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FRENCH AND GERMAN STRATEGIES IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

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Abstract. This article explores the features of French and German policy in the Indo-Pacific Region (IPR). It is defined that these countries were the first members of the European Union to develop their own regional strategies in 2018–2020, hence it is appropriate to state their high interest in the IPR at the present stage. First of all, the characteristics of France’s approach are given: the emphasis on overseas territories and military capabilities; the desire to maintain contacts with a wide range of regional powers; a variety of initiatives and forms of influence. It is noted that Paris intends to build its regional coalition – the so-called “axis” with India and, until recently, Australia. Besides this, the article summarizes the basics of German policy in the IPR: the intention to keep economic ties along with an increasing willingness to develop political cooperation; the recognition of the leading role of ASEAN in regional processes; the desire to move away from the US–China bipolar confrontation. It is emphasized that in principle, the German government is ready to relocate its naval forces to this theater, but expects to do it as carefully as possible without violating the interests of Western allies or China (as the deployment of the frigate “Bayern” has shown). The authors conclude that the strategies of both countries have very much in common, which allows to discuss possible areas of their defense cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. Such could be a joint use of French bases (co-basing); the creation of a permanent naval mission or common aircraft carrier groups; the coordination of arms export policies. These measures could become a persuasive confirmation of European strategic autonomy and strengthen Europe’s positioning as an independent player in the IPR, especially after the creation of AUKUS.

Keywords: France, Germany, European Union, Indo-Pacific, AUKUS, US–China rivalry, defense cooperation, arms trade.

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СТРАТЕГИИ ФРАНЦИИ И ГЕРМАНИИ В ИНДО-ТИХООКЕАНСКОМ РЕГИОНЕ

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Аннотация. На современном этапе страны Евросоюза уделяют все большее внимание Индо-Тихоокеанскому региону, что выражается в появлении у них соответствующих доктринальных документов. В статье изучаются подходы двух государств, опубликовавших свои стратегии ранее остальных, – Франции и Германии. Выявляются их основные приоритеты в Индо-Пацифике, способы регионального присутствия, ключевые партнеры и форматы сотрудничества. Приводятся перспективные направления военно-политического взаимодействия, которые могли бы усилить позиции обеих стран и укрепить стратегическую автономию ЕС в целом.

Ключевые слова: Франция, Германия, Европейский союз, Индо-Пацифика, AUKUS, американо-китайское противостояние, военное сотрудничество, экспорт вооружений.

INTRODUCTION

The rivalry between the United States and China deepens, Russia's foreign policy positions strengthen, and the influence of a number of regional powers grows. In this situation, the question of a new alignment of forces and the place for these countries in the new reality becomes more and more urgent for the European Union. Thus, the rhetoric of strategic autonomy, i.e. the ability of the European Union to make independent decisions and actions, became fashionable during the presidency of Donald Trump in the United States (2017–2021), and the European Commission headed by Ursula von der Leyen was declared “geopolitical”, that is, striving to increase the role of the EU in the world. The European Union has been pursuing for several years “a course towards securitization of its foreign policy, strengthening diplomatic, as well as military-political tools, and a transition from high principles to pragmatism” since the EU does not want to be “the only vegetarian among predators” [1, p. 355]. The discussion on ways to maintain the EU's global competitiveness and use its advantages in various areas has intensified among politicians and experts.

In such context, the Indo-Pacific is now becoming one of the regions attracting the increased attention of the European Union despite its geographical remoteness. European states, following the USA, began to see a single political and economic space in the basins of the Indian and Pacific Oceans, where the same set of challenges to their interests is observed, primarily the expansion of China's activity. Given the global importance of the Indo-Pacific Region (IPR) with its transport arteries and growing markets, united Europe seeks to identify itself in this theater as a new player with its own capabilities and a circle of partners, which would be an additional confirmation of its strategic autonomy. It is noteworthy that the first Indo-Pacific strategies have already begun to appear within the EU. The following countries have issued national documents: France (2018–2020), Germany, and the Netherlands (2020). The EU's general strategy was published in September 2021. For continental Europe, the question of its role and further actions in the IPR became even more obvious after the Anglo-Saxon states formed their own *AUKUS* coalition (USA, Australia, Great Britain) in the same month. The answer to this question, apparently, will largely depend on the position of the Franco-German tandem, which makes it necessary to analyze the prospects for cooperation between Paris and Berlin in the region, primarily in the military-political sphere.

It is worth emphasizing that such a topic has not yet received full coverage in the scientific literature.

In particular, one of the authors of this article had the opportunity to study the IPR policy of France separately, but did not have a chance to compare it with the position of Germany [2]. A French military expert, Rear Admiral Pipolo, worked in a similar vein [3], as well as the analysts of the British *Chatham House* Billon-Galland and Kundnani, who were looking for points of intersection in the IPR between France and Great Britain without much emphasis on German interests [4]. On the other hand, the topic of cooperation between France and Germany on the European continent (implementation of bilateral agreements, management of *PESCO* projects), rather than in the Indo-Pacific, is more popular among Russian [5] and foreign [6] authors. The closest to the given topic should be called, in particular, the work by Godement and Wecker [7] where the approaches of European leaders towards China are analyzed, as well as a study by the German *SWP* center, which became one of the first attempts to compare the policies of the two countries in the IPR immediately after the release of German regional strategy [8].

The purpose of this article is to identify the most likely areas of defense cooperation between France and Germany in the IPR. To do this, it is necessary, first, to recall the main provisions of the French strategy in the region; second, to establish the characteristic features in the approach of the German leadership; third, by correlating the positions and resources at the disposal of both states, to identify the prospects for their cooperation in this theater. The solution to the tasks set will require the use of comparative analysis elements, as well as relevant materials: the main foreign policy documents of France and Germany on the Indo-Pacific and speeches by officials.

FRENCH INTERESTS IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

Speaking about the approach of the Fifth Republic to the IPR, one should emphasize that this space has constantly figured among the priorities of French diplomacy in connection with certain subjects: conducting nuclear tests in 1966–1996, providing security along the east coast of Africa (Madagascar, Comoros, anti-piracy), search for clients for the national defense industry and many others. However, Paris formulated a comprehensive strategy for action in the region only a short time ago. Notable work in this direction began under President Hollande (2012–2017), when French officials began to visit Asian countries much more often than usual. There was an intensification of business ties [9]; then major military-technical agreements were concluded with India (by *Rafale* fighters) and Australia (by *Barracuda*

submarines). The term “Indo-Pacific” itself became entrenched in government discourse only under Hollande’s successor, Emmanuel Macron and allowed developing a holistic approach to the IPR in the modern context.

The starting point in the formation of France’s regional strategy was 2018, when Macron visited China, India, Australia, and New Caledonia for the first time as head of state. So, speaking at the Garden Island naval base, he announced that the Fifth Republic is striving to form the so-called Indo-Pacific axis, i.e. a coalition with the participation of Canberra and New Delhi, whose priorities would be primarily regional security and freedom of navigation [2]. As the President explained during these visits, France can rightfully get involved in the affairs of the IPR, since its territorial possessions are located there¹ and more than 1.5 million of Republic citizens live there. The permanent military contingent consisting of 8 thousand people is stationed within the IPR (in total, including the personnel of bases in Djibouti and the UAE territory), as well as separate fleet formations (based on small frigates *Floréal*, which entered service in the middle of 1990s) and air force units (mainly helicopters and transport planes) [2]. According to Macron, France, relying on these forces as the vanguard of its presence, will strive not only to protect the sea borders but also to cooperate more widely with the aforementioned allies: conducting joint exercises, providing mutual logistical support, data exchange, etc.

Developing the President’s proposals, the Ministry of the Armed Forces outlined a little later an approach of France to the IPR in a special document: “Strategies of French defense in the Indo-Pacific” (2019; earlier, shorter brochures *France and Security in the Indo-Pacific* had appeared). This document stated that the strategic situation in the region had rapidly deteriorated in recent years. According to the logic of Paris, this trend is explained, first, by the deepening of Sino-American contradictions; secondly, by the departure of most states from the principles of multilateralism and the popularization of other world order models; thirdly, by the widespread reorientation to the policy of power balance, the build-up of conventional or even nuclear weapons [source 1, pp. 8-13]. Various cross-border factors also affect the situation. First of all, it is the climate, given that natural disasters typical for the IPR are also a challenge from the security point of view. In such circumstances, the Fifth Republic will build its course around four priorities:

- maintaining the sovereignty of France, protecting citizens and the inviolability of the exclusive economic zone borders;
- creation of a security belt around the overseas French territories by the establishment of a military-political partnership network;
- protection of free and open access to common spaces, protection of maritime communications;
- compliance with national and European interests in the field of strategic stability [source 1, pp. 13-16].

French Armed Forces were not the only department involved in the Indo-Pacific topic. The Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs released the “Strategy of France in Indo-Pacific” in 2020. In this document, the government once again outlined its concern about various negative trends observed in the IPR and confirmed that security issues remained at the center of French interests (where the armed forces are key elements of influence). At the same time, the importance of economic ties was not denied: in total, the IPR states provide more than one-third of the Fifth Republic’s foreign trade outside the EU, while in absolute terms, France’s trade turnover with them has grown by 49% over the past 10 years, and the volume of accumulated French investments amounted to 113 billion euros (however, in most of the cases, China was the reason) [source 2, p. 27]. The presence of large companies and representative offices of business associations is noted in almost all the countries of the region (Atout France, Business France). The French Development Agency (Agence française de développement, AFD) and scientific and educational institutions are also presenting there [source 2, p. 29, 35]. The promotion of numerous environmental initiatives that encourage local states to reduce carbon emissions, jointly work on cleaning up ocean waters, and build a sustainable “blue” economy is seen as the most important task. On all these issues, the following are listed as the most desirable partners: Australia, India, Japan, USA, New Zealand, ASEAN², Indian Ocean Commission³, The Indian Ocean Rim Association⁴, and Pacific Community. The authors of the Strategy welcomed the start of work on a similar document at the European level and promised to make the Indo-Pacific one of the main topics of the EU French presidency in the first half of 2022 [source 2, pp. 71-72].

¹ In addition to New Caledonia, these are French Polynesia, Wallis and Futuna Islands, Scattered Islands in the Indian Ocean, Reunion and Mayotte, Southern and Antarctic Territories, Clipperton Atoll.

² The French side received the status of a “development partner” in 2020.

³ France served as the Chairman of the Commission from May 2021 to May 2022.

⁴ France became a full member of the Association in 2020.

It should be noted that the activation of French policy in the region was not only declared at the doctrinal level but also acquired practical confirmation. In particular, the post of special envoy for the IPR was created to conduct the entire complex of relations with local states in 2020. It was occupied by the diplomat Christophe Penot who previously worked in Malaysia and Australia. On the defense track, the most significant event was the visit to the region of the aircraft carrier “Charles de Gaulle” (2019), which participated in joint exercises with the American, Japanese, Indian, and Australian Navies. From time to time, a *Mistral*-type helicopter carrier (training trips “Jeanne-d’Arc”), multipurpose submarine of the *Rubis* project (mission “Marianne”), various support ships, consolidated Pegasus air group, etc. also entered the Indo-Pacific [source 2, pp. 55-56]. In addition, the investment forum was held in Reunion to reveal the economic potential of the Overseas Territories (2019), which allowed outlining a number of projects for the benefit of the island infrastructure. The Fifth Republic, together with India, launched the International Solar Alliance, and within the framework of the France-Oceania summit in 2021, agreed to allocate additional funds for the protection of biodiversity in order to promote alternative energy sources (initiative *Kiwa*). Finally, during his tour of Polynesia in July 2021, Macron acknowledged the historical responsibility of the Republic to the local population for conducting nuclear tests and assumed that it would be compensated by the opening of archives and financial injections for local needs. In general, the French strategy in the IPR managed to show thematic diversity with a general emphasis on military and political issues, which, according to Pipolo, is logically explained by the status of France as a maritime power and the difficult regional context [3].

Assessing the general orientation of its regional strategy, the French leadership insists that it is neither unambiguously pro-American, nor even more pro-Chinese. According to Macron, this strategy implies working out a third way in which the Indo-Pacific states would not turn into an arena of rivalry between the two giants and at the same time would not become excessively dependent on Beijing [source 3]. Nevertheless, the French approach to the IPR in the selection of allies and exemplary areas of cooperation does not fundamentally contradict the American vision of regional architecture, which is quite obvious from the documents and practical steps of Paris (quadrilateral security dialogue consisting of the USA, Japan, India, and Australia: *Quad*). Hence, it is appropriate to summarize that in the Indo-Pacific, France, although striving to preserve strategic autonomy and

establish its own ties, as a whole remains a participant in the common Western camp, rather than a truly equidistant player. In September 2021, this conclusion received a very significant confirmation: having lost one of the most important pillars of its presence in the IPR in favor of the United States – a contract for the supply of 12 submarines to Australia with a total value of 56 billion euros – Paris limited itself to political declarations and did not take any long-term anti-American or anti-Australian steps. On the contrary, President Macron tried to quickly relieve the tension by holding talks with Joe Biden and returning the previously recalled French ambassadors to Washington and Canberra. This episode clearly demonstrated the unwillingness of the Republic’s leadership to move too far away from Western allies, even in the presence of direct contradictions with them, and also the lack of the ability to organize effective countermeasures. As Rubinsky and Fedorov rightly noted, in general, the “submarine crisis” revealed a discrepancy between the level of French ambitions in the IPR and its actual level of regional influence [10, p. 10].

FUNDAMENTALS OF THE GERMAN STRATEGY IN THE IPR

Historically, the Indian and Pacific oceans have not often been among the priorities of German foreign policy, and its presence there was relatively short-term and inferior in scale to the French or British. So, at the end of the 19th century, Berlin drew attention to this region, seeking to acquire its own colonial possessions (East Africa, the port of Qingdao, part of New Guinea, the Bismarck Archipelago, and the Solomon Islands), which were eventually quickly lost after World War I. Other well-known examples of German diplomatic interest in the IPR date back to the 1920s and 1930s, when military advisers from the Weimar Republic worked in China with the Kuomintang army, and before World War II, the Third Reich established allied ties with Japan. However, German relations with Asian states acquired a purely secondary character after 1945, as the Euro-Atlantic became objectively the most significant vector for Germany. The German leadership began to think about its own long-term strategy in Asia only after the unification of the country in 1991, initially referring only to economic contacts. The export-oriented industry of Germany took advantage of the rapid growth of local sales markets, which led to the strengthening of trade and economic ties between the countries of the region and Germany remained even during the Coronacrisis. According to data for 2020, at the present stage, Germany maintains the largest bilateral trade turnover with China (212 billion euros), which makes the

“Celestial Empire” a more significant partner for Berlin than the United States and Europe for the sixth year in a row [source 4]. There are generally significant volumes of trade with Japan (38.5 billion), South Korea (30 billion), Indonesia (5.5 billion), and others with a mostly positive balance for the German side⁵.

Meanwhile, during Angela Merkel’s tenure as Chancellor, the German leadership gradually began to demonstrate an increasing interest not only in economic but also in political contacts with the countries of the Indo-Pacific as indicated by a number of circumstances. First, Berlin was brought closer to such major regional players as India and Japan by a common desire to reform the UN Security Council, as a result of which all three countries would receive the status of its permanent members. The argument of the German side in favor of such an innovation was and remains built around its active participation in various peacekeeping operations, as well as the traditionally high (as in the case of Tokyo) level of contributions to the UN budget [11]. Second, in the foreign policy concept of the federal government in 2012 a special emphasis was placed on the so-called new rising powers with whom it was proposed to intensify multi- and bilateral cooperation in order to strengthen a multipolar world [source 5]. In this regard, the text mentioned not only China or India but also Singapore, Malaysia, and Vietnam. Third, Berlin took a course to expand financial support for ASEAN institutions and integration programs which allowed experts to speculate about the potential role of Germany as a sponsor for new centers of power, alternative to Chinese influence, already in the early 2010s [12]. It is noteworthy that in 2016, Germany was the first European country to receive the status of an ASEAN “development partner”, and the list of topics for cooperation until 2022 included, among other things, issues of maritime and energy security [source 6]. Fourth, Berlin’s military-technical ties with local states began to expand: during 2000–2010, *Leopard 2* tanks, *Marder 1A2 IFV* (Singapore, Indonesia), diesel-electric submarines “Type 214” (South Korea, as well as participation in the tender for the “contract of the century” with Australia) were sold in the region. Accordingly, the new regional strategy – the “Policy guidelines for the Indo-Pacific” 2020 – laid on the already prepared ground being designed to set the direction for Berlin’s further actions in the IPR and to bring together a developed economic track and a recently launched political one.

Heiko Maas, who was Minister of Foreign Affairs during those days, stressed in his introductory speech to the document that in modern conditions, Germany

⁵ According to *UN Comtrade Database*. Available at: <https://comtrade.un.org/data> (accessed December 1, 2021).

could no longer remain a passive observer of the processes taking place in the region, referring primarily to the beginning of the US-Chinese confrontation [source 7, p. 2]. Germany’s well-being depends on the availability of sea trade routes, the openness of markets, and the ability to maintain contacts with different partners, while the logic of the new bipolarity contradicts all this. As the Minister pointed out, Berlin, for its part, is ready to contribute to strengthening international security in the IPR by experience exchange, support for the nuclear non-proliferation regime, participation in exercises, and other collective security measures to protect the “rules-based order” [source 7, p. 2]. German diplomacy saw a significant problem in the shortage of institutions that could become the basis for a regional security architecture, so it proposed to interact even more actively with those that already exist (ASEAN). In addition, Maas recalled the expediency of developing an all-European approach to the IPR and more active participation of the entire EU members in the affairs of the IPR [source 7, p. 3]. The latter thesis looked particularly relevant, because, as the Carnegie Endowment expert Grare said, the “Policy guidelines” were published at the beginning of Berlin’s presidency in the EU Council, and it was Germany (in tandem with France) that should have been expected to try to increase the importance of the IPR in the eyes of other European countries [13].

According to the document, the most priority areas where Germany’s Indo-Pacific policy should be concentrated are currently the following: [source 7, pp. 20-61]:

- strengthening multilateralism: striving for a situation where none of the IPR countries would be faced with the need to submit to someone’s unilateral hegemony or join one of the two rival parties;
- environmental protection: convergence of local states’ economic growth tasks and the “green” agenda;
- maintenance of peace, security, and stability: anti-terrorism, peaceful settlement of territorial disputes, nuclear non-proliferation, and protection of navigation freedom;
- promotion of human rights and the rule of law: support for reforms in the countries of the region, dialogue with civil society;
- expansion of free trade practices: conclusion of agreements on relevant zones between the European Union and the IPR powers, strengthening business contacts;
- support for digital transformation: cooperation in advanced sectors of the economy, creation of new

industrial and technological chains within the Indo-Pacific and between the IPR and the EU;

– strengthening contacts in the field of culture, education, and science: between Asian and German scientific and educational institutions.

In addition, the document contains the main forms of the German presence in the IPR, which will become the basis for further policy. The authors of the strategy pointed to mainly non-military capabilities, since Germany does not have a permanent military contingent and its own bases there: 38 diplomatic missions, 31 departments of the Goethe Institute, 25 foreign Chambers of Commerce, numerous representative offices of German companies, as well as the fact of maintaining a dialogue with regional organizations (in addition to ASEAN, these are the Mekong River Commission, the Pacific Islands Forum, etc.) [source 7, pp. 63-68]. As the *SWP* experts summarize, the new strategy in the IPR retains the traditional focus for German diplomacy on industrial, trade, and humanitarian cooperation, but at the same time, seeks to diversify the circle of interlocutors: the task is to balance relations with China, which previously developed ahead of schedule, by expanding ties with the states of Southeast Asia [8, pp. 17-24]. At the same time, the “Policy Guidelines” nevertheless indicated the desire of the federal Government to carry out a direct naval presence in the near future in order to strengthen defense cooperation with the most important regional powers and protect its economic interests (maintaining freedom of navigation, combating piracy) [source 7, pp. 15-16].

The first and so far the only large step in this direction was the dispatch of the frigate “Bayern” to the region for the period from August 2021 to February 2022, which became known following a meeting of the Ministers of Defense and Foreign Affairs of Germany and Japan a few months before [source 8]. According to the original route, the ship was to proceed through the Strait of Malacca, the South China Sea, and the Taiwan Strait and then reach Tokyo, simultaneously participating in various exercises with the European, American, Australian, and Japanese fleets [14]. However, this schedule was repeatedly changed after the protests of the PRC: even the idea of a friendly visit to the port of Shanghai was discussed as a symbolic “compensation” for the passage between mainland China and Taiwan. As a result, it was decided to send the frigate on a detour through Australia, Palau, and Guam, and back to pass east of Taiwan, without entering the strait itself. This situation clearly showed the duality of German policy in the IPR, which combines, on the one hand, considerations of solidarity within the common Western camp, and, on

the other hand, the unwillingness to get involved in a confrontation with China, which is disadvantageous to Berlin both in military-political and economic terms. It is interesting that the “Policy Guidelines” have also been prepared in this way: the authors of the document sought to avoid direct accusations against Beijing (moreover, pointing out the importance of cooperation with it in various fields), but among the main allies mentioned above all NATO and its regional partners (Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea). One way or another, the facts of a new strategy emergence and the temporary relocation of the frigate are indicative for German foreign policy as a whole: with all the restrictions imposed on it after World War II, Germany begins to take an active interest in regions remote from its own territory, and the use of military means to demonstrate its presence is gradually becoming permissible.

POSSIBLE AREAS OF COOPERATION

A high degree of the tasks set similarity in the regional strategies of France and Germany should be stated by studying the approaches of these countries in relation to the Indo-Pacific. Both countries simultaneously declare the need to maintain stability in the IPR; the undesirability of a new bipolar confrontation; the desire to develop a dialogue with a wide range of regional players, but also not to get too close to China. The differences, as Heiduk and Sulejmanović noticed, reduced to details: France focuses on minilateralism, while Germany relies especially on ASEAN; unlike Berlin, Paris provides a more detailed political and geographical justification for its course, etc. [8]. Accordingly, the proximity of the basic installations allows making assumptions in which areas France and Germany could further take joint action in the Indo-Pacific. Within the framework of this article, it is appropriate to limit ourselves to the military-technical sphere, leaving the discussion of the bilateral cooperation potential in other areas (economy, climate, etc.) for further research.

1. It seems that the joint use of French naval bases in the Indian and Pacific Oceans may correspond to the interests of both countries. Such a step would allow the FRG to get permanent stations for its ships in the IPR and, consequently, make their appearance there more frequent. From the Fifth Republic’s point of view, this decision would expand the capabilities of its own contingent and strengthen the security of overseas departments. According to the commander of the French Navy Vendier, the *Floréal* small frigates located there are not capable of conducting large operations, since they do not have serious weapons and modern equipment, for example, sonars which are powerful

enough to detect submarines [15]. Joining them with at least one German frigate of the *Brandenburg* type or more powerful (depending on the ability of the ports to accept various types of ships) would solve some of these problems. The project on joint basing within the framework of PESCO: cobasing, where both countries participate (France as a leader), can facilitate work in this direction. It would also go in line with the European strategy in the IPR, where an expansion of European fleets' activity in the regional theater was already discussed in the "Defense" section [source 9].

2. Further, according to the French experts Veron and Lincot, a strategically advantageous step for the European Union could be the start of an EU naval mission in the IPR, whose participants would patrol the entire space from India to Japan on a regular basis and conduct purely European exercises [16]. An even larger proposal is to deploy there two aircraft carrier groups with a mixed escorts, replacing each other on the principle of rotation. Coupled with the joint use of naval bases, such measures, although very expensive, would be quite a convincing response to the *AUKUS* coalition formed by the United States pointedly without the participation of EU countries. At the same time, the Franco-German tandem is able to play a central role there: The Fifth Republic could be a "framework nation" with its own nuclear aircraft carrier and three helicopter carriers while German ships could be members of the escort group.

3. Contacts between Paris and Berlin should not be ruled out for the coordination of their policies for the sale of military equipment, taking into account the interest of both countries in the Indo-Pacific as a capacious arms market. Traditionally, the approaches of the two capitals to this issue were somewhat different: the German side was usually linking arms supplies with respect for democratic rights and freedoms, while the political and economic benefits of contracts played a more important role for the French side. It could lead in some cases to the blocking of French transactions with third countries on equipment with German components, as in the supply of *Meteor* missiles to Saudi Arabia in 2019. As a result, in October of the same year, a Franco-German agreement on the rules for the sale of joint equipment was signed, stipulating that neither side would interfere with deliveries if they did not pose a direct threat to its own national security. It is appropriate to assume that Paris and Berlin will work in the spirit of this agreement in the IPR markets, minimizing mutual claims or even supporting each other's applications against non-European competitors.

It should be expected that some of these or other measures will be implemented no earlier than the

summer-autumn of 2022, when presidential and parliamentary elections will be held in France, and it will also be possible to draw the first conclusions about the foreign policy course of Scholz's government in Germany. However, statements significant for the military-political partnership of the two countries in the Indo-Pacific can theoretically follow in the first half of 2022, when Paris will serve as the interim chairman in the Council of the European Union.

CONCLUSIONS

As summarized by the analysts of the IFRI Institute Martin and Krpata, France and Germany, taking into account the formation of *AUKUS*, have several alternatives for the near future on how to build their policy in the IPR [17, pp. 26-30]:

- to join the Anglo-Saxon allies, agreeing with the leadership of the United States and, accordingly, a secondary role for themselves;
- continue to maneuver between Washington and Beijing, maintaining a passive rather than a proactive line;
- try to become a full-fledged "third force" in the region with its own strategic vision.

Of these options, the third one seems to be the most daring, but also the most consistent with the idea of EU strategic autonomy. If the European Union expects to be an independent player in the Indo-Pacific, sooner or later it will have to confirm these ambitions with the presence of an adequate defense potential. Cooperation between Paris and Berlin in the areas presented above should play a decisive role in this. Meanwhile, from the point of view of Russian interests, if the military preparations of the Europeans in the IPR took place at all, then, most likely, they would not pose an immediate threat. Such an opinion arose because the military preparations of the Europeans will certainly take place not in the northern Pacifica near the Russian Primorye, but in its southern part, where the French overseas territories are located. Moreover, the EU's transition to the IPR to the position of an equidistant player with its own range of capabilities will mean a split within the US-led anti-Chinese coalition, which means de facto reducing the risk of a large-scale clash in the region, which is beneficial to Russia as well. However, the converse is also true: if the EU went to increase its military presence in the Indo-Pacific exactly as an ally of the United States (not as a new force), then such a step would only turn into a new round of regional confrontation, which neither Moscow, Beijing, nor even the European Union itself needs.

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