Section 4. Political culture

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SOUTHEAST ASIA IN THE FRANCE’S PIVOT TO ASIA

Abstract. Southeast Asia used to be a “lost area” by France for a long time after the Second World War, when Paris focused on developing Europe, strengthening the relationship with neighbouring countries and gave the priority to Africa in their diplomatic policies. However, in the context where the Asia-Pacific including Southeast Asia, an inseparable component, has become the centre and motive for the development of the world economy. Most of the world powers, notably the United States of America, have pivoted to this area. That is the reason Paris has changed their perspective and started making the plan of pivoting to Asia in 2012. Southeast Asia has been considered as an indispensable link in this whole policy. French pivoting policy-making based on the national benefits in Asia due to a powerful development of this area within the economy, trade, political connection, and the world gradual influence. The focus of France’s pivoting policy does not include the restructuring of military force in this area but relates to the economy and diplomatic activities.

Keywords: Southeast Asia, France, President François Hollande, pivoting policy.

The situation of Southeast Asia in the Current international political complexion

International security after the cold war has witnessed great mutations. Dialogue has replaced confrontation and military race. However, international political complexion has not been stable yet. It even tends to be complicated and diversified. The possibility of a world war has been driven back but the conflict of ethnicity, religion, and terrorism still happens in many places in the world. Today, the Asia Pacific has seen alternatively the competition and cooperation in which the USA and China fight over their influence in this region. Besides, this region faces many challenges in security such as the existence of hot spots in the straits of Taiwan, the Northeast Asia,

South China Sea, the Strait of Malaca, etc. and other complicated and insolvable troubles such as potential conflicts due to territorial, ethnic and religious disputes; internal political instability in each country, terrorism, pirates, weapons, and drug smuggling and illegal migration. In recent decades, the Asia-Pacific has risen up as the main global growth motive with the strength of the economy and strategic position and influential role to the global balance in terms of the environment, military affairs and politics. The 21st century is forecasted as a “Century of the Asia-Pacific” [1]. Such changes of the world and regional situation are factors directly impacting Southeast Asia. It is the first time in history after the Second World War, there have not been conflicts, nor for-

foreign military occupation in Southeast Asia. Countries in the same region are coming closer together and cooperating with each other to make Southeast Asia a peaceful, independent, stable and developed region. In some recent decades, Southeast Asia has developed strongly in both commercial economy and political cooperation. Notably, the foundation of ASEAN and the official establishment of three great pillars including political-security community, economic community and cultural-social community on December 31st, 2015 marked the unification process of ASEAN, created a firm foundation for the coming development steps, and improved the position of Southeast Asia in the world. Any country which establishes a close relationship with this region and strengthens its influence in this region, it better assures its position in the world order. That is the reason why, all powers speed up the implementation of the strategies in this region, which offers both opportunities and challenges in security. In this context, France has carried out Asia pivoting policy since 2012, in which Southeast Asia is an important pillar.

The article studies Asia pivoting policy of France implemented under the former president François Hollande. This policy clearly indicated that the position of Southeast Asia would be one of the essential issues in the French diplomatic scenarios. The analysis of French benefits in this region clarified the cornerstone of policymaking. The article also illustrates the process of policy implementation in Southeast Asia focusing on economy, diplomacy, security and national defense. The article additionally figures out the prospect assessment of the succession of this policy in an overall diplomatic policy of France under the president Emmanuel Macron.

Benefits of France in southeast Asia

During a long period after the Second World War, France paid less attention to Asia and considered this region as a remote area which had a slight link to their national benefits. However, in the period where geopolitics and a cutthroat power transfer in the Asia-Pacific are dominant issues making the

face of the world, Paris should restate the benefits of France when strengthening cooperation with Asia in general and Southeast Asia, in particular, to make a more suitable diplomatic policy. This point was clearly stated in the speech by the French minister of Foreign Affairs Laurent Fabius in the headquarter of ASEAN in August 2013 “The French government decided to focus on Asia, especially on Southeast Asia”. The adjustment of this strategy is an important pillar in the French diplomatic policy under the former president François Hollande. This strategy was defined through the benefits of France in this region.

Geostrategy and national security

Southeast Asia is located in the southeastern continent of Asia – Europe, including Southeast Asian mainland and island with an area of about 4.5 million km² with 11 countries: Brunei, Cambodia, Timor-Leste, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.

Southeast Asia has an important strategic position for France because it stretches marine navigations between the Pacific and The Indian Ocean, controlling most of the world's energy trade and transport activities going through this area. This is a vital arterial pathway for Pacific coastal countries and continents. Most of the oil imported by many East Asian countries comes from the Gulf and must go through Southeast Asia. Geographical researchers still call this area “ventilation duct”, “crossroads” or “bridge” of important traffic in the world. In particular, Southeast Asia is a bridge between two large oceans, the Pacific and The Indian Ocean, and also a bridge between Asia, Europe and Oceania.

Southeast Asian countries cover almost the entire perimeter of the South China Sea with a total coastline of about 130.000 km. The South China Sea is controlled by seven straits to ensure an intersection between Asia and Oceania and is the only sea linking the Pacific and the The Indian Ocean (The Strait of Malacca between the Malay Peninsula and Sumatra island of Indonesia, connecting the Andaman Sea, bordering the Indian Ocean, to the South China Sea;

Macassar Strait connects the sea of Celebes and the Java Sea, separating Borneo west of Sulawesi to the East; Taiwan Strait between Taiwan and the continent; The Sunda Strait separates the islands of Java and Sumatra of Indonesia; The Lombok Strait connects the Java and Indian Ocean, dividing the Indonesian islands from Bali and Lombok; The Balabac Strait connects the Sulu Sea with the South China Sea, separating Balabac Island in the Philippines from the northern Borneo islands, in the state of Sabah in Malaysia; Luzon Strait separates the Philippines and Taiwan). Through decades of history, the South China Sea has always been considered as an essential way of transporting oil and commercial resources from the Middle East and Southeast Asia to Japan, South Korea, and China. More than 90% of the world's commercial transport is carried out by sea and 45% of them must go through the South China Sea. The amount of oil and liquefied petroleum gas transported through this sea is 15 times greater than that of the Panama Canal. Every year, about 70% of the volume of imported oil and about 45% of the volume of Japanese exports are transported through the South China Sea; 70% of imported oil and 60% of China's imports and exports are transported by sea through the South China Sea. Therefore, this sea is very important for all countries in and outside the region in terms of geostrategy, security, maritime and economic transport.

As a country that controls many territories in both the The Indian Ocean and the South Pacific, it means that France is also a power in the Asia-Pacific and the only European country to have direct benefits in the area. France needs to be assured of freedom to enter and exit this area. Therefore, strengthening the presence in Southeast Asia is Paris' inevitable choice.

With 1.6 million citizens living in the overseas territories of France such as Mayotte and La Réunion in the The Indian Ocean or New Caledonia, Polynesia, Clipperton and Wallis, and Futuna Islands in the Pacific Ocean, all constitute the world second largest economic privilege area with about 9 million square kilometers (after the US), all administrations

in France also need to resolutely strive to protect the principles of maritime freedom in Southeast Asia, especially in the context where China's activities in the South China Sea are causing concern for the whole world. France has always maintained its standing sovereign defenses in its overseas territories, including 8,000 people with 72 experienced warships and support ships operating in tropical waters [4].

Economy

Southeast Asia is seen as a driving force in the global economy thanks to the positive growth prospects as well as the rapid recovery from the major financial and economic crisis of 1997. The good economic health of some emerging countries in this region contrasts with the slowdown in other regions. According to the International Monetary Fund, by 2020, Asia will account for more than 30% of the total global growth, of which ASEAN countries account for one third. Investment opportunities, free trade and open markets make the region a real attraction, explaining the new interest of French diplomacy in the region, which is promoted by the desire to develop an economic partnership for companies and France's own economic growth.

France needs Southeast Asia as a potential market to revive its still stagnant economy after the recession and sees ASEAN as an important economic partner in Asia pivoting policy. Today's prosperity in France – the sixth largest economy in the world – is also closely related to the dynamic development of Asia in general and Southeast Asia in particular. With a population of over 600 million people (about 9% of the world population), ASEAN is a big market with a high growth rate of 5–7%. In Southeast Asia, more than 1,500 French businesses are operating. The total French export turnover to ASEAN is equivalent to the export turnover to China. Apart from the European Union (EU) member states, ASEAN is France's third largest trading partner after the United States and China, ranking ahead of Japan. At least six Southeast Asian countries are on the list of about 45 priority countries and territories for French exports.

Southeast Asia clearly has an increasingly important position in the strategy of French businesses, contributing to boosting France's economic dynamism.

Southeast Asia during the implementation of Asia pivoting policy of France

Goals of Asia Pivoting Policy of France

Since the 1990s, French leaders have evaluated Asia as a top strategic challenge to overcome, with a series of official speeches and texts emphasizing the economic potential of this area. The presence of France in this area is no longer something new but still quite fuzzy. Since the mid-1990s, France has conducted high-level dialogues and established strategic partnerships with Japan (1995), with China (1997) and with India (1998). President Jacques Chirac signed a defense treaty with Singapore and Malaysia and by the time of President Nicholas Sarkozy France was closer to India despite the prolonged tension between this Asian country and China since 2008–2009 [3].

By the time he came to the power in 2012, President François Hollande showed a desire to establish a clearer and more diverse presence of France in the Asia-Pacific, despite having to compete directly with the US, the latter is pushing its strategy toward this region to limit China's influence. The French White Book on defense and national security in 2013 gave a priority to Asia and called on France to increase its engagement with the continent [5].

The basic goal of Asia pivoting policy of France is to find its strategic position in this area, in other words, the position of a France with a relevant role and to be heard. However, "pivoting to Asia is not a movement effect, but because France wants to be present in an area where the future world is being built" [2]. The idea of French pivoting is not the same as American "pivoting" or "rebalancing" policy implemented in the Asia-Pacific in 2011 under President Barack Obama. The focus of "pivoting" of France is not accompanied by military restructuring in the region but mainly on economic and diplomatic activities. Specifically, the French pivoting policy focuses on solving two main issues: the first is to find new commercial markets, the

second is to diversify and deepen strategic partnerships in the Asia-Pacific region.

Policy implementation measures in Southeast Asia

Firstly, on diplomatic strategy: Building a high-level Asian strategy accompanied by the development of the concept of The Indian Ocean – Pacific; Increasing the frequency of official political-military visits to Southeast Asian countries; Strengthening strategic partnerships with Singapore, Indonesia, Vietnam and working towards strategic partnership with Malaysia and expanding relationships with potential countries such as Thailand and the Philippines; Strengthening involvement in regional institutions by fully participating in forums and organizations such as ASEAN, APEC, EAS ... and playing an active role in developing the agenda of these forums.

Secondly, on security and defense: Strengthening the military presence in the region, on the one hand, to modernize military relations with the strategic partner Singapore, to ensure the presence of trusted military equipment in the region with a naval, transportation and logistics support point located in Singapore, on the other hand to seek to strengthen the presence of the French Navy in other countries in Southeast Asia with the deployment of modern destroyers; Maintaining the presence of the French Defense Minister in the Shangri-La annual dialogue in Singapore; Expanding cooperation with naval forces of Southeast Asian countries (in the field of anti-terrorism, disaster prevention, officer exchange, exercise ...); Proposing annual consultations on maritime safety and freedom of marine navigation in the The Indian Ocean-Pacific on international forums; Actively participating in regional security forums, strengthening defense cooperation and promoting arms supplying contracts.

Thirdly, on economy: Improving the overall trade impact of Paris in the region facing a strong emerging China by expanding relations, trade and investment to the region through APEC, G20 and new generation free trade agreements to promote market opening, reduce trade barriers, enhance transparency

and implement fair trade commitments; Making the “green economy” become a spearhead in Southeast Asia. Fourthly, promoting the role of member countries of Francophonie (French Speaking Community) in Southeast Asia to enhance cultural and people exchanges.

The imprint of the process of implementing the pivoting policy in Southeast Asia under President François Hollande

The focus on “pivoting” is primarily on economic and diplomatic activities, and political and security aspects are also noted.

Southeast Asia – French prioritized economic partner

Faced with economic dynamism and the strong rise of Southeast Asian nations, France must reform its economic policy for the whole region. The result of this reform is the movement to commit to diversify French foreign policy in Asia and reaffirm French influence on a global scale. Based on this point of view, France continues to develop bilateral relations with traditional partners in Southeast Asia such as Singapore, Vietnam, and Indonesia. In addition, France is exploring new markets and investment potentials in emerging economies like the Philippines, Malaysia, and Thailand.

According to data from the French Treasury, ASEAN is its second largest trading partner in Asia, with a two-way trade turnover of nearly 31 billion EUR in 2017, an increase of 5.9% over the previous year. French exports to the region increased slightly, reaching 3.7% while imports grew stronger, to 8.1%. In that overall picture, France’s market share in the region reached about 1.6%. Although this rate is not high, it is almost stable in the last 10 years. This is a relatively positive trend compared to other markets, France’s market share tends to decrease. In 2016, French exports to Thailand increased by 33%, to Malaysia by 23%, to Singapore by 10%, to Vietnam by 7.9%, to Myanmar by 5.1%, and figures showed that the product originated from the country of “Gaulois Rooster” is quite well received in the main markets.

French foreign investment into Southeast Asia is also quite large. By 2017, French direct investment to

ASEAN reached about 16 billion EUR, the third largest level after French investment to China and Japan.

France must be present economically everywhere and make the most of its leverage in every Southeast Asian country. Vietnam, for example, is partnering in high-tech sciences and in admitting more students to study in France; Singapore and Malaysia are French partners in defense equipment and technology transfer.

According to the Singapore Ambassador in France, Zainal Arif Mantaha, the steady rise of the middle class in Southeast Asian countries, is forecasted to quadruple up to 2030. This will be a huge opportunity for French businesses which have strengths in areas such as services, aviation industry, luxury goods or food industry. ASEAN is ready for new opportunities, especially in the area of creative economy and digital economy.

According to Joffrey Célestin-Urbain, the Deputy Director in charge of bilateral relations of the French Treasury, infrastructure or climate change are the areas of investment of which France has a great advantage in the region. In Southeast Asian countries, the demand for capital infrastructure construction is huge. The Asian Development Bank estimates that the region needs about US \$3,150 billion in investment in this area between 2016 and 2030, i.e. about US \$200 billion per year, equivalent to 5% of the region’s GDP.

As for climate change, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has released an economic report on the status of climate change in Southeast Asia in 2015 and affirmed that Southeast Asia is particularly vulnerable to climate change because people densely live on the coast. Up to 4 countries in the region are among the most vulnerable countries. In the next few years, countries will have to invest about \$200 billion to adapt to climate change.

Enlisting ASEAN’s dynamic development has become a concern and a key development strategy of French businesses, including many activities to promote the advertisement of French technology and products to Southeast Asia, improving the competi-

tiveness of France in areas where goods from countries such as Japan, Korea, China ... are prevailing. The seminar with the theme “ASEAN – a big market towards the creative economy” held in 2018 in Paris the French Senate in the coordination with Business France is one of those activities.

Diplomatic activities

Southeast Asia's position in Asia pivoting policy is reflected in the fact that France advocates maintaining high-level meetings with ASEAN on global economic and geopolitical issues, maintaining its presence of the Minister of Defense at the Shangri-La Dialogue and strengthening diplomatic activities with ASEAN and resources for the French Mission in ASEAN.

From the first months of François Hollande's five-year presidency, specifically from May 2012 to November 2013, 33 state visits to Asia took place, while this number was only 13 in the previous two years. The first Southeast Asian country that the French president chose at the beginning of his presidency was Laos. During five years in power, President Hollande traveled to the Philippines (2015), and Vietnam (2016). One month before leaving the Elysée Palace, the French president made the last trip as head of state to three Southeast Asian countries namely Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia, from March 26–30, 2017.

In Paris, Mr. Hollande received leaders from countries like Thailand and Myanmar. Dozens of bilateral dialogues by President François Hollande with the leaders of Southeast Asian countries have helped Paris expand its influence and create a solid foundation in its relationship with the region.

Not only did he personally go to Southeast Asia but President Hollande also mobilized the government, headed by Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault, then Prime Minister Manuel Valls, standing side by side with him in this effort. His two prime ministers have been the most senior leaders of France since the late 1980s visiting Thailand.

In addition to visiting or regulating the most senior government envoys to Southeast Asia, President

Hollande also took advantage of a team of French diplomats around the world and embassies to expand Paris' Asia pivoting policy.

Economy, strategy, and environment are always the driving forces of the French missions or diplomatic contacts. The diplomatic campaign to serve the purpose of the environment is also a new direction that President Hollande has outlined. In preparation for the summit against climate change Paris-COP 21, in the Philippines, in February 2015, the head of France launched the “Call from Manila”.

Culture and people exchange

This is also the field that is creating the mark in the “pivoting” of France to Asia. Never before have French interested in Asia in general and Southeast Asia in particular as much now as the French communities in Asia are the fastest growing communities in the world. Currently the number of French people living in Asia accounts for nearly 9% of the French population abroad. In Southeast Asia, the two most populous French countries are Indonesia and Thailand.

The number of French students at Asian universities is increasing, while Asian students (especially Chinese, Korean or Vietnamese) currently studying in France have reached 50,000.

Many Southeast Asian countries such as Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, are members of the Francophone community and become “bridges” linking culture, language, education, etc. between France and the ASEAN region in particular and Asia in general.

Security-national defense

France's Asia pivoting policy is not only promoted by diplomatic activities and economic cooperation but also by security and national defense strategy. In his speech at the ASEAN Headquarters in Jakarta on August 2, 2013, former French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius affirmed, “It is impossible to have France's Asia pivoting policy without ASEAN. This policy cannot be restricted to the Delhi-Beijing-Tokyo strategic triangle”. The 2013 French White Paper on Defense and National Security pointed out that “France participates in defense and security

cooperation with many countries in the region such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam.”

So far, the security strategy implemented by France has been to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons and to focus on scaling up and increasing the military’s potential. However, France has re-established the problem of identifying a new regional and global security strategy, reflected in the document “France and Security in the Asia-Pacific” published in April 2014 [6] and updated in June 2016. This is a publication of the action plan in the field of French security and defense in the Asia-Pacific region. This document highlights two things: France strengthens its presence in the Asia-Pacific region because France’s benefits are directly related to this region; France must assert this fact and convince that it is a strategic choice.

A key point in France’s Asia pivoting policy is that President Hollande has found a balance between Paris’ partners. France not only cares about developing economies like China and Japan but also small partners in the region. France was the first European country to join the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) in Southeast Asia in 2007 [4]. In this area, France has a close relationship with four countries: Singapore, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Malaysia. The French defense-security policy for Southeast Asia has been planned based on the division of three specific groups of countries such as:

Firstly, the political top priority countries for which France performs all levels of partnerships (political and economic dialogue, political-military exchanges, defense cooperation) include Malaysia and Singapore.

Secondly, the countries are identified roughly equivalent to the priority group including Indonesia and Vietnam.

Thirdly, countries with weak cooperation which France must make a commitment to support relations with such as the Philippines, Myanmar, and Thailand.

France implements its political commitment to the region through its active presence, the develop-

ment of strategic partnerships and the strengthening of security cooperation networks. French Defense Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian twice performed the Shangri-La Dialogue Security in Singapore and spoke about the South China Sea. Mr. Le Drian has set up a dialogue framework every 2 years with defense ministers in the South Pacific region. Especially, his last attendance in this security forum in June 2016, Mr. Le Drian announced the intention of France to cooperate with EU countries to implement the Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs) in the South China Sea aiming to protect “order based on international law”. For two consecutive years from 2016–2017, the group of assault landing craft *Jeanne d’Arc* (The *Jeanne d’Arc* campaign aims to strengthen international cooperation and practical combat training for 131 officers involved in the course – including officers from allies – and facilitate student’s active participation in group activities. The four main objectives of the campaign are: deployment of military forces in strategic areas, international cooperation, diplomatic relations support, and practical combat training for the officers involved in the course), including the fleet of helicopter cruiser *Mistral – Courbet* and the French *Tonnerre* lander, visited ports of the countries with strategic partnerships with France in Southeast Asia like Vietnam and Singapore.

One problem that France is also concerned about when implementing a security-defense strategy in its Asia pivoting policy is defense equipment, focusing on basic issues such as military equipment business, technology transfer and long-term support in the fields of training as well as logistics.

As the fifth largest weapon exporter in the world, France contributes to strengthening the defense of Asian countries with gradually increased sales of defense equipment to this region (28% in the period of 2008–2012, compared with 12% in the period of 1998–2002). Southeast Asia is a major consumer market for French defense equipment. About 40% of submarines sold to Southeast Asian countries are from France. France currently holds more than 50%

of Malaysia and Singapore's defense market, and in 2012, French companies won more than 800 million dollars in the sale of weapons equipment in Indonesia. In 2012–2013, Singapore is the fifth largest importer of weapons in the world, in which France is the second largest supplier after the US.

The inheritance of Asia pivoting policy under President Emmanuel Macron

Mr. Macron had played a key role in shaping foreign policy for Mr. Hollande in the period of 2012–2014, which focused on China and developed relationships with India, Japan, Korea, and ASEAN. Perhaps therefore, since the election campaign, Mr. Macron was thought to be more interested in the Asia-Pacific region than Ms. Le Pen. Mr. Macron also expressed prominence compared to Ms. Le Pen in foreign policy at the point of not taking China to represent the whole Asia-Pacific, but actually addressing other issues of this region.

As a former Minister of French Economy (2014–2016), Mr. Macron had his own assessment of advantages and disadvantages from the rise of China, India and Southeast Asia for France. He also called for the re-establishment of France's strategic presence in the Asia – Pacific within the framework of the European plan.

During more than a year in power, Emmanuel Macron has made a clear mark on politics with innovations in the diplomatic security strategy [8]. The key role of the Asia-Pacific region is also included in the French security strategy by Mr. Emmanuel Macron. France has increased the frequency of defense operations in the Pacific and The Indian Ocean since the beginning of 2018, while actively promoting defense cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region.

France's selection of this area to conduct a combat training program for naval officers of other countries is a clear testament to Paris' security strategy. As part of a series of recent activities with many Asian countries, the visit to Philippine port of the French battleship or the friendly visit of Dixmude helicopter carrier and the stealth frigate Surcouf to the ports of Vietnam and Singapore clearly stated ongoing development of defense relations between France and Southeast Asian countries, as well as France's role as a great power in the Indian-Pacific region.

It can be said that the continuation of the current defense policy as well as the support of Mr. Le Drian for Mr. Macron have shown that the importance of cooperation between France and the Asia-Pacific will be recognized and consolidated by Mr. Macron's administration.

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