2020>.

increased for 26 consecutive years. The SIPRI says this is the most extended series of uninterrupted increases in any country's global military expenditure. But one interesting fact in this regard is that China stands out as the only major spender in the world not to increase its military budget in 2020 despite increasing its military expenditure.

Moreover, the defense expenditure was enhanced when China's border feud began with India. While announcing the annual report to the national legislature, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang declared that China would boost military training and prepare its forces to respond to security risks in all areas and situations. Further, Chinese President Xi Jinping has vowed to make the nation a great military power and modernize China's armed forces by 2035 to build a world-class military capable of winning all types of war by 2050.⁴⁷ Simultaneously we learn that Pakistan's Defense budget has increased significantly. The 2021 Budget of Pakistan allocated 1.37 trillion for defense services marking an increase of 6.2 per cent.⁴⁸ Therefore, it is becoming more concern for India and Vietnam. Notably, after COVID-19, the Ukraine crisis, and the ongoing Israel and Palestine issue, the world security environment has been rapidly changing. The SIPRI

⁴⁷ "China's Defense Budget Climbs 6.8% as Economy Recovers," *Bloomberg*, March 4, 2021, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-03-05/china-s-defense-budget-climbs-6-8-as-economy-recovers>.

⁴⁸ Baqir Sajjad Syed. "BUDGET 2021-22: Defence Allocation Goes up by 6.2pc," *DAWN.COM*, June 12, 2021, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1628903>.

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data indicates that even during the pandemic, many countries have increased their defense and security budgets. That clearly indicates how crucial the defense and security aspect is in emerging international relations.

VII. The assessment of India and Vietnam's defense and security relations

However, India and Vietnam diversify their engagement and encourage more research and development investment in the defense and security sector. Education and higher education collaboration are imperative. Regular exchange of knowledge and information on growing technology and science development. To mark 45 years of relations between the two countries, Vietnamese President Tran Dai Quang visited India in early 2018. This visit came barely after a month after Vietnam Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc came to India to attend the India-ASEAN Commemorative Summit, Republic Day Parade, and other ASEAN leaders. This indicates the intensification of high-level bilateral ties with Vietnam emerging as one of India's most vital partners in the Southeast Asian Region.⁴⁹ During the international workshop “*India-Vietnam Ties Amid the Changing Geopolitical Situation in the India-Pacific*,” held at Vivekananda International Foundation in January 2018, many scholars pointed out that “India-Vietnam strategic partnership was key to maintaining

⁴⁹ Pant. “India and Vietnam: A truly strategic partnership.”

peace not only in Southeast Asia but also in the entire India-Pacific region”.⁵⁰ While delivering the keynote address at the same workshop, the former National Security Agency director commented, *“China’s growing ambitions have created ripples in the region. The concept of Indo-Pacific cannot be developed without ASEAN on board. Under such circumstances growing Indian presence in Vietnam and vice-versa are imperative. The two sides can explore joint defense production, wider cybersecurity, and space Cooperation.”* Later, 27 November 27, 2020, India’s Defense Minister Rajnath Singh and National Defense of Vietnam H.E. General Ngo Xuan Lich held bilateral talks via video conferencing. During the meeting, both Ministers reaffirmed the strong India-Vietnam Defense cooperation as the vital pillar of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the two countries. Further, the leaders discussed scores of ongoing projects and the future trajectory of bilateral Defense engagements. The more critical part of the discussion is the collaboration in defense industry capability building, training, and Cooperation in U.N. Peacekeeping Operations. Furthermore, both sides have signed an arrangement for Cooperation in Hydrography between the National Hydrographic Office to enhance the bilateral partnerships. This will pave the way for sharing Hydrographic data and producing nautical charts by India

⁵⁰ Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury. “India, Vietnam Strategic Partnership Key to Stability in Indo-Pacific Region,” *The Economic Times*, January 11, 2018, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/india-vietnam-strategic-partnership-key-to-stability-in-indo-pacific-region/articleshow/62454195.cms?from=mdr>.

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and Vietnam. Another significant development in recent years is the institutionalization of defense industry cooperation.⁵¹ However, the aim of institutionalizing the relations between both countries takes more time than anticipated. Periodic visits of the India-Vietnam officials in both countries should be encouraged more. On January 12, 2021, India's Defense Secretary, Dr Ajay Kumar, co-chaired the 13th India-Vietnam Defense Security Dialogue with Sr Lt Gen Nguyen Chi Vinh, Deputy Defense Minister of Vietnam. The virtual interaction between the leaders expressed satisfaction with the ongoing defense cooperation between the two countries despite disruptions caused by the COVID-19-induced lockdowns. Further, they exchanged views on the plan of action drawn from the recently concluded virtual summit between India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Vietnam's President H.E. Nguyen Xuan Phuc in December 2020. Both leaders expressed satisfaction with the growing defense ties between the two countries. They reviewed the progress on various bilateral defense cooperation initiatives and expressed commitment to elevating further engagements between the Armed Forces under the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Both countries stressed the need to enhance even greater Cooperation in the defense industry and Technology.⁵² On April 6, 2021, India

⁵¹ "Talks Between Defense Ministers of India and Vietnam," *PIB*, November 27, 2020, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1676523>

⁵² "13th India-Vietnam Defence Security Dialogue," *PIB*, January 12, 2021, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1687915>.

and Vietnam held their second maritime security dialogue in a virtual format. The consultations revolve around development in maritime security, regional cooperation, and opportunities for collaboration between the two countries.⁵³ To further enhance the cooperation between the two countries, Vietnam's National Assembly Chairman Vuong Dinh Hue visited India from December 15 to 19, 2021. During the meeting, both sides emphasized the importance of trade diversification and strategic ties. Both sides agreed to diversify it to pharmaceuticals, oil, gas, and I.T. services as the two countries were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly the service sector, as India has become one of the important exporting countries for the service sector of the world. Another significant aspect of the meeting was that it deepened the strategic ties between the countries.⁵⁴ Because China has been becoming aggressive daily by diversifying its might in defense and security areas. Moreover, China's tinkering with the South China Sea countries. Further, China's activities in the Himalayan region and the Indian Ocean openly transgress India's strategic area. Therefore, it is now time for India and Vietnam to strike a balance with China's growing

⁵³ "2nd India – Vietnam Maritime Security Dialogue," Ministry of External Affairs of India, April 6, 2021, https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/33772/2nd_India__Vietnam_Maritime_Security_Dialogue_April_06_2021.

⁵⁴ Shira Dezan. "Vietnam's N.A. Chairman Visit to India Underlines Increasing Trade, Relations," *Vietnam Briefing*, December 22, 2021, <https://www.vietnam-briefing.com/news/vietnams-na-chairman-visit-india-underlines-increasing-trade-relations.html/>.

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influence on contemporary international relations. It is now widely accepted that an Indo-Vietnam convergence and cooperation on security and trade matters is necessary to create a peaceful and stable Asia. When the outgoing Ambassador of Vietnam to India, Phan Sanh Chau, on September 2, 2022, underscored that Vietnam's relations with India do not intend to fight against China. India and Vietnam do not take sides and practice zero-sum games. The whole reason for strengthening is to promote and respect international law, as India and China are good friends of Vietnam.⁵⁵ However, China's supremacy has created an unpredictable and volatile situation in Asia-Pacific. Therefore, India and Vietnam must be proactive and take steps that are essential in the immediate future to counter the unforeseeable threat. Multiple actions should be encouraged to converge India and Vietnam relations more.

VIII. Conclusion

India and Vietnam are exercising smart strategy by engaging in security and trade cooperation and widening their mutual relationship to counter future uncertainties from the Chinese nation. China, on the other hand, is taking an aggressive stand on many issues. Simultaneously, China's increasing friendship with

⁵⁵ Manish Chand. "Defence, security cooperation becoming stronger in India-Vietnam partnership," *Guardian Online*, September 3, 2022, <https://www.sundayguardianlive.com/world/defence-security-cooperation-becoming-stronger-india-vietnam-partnership>.

Pakistan should not be ignored because it can destabilize the entire region. Countries like India and Vietnam have already shown a model for other players globally to follow by taking a united stand against Chinese expansionist tendencies. Apart from that, India and Vietnam can work in the future to combine their resources like Human Capital and Trade Potential to leverage a great push against Chinese domination. More importantly, Vietnam is strategically positioned for India, and India will benefit from having an ally in the South China Region. Similarly, India's resources and military power can support Vietnam whenever it needs. Likewise, Vietnam's other resources are very beneficial for India. For India, strengthening relations with Vietnam is one step ahead to fulfilling its ambitious program SAGAR Mala. Moreover, both India and Vietnam can mutually benefit from the Blue Economy strategy. Hence, it is the perfect time for India-Vietnam to work on more convergence in their bilateral security and defense relations.

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