

Security and defence in the Indo-Pacific: What is at stake for the EU and its strategy?



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IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

The EU published its 'Joint Communication on the EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific' on 16 September 2021. This Indo-Pacific Strategy lays out five crucial security issues in the region that directly affect the EU's own security and prosperity. These are maritime security, nuclear security and non-proliferation, cyber security, trafficking, and terrorism. In order to deal with these security issues, the EU has CSDP missions and the CSDP toolbox at its disposal. In fact, the long-standing Operation Atalanta in the Western Indian Ocean is an example of how CSDP missions can protect EU security interests in the Indo-Pacific. Meanwhile, PESCO, EPF, a more robust cyber policy, or the recently established Coordinated Maritime Presences are CSDP toolbox components that can also promote security interests in the region. In addition, the EU has a set of partnerships in the Indo-Pacific region that can enhance its power projection and, consequently, strengthen its security. Through a combination of all these tools, the EU can have a security and defence presence in a region where core interests are at stake.

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Table of content

1	Introduction	1
2	Looking back and ahead: The Indo-Pacific	3
2.1	Emergence and evolution of the concept	3
2.1.1	The Quad and the Indo-Pacific	6
3	Security challenges in the Indo-Pacific and their consequences for the EU and its Member States	7
3.1	Maritime domain	7
3.2	Cyber security	9
3.3	Organised crime	11
3.4	Counter-terrorism	12
3.5	Nuclear domain	13
3.6	Summary: Security consequences for the EU	14
4	The EU's Evolving Indo-Pacific Strategy: Contributing to addressing security challenges	15
4.1	Key points and EU Documents on the Indo-Pacific	15
4.1.1	Protecting an open, free, and rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific	16
4.1.2	Emphasis on maritime security	17
4.1.3	Working with ASEAN as the central security institution	17
4.1.4	Partnerships with Regional and Middle Powers	18
4.1.5	What's missing in the EU's evolving Indo-Pacific Strategy?	18
4.2	Comparison of EU Member States and the UK	20
4.2.1	France	20
4.2.2	Germany	21
4.2.3	The Netherlands	21
4.2.4	Other EU Member States	22
4.2.5	The United Kingdom	22
5	CSDP missions, toolbox, and security challenges in the Indo-Pacific	23
5.1	The role of CSDP missions and the CSDP toolbox	23
5.1.1	CSDP missions	23
5.1.2	The CSDP toolbox	24

5.2	Prospects for launching Coordinated Maritime Presences (CMP)	26
5.3	The potential response of countries in the region	27
6	Indo-Pacific partnerships and their role in enhancing the EU's security and defence	28
6.1	Potential role of partnerships in the region	28
6.2	Potential partnerships with extra-regional countries	30
7	Suggestions and proposals: How the EU should approach Indo-Pacific security challenges	32
7.1	Recommendations for short-term actions	32
7.2	Recommendations for long-term actions	34
	Interviews	35

1 Introduction

Since 2018, the EU has paid growing attention to the Indo-Pacific region. As the security, economic, and political centre of gravity seems to be moving towards the Indo-Pacific, the EU has developed and is starting to implement a strategy of its own, taking into consideration its own assets, the security risks within and from the region, and the partnerships it has with China, India, Japan, South Korea, and (since December 2020) the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). This strategy should allow the EU to become a more active security actor in the Indo-Pacific region, building on its own CSDP missions in the western Indian Ocean, and deepening links with several partners across the Indo-Pacific. The 'Council decision on an EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific' adopted by the EU Council on 19 April 2021 set out the EU's intention to reinforce its strategic focus, presence, and actions in the region.¹ The 'Joint Communication on the EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific', published on 16 September 2021, has given the EU a template to transform its interests in the region, and put its own assets into a substantial strategy to enhance its security role across the Indo-Pacific and defend EU security interests in relation to it.² This is part of the 'Geopolitical Commission' led by President Ursula von der Leyen.³ The EU's Indo-Pacific strategy is a geopolitical document,⁴ in response to 'geopolitical dynamics in the Indo-Pacific'.⁵

This in-depth analysis (IDA) is a forward-looking analysis addressing the potential role of CSDP, including (but not solely) missions and operations in the Indo-Pacific. This includes CSDP's current involvement in other parts of the region (besides the western area), as well as in all dimensions of security (maritime, cyber, disinformation, and terrorism, among others). The scope of the IDA, in any case, is solely in security and defence.

The first objective of this IDA is to analyse the major security challenges and threats affecting the Indo-Pacific, including the actors involved in it, and to evaluate the different consequences that these have or may have on the security of the EU, its Member States, and its interests and policy in the region. Areas to be analysed include maritime security, cyber disinformation, counter-terrorism, nuclear/disarmament, and broader military developments in the region. Taking a thematic approach, this analysis will explore security threats posed by both state and non-state actors. Special emphasis will be put on the threat coming from China and Russia as two major powers in the region, but also from other states, such as North Korea. In addition, the assignment will also look at the threat coming from non-state actors, including terrorist groups, pirates, criminal networks, and cyber criminals. This analysis will also lay out the degree to which each of these threats affect the EU and its Member States, both in the EU itself, as well as in relation to their presence and interests in the region.

The second objective of this IDA is to provide a detailed analysis of the April 'Council decisions on an EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific' and the September 'Joint Communication on cooperation in the Indo-Pacific', with special emphasis on the latter. This analysis will be guided by the following questions:

- How can the EU strategy and its implementation modalities contribute to addressing the security challenges in the region?
- Is the EU strategy ambitious enough (or not)?

¹ Council of the European Union (2021), Council conclusions on an EU Strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, 16 April 2021, available at: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7914-2021-INIT/en/pdf>.

² European Commission (2021), The EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, 16 September 2021, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/jointcommunication_indo_pacific_en.pdf.

³ European Commission (2021), The von der Leyen: for a Union that strives for more, 10 September 2019, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/ov/SPEECH_21_4701.

⁴ Interview with EEAS official, 5 October 2021, 5pm; interview with EEAS official, 8 October 2021, 10.30am.

⁵ European Commission (2021), The EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.

- What role does the strategy envision in terms of the CSDP toolbox?
- Does the strategy offer concrete proposals for its implementation? What hurdles could the strategy face in its implementation?
- What is missing/not mentioned in the strategy?
- Is the question of China's growing assertiveness in the region addressed?
- What about Russia and its role in the region?

This IDA includes analysis of the Indo-Pacific strategies of France, Germany, and the Netherlands, noting the similarities and differences with the EU's own strategy, as well as addressing how any differences could be reconciled. It also includes analysis of bilateral relations between the EU and its strategic partners in the region (including particular security dialogues), noting how existing partnerships and discussions with India, Japan, and South Korea could support the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy, and how to address growing divergences with China in the context of the existing partnership and security dialogue.

The third objective of this IDA is to briefly analyse current CSDP missions and operations in the western parts of the Indo-Pacific region and their impact, both positive and negative. This will lead to a more detailed inquiry into the role the CSDP toolbox can play in the whole region, which will be guided by the following questions:

- What tools from the CSDP toolbox can be used in the region or in complementarity to one another?
- Given that some Member States already have established security and defence cooperation initiatives in the region, what is the added value of EU involvement, and could the EU bring together these ad-hoc initiatives?
- What prospects are there for launching Coordinated Maritime Presences (CMPs) in the Indo-Pacific?
- To what extent would countries in the Indo-Pacific region welcome more EU CSDP involvement, including via CSDP missions and operations?
- What gains and risks, especially with regard to its relationship with China, could the EU obtain or face by deploying its CSDP tools in the region?

As such, the third objective builds on the first objective.

The fourth objective of this IDA is to analyse how the EU can combine its partnerships in the region with CSDP missions and operations. This analysis will be guided by the following questions:

- How can security and defence partnerships with countries and regional organisations be increased?
- In particular, how can greater participation with regional partners in CSDP missions and operations (including Operation Atalanta and EU counter-piracy operations in Asian countries) be increased?⁶
- How does the UK's Brexit status impact cooperation between Brussels and London in this particular area?
- In light of strong US security presence in the region, how does the EU plan to cooperate with the United States without losing sight of its own goals and interests?
- What cooperation is envisioned between the EU and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) in this area?

⁶ Operation Atalanta was formally European Union Naval Force (EU NAVFOR) Somalia.

This analysis will advance concrete proposals for ways in which the CSDP could get involved in the Indo-Pacific region at all levels (e.g. political, financial, operational, human). This section will also include analysis of how the CMP concept could contribute to addressing existing security challenges in the region.

Finally, this IDA offers concrete and detailed suggestions for the EU approach to security and defence challenges in the Indo-Pacific, and more specifically for every CSDP actor involved (e.g. the Council of Europe, European External Action Service (EEAS), European Defence Agency (EDA), European Commission (EC), and European Parliament). These proposals will be based on the complete CSDP toolbox and are realistic, but there are also innovative proposals for better use of existing tools. This will be supplemented with suggestions for how the European Parliament (EP) can contribute to implementing the CSDP in the Indo-Pacific region, considering the variety of tools at its disposal.

In the IDA, we use desk research to analyse major security challenges in the region; the role of the Council decisions on an EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific and, especially, the Joint Communication on cooperation in the Indo-Pacific in addressing these challenges; the current and potential role of the CSDP toolbox in relation to the EU's strategy to address these challenges; and the role of partnerships in these areas of security and defence. The desk research involved a critical examination of official documents issued by the EU, Member States, and governments in, or with an interest in, the Indo-Pacific, as well as high-quality analyses available from established academic institutions and think tanks. In addition, the authors undertook three remote interviews with key policy-makers involved in the formulation and implementation of the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy. The interviews focused on open-ended questions to allow them to communicate their areas of expertise and interests in relation to the Indo-Pacific.

Overall, this IDA explores the extent to which the EU has a well-defined Indo-Pacific strategy, highlighting and narrowing down the areas of security and defence it should be focusing on. However, the EU is a relative newcomer to security debates and developments in the Indo-Pacific region. Thus, it should now make use of its CSDP missions and toolbox, new projects (such as ESIWA),⁷ and partnerships – especially with Australia, India, Japan, South Korea, and the United States – to become an active security player in the Indo-Pacific.

2 Looking back and ahead: The Indo-Pacific

The term Indo-Pacific has gained traction in a relatively short period of time as a geopolitical and security construct, replacing the term Asia-Pacific, which dominated discussions from the 1990s.⁸ The term Asia-Pacific itself had come to replace the older notion of the Pacific Rim, which was common in the 1980s. All these constructs have the Pacific Ocean element in common. The novelty of the term Indo-Pacific, therefore, is the inclusion of the Indian Ocean in a geopolitical and security area that spreads all the way from the western Indian Ocean to the shores of North America. It is a term that bridges the two oceans and the seas that dominate the geopolitics of Northeast, Southeast, and South Asia.

2.1 Emergence and evolution of the concept

The modern origins of the use of the term Indo-Pacific to refer to a new geopolitical and security region can be traced back to Gurpreet S. Khurana, a captain in the Indian Navy, and his January 2007 paper 'Security of Sea Lanes: Prospects for India-Japan Cooperation'.⁹ The paper was published in the context of the economic centre of gravity shifting towards Asia, which is underpinned by the Indian and Pacific oceans

⁷ ESIWA is the European Union project for Enhancing Security Cooperation In and With Asia.

⁸ It should be noted that Asia-Pacific continues to be much more widely used as an economic and geoeconomic construct.

⁹ Khurana, G. S. (2007), 'Security of Sea Lanes: Prospects for India-Japan Cooperation', *Strategic Analysis* 31:1, pp. 139-153.

as key trade routes; the links between East Asian economies and the natural resources of West Asia and Africa; new security challenges; the growing importance of India; and, crucially, the perception of China's growing assertiveness.¹⁰ Captain Khurana's paper was published following joint strategic assessments between Indian and Japanese analysts.¹¹

Shortly after its publication in August 2007, the term was picked up by Japan's Prime Minister Abe Shinzo in an address he delivered to the Indian Parliament. During the address, Prime Minister Abe talked about the 'confluence of the two seas of the Indian and Pacific oceans', labelling a 'broader Asia' with expanded borders and linking the concept to the coupling of 'freedom and prosperity'.¹² Prime Minister Abe resigned one month later, however, and the term fell into disuse. United States (US) Secretary of State Hillary Clinton wrote about the Indo-Pacific when discussing the US's 'pivot to Asia' in October 2011.¹³ Australia then became the first country to officially adopt the term Indo-Pacific as a core component of its security and foreign policy. In October 2012, the Australian government published the white paper 'Australia in the Asian Century'. In the paper, it was observed that Asia's economic rise was making the Indian Ocean the 'busiest and most strategically significant trade corridor', which was leading to the 'western Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean' becoming 'one strategic arc'.¹⁴ In subsequent years, India also embraced the term Indo-Pacific, while in the US a discussion developed around the concept 'Indo-Asia-Pacific'.¹⁵ Japan also did once Abe was re-elected as Prime Minister.¹⁶ In the case of the US, it was Admiral Harry Harris who began to promote the idea of an Indo-Asia-Pacific geopolitical construct upon taking over the United States Pacific Command (USPACOM) in May 2015.¹⁷ However, the Barack Obama administration in power at the time rejected the new concept.¹⁸

When Donald Trump was inaugurated as US president in January 2017, the US embraced the Indo-Pacific construct. In November 2017, US President Donald Trump presented the US's 'vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific' at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit held in Vietnam. Both 'prosperity' and 'security' were highlighted, with President Trump focusing on a 'peaceful, prosperous, and free Indo-Pacific'.¹⁹ One month later, in December, the US published its new National Security Strategy. In a section of the strategy devoted to the Indo-Pacific, the US states that 'a geopolitical competition between free and repressive visions of world order is taking place in the Indo-Pacific region', which is identified as 'stretching from the west coast of India to the shores of the US'. In May 2018, the name of the United States Pacific Command (USPACOM) changed to the United States Indo-Pacific Command.²⁰

Following the US's decision to make the Indo-Pacific a key element of its security and defence strategy, other countries followed suit. In November 2017, South Korean President Moon Jae-in had already agreed

¹⁰ Kuo, M. A. (2018), 'The Origin of 'Indo-Pacific' as Geopolitical Construct', *The Diplomat*, 25 January 2018.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Abe, S. (2007), 'Confluence of the Two Seas', 22 August 2007, available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/pmv0708/speech-2.html>.

¹³ Clinton, H. (2011), 'America's Pacific Century', *Foreign Affairs*, 11 October 2011.

¹⁴ Department of Defence of Australia (2013), Defence White Paper 2013, p. 74.

¹⁵ Ministry of Defence (Navy) of India (2015), Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy, pp. 2 and 18-19.

¹⁶ Abe, S. (2013), 'The Bounty of the Open Seas: Five New Principles of Japanese Diplomacy', 18 January 2013, available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/pm/abe/abe_0118e.html.

¹⁷ U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (2015), U.S. Command Change of Command as Delivered by Admiral Harry B. Harris, Jr., 29 May 2015, available at: <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/Speeches-Testimony/Article/590106/us-pacific-command-change-of-command-as-delivered-by-admiral-harry-b-harris-jr/>.

¹⁸ Detsch, J. (2021), 'How the U.S. Learned to Stop Worrying about the Pacific and Love the 'Indo-Pacific'', *Foreign Policy*, 30 July 2021.

¹⁹ U.S. Mission to ASEAN (2017), Remarks by President Trump at APEC CEO Summit | Da Nang, Vietnam, 11 November 2017, available at: <https://asean.usmission.gov/remarks-president-trump-apec-ceo-summit-da-nang-vietnam/>.

²⁰ U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (2021), USINDOPACOM Area of Responsibility, available at: <https://www.pacom.mil/About-USINDOPACOM/USPACOM-Area-of-Responsibility/>.

that the US-South Korea alliance was ‘a linchpin for security, stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific’. Meanwhile, in May 2018, French President Emmanuel Macron set out the principles of France’s Indo-Pacific strategy.²¹ In May 2019, France issued an updated strategy for the region,²² to be updated again in 2020 and 2021. Meanwhile, in June 2019 ASEAN adopted its ‘ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific’.²³ Germany then adopted its own ‘Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific’ in September 2020,²⁴ with the Netherlands following suit in November 2020 with ‘Indo-Pacific: Guidelines for Strengthening Dutch and EU Cooperation with Partners in Asia’.²⁵ These strategies certainly differ from each other, but there are three commonalities:

1. Security and economics are acknowledged as being very closely linked in the Indo-Pacific region.²⁶
2. In contrast to the Trump administration’s strategy, China is not treated (exclusively) as a threat (at least explicitly).
3. The waters of the Indo-Pacific and Southeast Asia are treated as central to the region (the Dutch, French, and German strategies are discussed in more detail in section 3).

The Biden administration took office in January 2021. Very quickly it became clear that the Indo-Pacific construct would remain central to US foreign, security, and defence policy. The Biden administration moved away from the Trump administration’s openly and explicitly confrontational approach in its Indo-Pacific strategy, putting values front and centre. It aimed to support security, diplomatic, and economic cooperation with US allies and partners in the region. Thus, the Quad held its first-ever leaders’ meeting and issued a joint statement in March 2021. In it, the leaders called for a ‘free and open Indo-Pacific’ that is ‘open, inclusive, healthy, anchored by democratic values, and unconstrained by coercion’. The leaders also committed ‘to promoting a free, open rules-based order, rooted in international law, to advance security and prosperity and counter threats to both the Indo-Pacific and beyond’. The leaders also specifically included health and maritime issues as security issues.²⁷

Japan and South Korea signed up to President Biden’s Indo-Pacific strategy during summits that the president held with Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide and President Moon in April 2021 and May 2021, respectively.²⁸ The Carbis Bay G7 Summit Communiqué of June 2021 made reference to the Indo-Pacific,²⁹ while the NATO Brussels Summit Communiqué referred to both the threat coming from China and cooperation with ‘Asia-Pacific partners’ Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea.³⁰ In short, multiple US partners have now vowed to cooperate with the Biden administration on its Indo-Pacific strategy.

²¹ Macron, F. (2018), Discours a Garden Island, base navale de Sydney, 3 May 2018, available at: <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2018/05/03/discours-a-garden-island-base-navale-de-sydney>.

²² Ministry of Armed Forces of France (2018), France and Security in the Indo-Pacific.

²³ ASEAN (2019), ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific.

²⁴ Federal Foreign Office of Germany (2020), Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific.

²⁵ Government of the Netherlands (2020), Indo-Pacific: Guidelines for strengthening Dutch and EU cooperation with partners in Asia.

²⁶ The remit of this IDA is CSDP, but a broader interpretation of security would include areas such as connectivity, security of supply chains, or technology cooperation.

²⁷ The White House (2021), Quad Leaders’ Joint Statement: ‘The Spirit of the Quad’, 12 March 2021, available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/03/12/quad-leaders-joint-statement-the-spirit-of-the-quad/>.

²⁸ The White House (2021), U.S.-Japan Joint Leaders’ Statement: ‘U.S.-Japan Global Partnership for a New Era’, 16 April 2021 available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/04/16/u-s-japan-joint-leaders-statement-u-s-japan-global-partnership-for-a-new-era/>, The White House (2021), U.S.-ROK Leaders’ Joint Statement, 21 May 2021, available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/05/21/u-s-rok-leaders-joint-statement/>.

²⁹ G7 (2021), Carbis Bay G7 Joint Communiqué, 13 June 2021, available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/50361/carbis-bay-g7-summit-communication.pdf>.

³⁰ NATO (2021), Brussels Joint Communiqué, 14 June 2021, available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_185000.htm.

2.1.1 The Quad and the Indo-Pacific

The Quad is considered to be the main emerging security architecture in the Indo-Pacific, even if recently it seems to be moving away from 'hard' security matters to focus on 'soft' issues. It involves four members: Australia, India, Japan, and the US. The origins of the Quad can be traced back to the December 2004 earthquake and subsequent tsunami in the Indian Ocean. The four countries and their militaries coordinated their relief efforts, prompting talk of launching the Quad as a more permanent forum to discuss cooperation. Japan sought to maintain the momentum behind the group, especially during 2007 under the Abe premiership, but differences among members resulted in the breakup of the group.³¹

The Quad was revived after President Trump took office. Foreign Ministry officials from the four countries met in November 2017, at the sidelines of the ASEAN summit in the Philippines. As of November 2021, Quad senior officials have met a total of eight times.³² Quad foreign ministers have also met three times, the last one in February 2021,³³ while Quad leaders met at their March 2021 summit. Quad countries have also held joint exercises and freedom of navigation operations.³⁴

Recognising the limitations of the Quad format, in March 2020 the US convened a meeting of a so-called 'Quad-plus', which also included New Zealand, South Korea, and Taiwan, to discuss joint responses to and cooperation on the COVID-19 pandemic.³⁵ The Quad-plus countries have been holding regular meetings since then, and there have also been suggestions that an expanded Quad or Quad-plus could also include countries such as Canada, France, or the UK.³⁶

³¹ D'Ambrogio, E. (2021), The Quad: An emerging multilateral security framework for democracies in the Indo-Pacific, European Parliamentary Research Service, March 2021, pp. 3-4.

³² Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Australia (2021), Quad, available at: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/international-relations/regional-architecture/quad>.

³³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of India (2021), 3rd India-Australia-Japan-USA Quad Ministerial Meeting, 18 February 2021, available at: https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/33540/3rd_IndiaAustraliaJapanUSA_Quad_Ministerial_Meeting

³⁴ D'Ambrogio, op. cit., p. 5.

³⁵ Rajagopalan, R. P. (2020), Towards a quad-plus arrangement, 7 May 2020, available at: <https://www.orfonline.org/research/towards-a-quad-plus-arrangement-65674/>.

³⁶ Kutty, S. N., and Basrur, J. (2021), 'The Quad: What It Is – And What It Is Not', *The Diplomat*, 24 March 2021.

3 Security challenges in the Indo-Pacific and their consequences for the EU and its Member States

Geopolitical competition is the dominant security feature of the Indo-Pacific. The increasingly strained relationship between the United States and a re-emergent China is at the centre of this competition. A major source of this is China's meteoric rise as a global economic and military power since the 1990s, and the direct tension this has created with previously uncontested US dominance in the Indo-Pacific.³⁷ The United States is not alone in its strategic discomfort – China's rise tests the comfort zones of regional powers like Australia, India, Japan, and South Korea. This competition between great and regional powers is reshaping the strategic landscape of the region, driving intense naval modernisation and combative behaviour at sea – particularly from China – as well as defensive arrangements, chief among these the Quad, and more recently, AUKUS. China³⁸ and Russia³⁹ consider the Indo-Pacific a hostile space and strategy that runs counter to their respective economic and security interests. Unresolved hotspots, old rivalries, and war-time trauma add further layers of complexity to this strategic landscape. These include North Korea's development of a nuclear bomb, the stability of the Korean Peninsula, the territorial integrity of Taiwan, and the problematic historical legacies of the Second World War and colonialism in the region.

What these factors mean today for security in the Indo-Pacific, and their consequences for the EU and its Member States, will be unpacked in this section. For clarity of analysis, five inter-related areas will be explored:

1. The maritime domain
2. Cyber security
3. Organised crime
4. Counter-terrorism
5. Nuclear/Disarmament

3.1 Maritime domain

Maritime security, especially safeguarding open access to sea lines of communication (SLOC), remains the dominant challenge in the Indo-Pacific. The SLOC waters (and continental shelf) of the Indo-Pacific are crucial to the smooth running and growth of the global economy and digital telecommunications via a vast network of undersea cables. The EU single market is particularly dependent on these SLOC, perhaps even more so than the US. Indeed, around 75 % of imported goods in Europe arrive by sea.⁴⁰ Wider debates within the EU around 'open strategic autonomy' and the objective of reducing strategic dependence can also be connected to this issue. Whether you are in Manila or Madrid, any disruption in accessing and navigating these waters runs deep, impacting everyday life. As such, it constitutes the challenge that most directly affects the EU and its Member States.

³⁷ Russia appears content with China's counter to US power in the region, see: Artyom Lukin (2019), 'China in Russia's Turn to the East', Asia Pacific Bulletin, No. 477, 6 May 2019, available at:

https://www.eastwestcenter.org/system/tdf/private/apb477_0.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=37135–

³⁸ Wu, S., and Colombage, J. (2019), 'Indo-Pacific Strategy and China's Response', ICAS, available at: <https://chinaus-icas.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Indo-Pacific-Strategy-and-Chinas-Response-Report-FINAL.pdf>.

³⁹ Melvin, N. (2021), Russia and the Indo-Pacific Security Concept, RUSI, available at: https://static.rusi.org/277_russia_ip.pdf.

⁴⁰ Fiott, D. (2021), 'Naval dazing? The Strategic Compass and the EU's maritime presence', EUISS Brief 16, July 2021, available at: https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Brief_16_2021.pdf

The security of the Indo-Pacific waters is hotly contested and increasingly crowded. Territorial and maritime disputes in the East and South China Seas have heightened in recent years.⁴¹ These disputes threaten access to international sea lanes and could potentially escalate into major military conflicts. Among claimants, Brunei, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam declare sovereignty over parts of the South China Sea, while Japan, South Korea, and China have claims in the East China Sea.⁴² Legal attempts to defend claims have been ignored – China’s dismissal of an international ruling in favour of the Philippines in 2016, for example. Indeed, at an ASEAN meeting at the time no explicit reference was made to the ruling, with some members preferring to view the ruling as a bilateral rather than region-wide matter. In general, since the late 2000s, China’s behaviour at sea has been increasingly combative, including (among others) clashes with the USS Impeccable in 2009, increased tension over the South China Sea and maritime disputes with Japan and South Korea, including the announcement of an Air Defense Identification Zone in the East China Sea in November 2013. For some, this shift in behaviour is seen as indicative of over-confidence on the international stage due to China’s relatively strong global economic position and insecurity at home. From China’s perspective, however, since 2011 there has been a growing sense that its neighbourhood has become more threatening, with the Obama administration’s so-called ‘pivot’ or ‘rebalancing’ towards the Asia-Pacific,⁴³ and more recently the promotion of the Indo Pacific under Trump, and now Biden.

The Indian Ocean contains fewer disputes, but as part of its massive Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China has negotiated and secured access to commercial ports across the Indian Ocean and beyond, including in Gwadar (Pakistan), Koh Kong (Cambodia), and Hambantota (Sri Lanka). The Chinese Army Support base in Djibouti, established in 2016, is another example of Chinese maritime capabilities going global. These Chinese investments are explicitly commercial or logistical on paper but have latent strategic value as dual-use outposts in times of crisis or war. In other words, they could be converted (with varying degrees of difficulty) into military bases, expanding the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) Navy’s ability to project power overseas. The Indian (and US) strategic community have made plain these security concerns, labelling the Chinese access to ports along the Indian Ocean a ‘string of pearls’ intended to counter Indian influence.⁴⁴ India’s wider ‘Look East’ towards Southeast and Northeast Asia, and the participation of the Indian navy in Exercise Malabar in June 2018 with Japan and the United States, are testament to these concerns.⁴⁵

The crowded waters of the Indo-Pacific are a telling sign that navies are not simply seeking access, but also control over resources and the ability to protect and project their military power. Many states in the Indo-Pacific are actively modernising their naval forces, including Chinese and Indian development of nuclear powered, and nuclear-armed, submarines.⁴⁶ Even Australia, North Korea, and Pakistan are developing (at a slower pace) increasingly offensive naval capabilities. Of these, China stands out for sheer scale and

⁴¹ EU Parliament Briefing, Sino-Japanese controversy over the Senkaku/Diaoyu/Diaoyutai Islands An imminent flashpoint in the Indo-Pacific? (2021) available at:

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/696183/EPRS_BRI\(2021\)696183_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/696183/EPRS_BRI(2021)696183_EN.pdf).

⁴² An excellent map showing these claims in the Indo-Pacific can be found in the Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative at CSIS, see <https://amti.csis.org/maritime-claims-map/>.

⁴³ Remarks by the President in State of the Union Address (2012), Washington DC, 24 January 2012, available at:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/01/24/remarks-president-state-union-address>; BBC (2011), ‘Barack Obama says Asia-Pacific is “top US priority”’, *BBC*, 17 November 2011.

⁴⁴ Dabas, M., ‘Here Is All You Should Know About ‘String Of Pearls’, China’s Policy To Encircle India, *India Times*, 23 June 2017. Yet how easy it would be for China to use these ports for military purposes is contested. See available Klein, Natalie ‘A String of Fake Pearls? The Question of Chinese Port Access in the Indian Ocean’, *The Diplomat*, 25 October 2018, at:

<https://thediplomat.com/2018/10/a-string-of-fake-pearls-the-question-of-chinese-port-access-in-the-indian-ocean/>.

⁴⁵ Jaishankar D., ‘Acting East: India in the Indo-Pacific’, Brookings Institution, 2019 available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Acting-East-India-in-the-INDO-PACIFIC-.pdf>.

⁴⁶ Leveringhaus, N., (undated), ‘Nuclear Order at Sea: the Indo-Pacific’ in Patalano, A., and Russell, J., eds., *Maritime Strategy and Naval Innovation*, Georgetown University Press, forthcoming.

ambition. Once a coastal naval power, it is now a regional naval power, drawing from the PLA Navy, its Coastguard, and so-called 'maritime-militia'.⁴⁷ China has even controversially created artificial lands in the South China Sea to protect its growing assets and advance its claims of sovereignty.⁴⁸

In addition to the emerging navies of the Indo-Pacific, there are two established navies, belonging to the US and Russia, respectively. The US, despite the growing Chinese capabilities noted above, remains the dominant naval power in the Indo-Pacific. It has a huge military command, the USINDOPACOM,⁴⁹ to extend its reach and protect not just freedom of navigation, but also its allies and their interests in the region, specifically Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, and Australia. The US also has special security arrangements with Taiwan and Singapore.

None of the emerging navies in the Indo-Pacific directly and regularly talk to one another through military-to-military dialogues. Although the US and China have signed the Convention on the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea, there are no agreements like the 1971 Prevention of Incidents on and over the High Seas, which existed to regulate superpower behaviour at sea. Yet collisions between established navies can occur, as in 2009, when two nuclear armed submarines, the British HMS Vanguard and French Triomphant, collided in the Atlantic Ocean. More recently, in 2019, it was reported that a Chinese nuclear armed submarine had to surface in the South China Sea, near to a Vietnamese fishing boat, just off the Paracel Islands.

What does this all mean for the EU? The economic consequences of a major accident at sea or deliberate disruption in Indo-Pacific waters would likely be felt across the EU. Essentially, disruption to maritime trade in the Indo-Pacific could threaten economic prosperity in the EU. But maritime concerns in the Indo-Pacific are not simply about EU economic security. Two EU member states, France and Germany, already have a physical naval presence in this region. France has considerable overseas territories in the Indian Ocean and the Pacific,⁵⁰ as well as naval assets and personnel,⁵¹ which it rightly seeks to protect. In September 2021, Germany attempted, but was denied access to dock its warship Bayern at a Chinese port.⁵² A few other EU member states, such as Spain and the Netherlands, support sending warships to the Indo-Pacific.⁵³ Overall, as EU maritime contributions grow in the Indo-Pacific, exposure to security risks is likely to grow as well. These security risks range from piracy and accidental collisions at sea, to entanglement in geopolitical conflicts that may break out over the South China Sea or Taiwan.

3.2 Cyber security

Cyber security is a global challenge, yet not all countries are global cyber powers. Both the EU and Indo-Pacific share common ground here, as they are home to several global cyber powers. The US, China, and Russia were ranked in the top five of the US National Cyber Power Index in 2020, with Japan and Australia

⁴⁷ Note this is not a Chinese term. It was developed in the United States and is a popular term used by foreign experts of Chinese naval power.

⁴⁸ Layton, P., 'China's Enduring Grey Zone Challenge', 13 July 2021, available at:

<https://airpower.airforce.gov.au/publications/chinas-enduring-grey-zone-challenge>.

⁴⁹ U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (2021), USINDOPACOM, available at: <https://www.pacom.mil/>.

⁵⁰ La Reunion, Mayotte and Scattered Islands in the Indian Ocean. New Caledonia and French Polynesia in the Pacific.

⁵¹ Barry, B., and Decis, H., (2021), 'Posturing and presence: the United Kingdom and France in the Indo-Pacific', 11 June 2021, available at: <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/military-balance/2021/06/france-uk-indo-pacific>.

⁵² Deutsche Welle (2021), 'China denies port visit by German warship', 15 September 2021.

⁵³ Gare, F. and Reuter, H., (2021), 'Moving Closer: European Views of the Indo-Pacific', European Council on Foreign Relations, September 2021, available at: <https://ecfr.eu/wp-content/uploads/Movingcloser-European-views-of-the-Indo-Pacific.pdf>.

ranked ninth and tenth. Three EU Member States, the Netherlands, France, and Germany are also ranked in the top ten.⁵⁴

Many cyber-attacks and instances of online espionage emanate from the Indo-Pacific. Cyber-attacks can be debilitating to electoral systems by spreading disinformation, and paralysing critical infrastructure and the global economy. Of these, information manipulation is a particular challenge – even more so in the context of global pandemics like COVID-19. State and non-state actors in the region, particularly China, North Korea, and Russia, are suspected of abusing the cyber domain for political and financial gain. The EU acknowledges this, and considers the three of them to be cyber threats.⁵⁵ EU institutions and member states have endured a number of cyberattacks in recent years. In 2020, for example, there were 949 significant malicious attacks in the EU, of which 742 targeted so-called critical sectors of energy, transport, water, health, digital infrastructure and the finance sector.⁵⁶ For instance, in 2018, the German government's IT network experienced a serious cyber-attack in March 2018 by a group of hackers called Fancy Bear with suspected links to Russia's GRU military intelligence agency.⁵⁷ In 2019, a China based group of hackers known as 'Winnti' used malware to spy on at least six major corporations in Germany.⁵⁸ Later, in January 2020, Austria's Foreign Ministry was targeted by a major cyber-attack.⁵⁹ More recently, in 2021, Ireland's national health system was left paralysed after a Russian-based Conti ransomware group demanded \$20m (£14m) to restore services.⁶⁰

The EU is responding to these cyber challenges with an updated EU Cybersecurity strategy in 2020⁶¹ to ensure an open, stable and secure cyberspace grounded in EU core values and the rule of law. A series of laws have been passed in recent years in the EU to achieve a common high level of security of network and information systems. The EU has even listed 8 individuals and 4 entities and bodies suspected of cybercrimes. Yet, according to the EU 2020 report, over two thirds of EU companies, especially Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) are not yet well versed in cybersecurity, making them especially vulnerable to attacks.

Within the Indo-Pacific, Japan is taking considerable measures to improve cyber security and develop a robust cyber strategy.⁶² In 2018, for example, Japan released a cyber security strategy that sought to protect 'a free, fair, and secure cyberspace [...] the free flow of information, the rule of law, openness, autonomy, and collaboration among multi-stakeholders'. In the same year, the Japanese government established cyberspace as a new defence domain and published a defence strategy that assigned a more important role to cyber issues. Other countries, like China, have earmarked the cyber domain as a key part of their military doctrine. Indeed, in December 2015, Xi Jinping established an entirely new service of the

⁵⁴ Voo, J., Hemani, I., Jones, S., DeSombre, W., Cassidy, D., and Schwarzenbach, A. (2020), National Cyber Power Index 2020, Belfer Center, available at: https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/NCPI_2020.pdf.

⁵⁵ Interview with EEAS official, 5 October 2021, 5pm.

⁵⁶ Sanchez Nicolas, E., (2021), 'EU creates new cyber unit, after wave of online attacks', 24 June, available at: <https://euobserver.com/democracy/152239>

⁵⁷ BBC (2018), 'Cyber-attack on German government IT network 'ongoing'', BBC, 1 March 2018, available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-43248201>

⁵⁸ Tanriverdi, H., Eckert, S., Strozyk, J., Zierer, M., and Ciesielski, R. (2019) "Winnti: Attacking the Heart of the German Industry" 24 July 2019, available at <https://web.br.de/interaktiv/winnti/english/>

⁵⁹ BBC (2020), 'Serious cyber-attack' on Austria's foreign ministry; 5 January 2020, available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-50997773>

⁶⁰ McNamee, S., M., (2021), 'HSE cyber-attack: Irish health service still recovering months after hack', BBC, 5 September 2021, available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-58413448>

⁶¹ EU Parliament (2020), EU Cyber Strategy, 16 December 2020, available at: <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/eu-cybersecurity-strategy-digital-decade-0>

⁶² Pohlkamp, E.-K. (2021), Why cyber security should be a key part of Europe's Indo-Pacific strategy, ECFR, 17 March 2021, available at: <https://ecfr.eu/article/why-cyber-security-should-be-a-key-part-of-europes-indo-pacific-strategy/>.

PLA, the Strategic Support Force, dedicated to cyber, as well as space, domains.⁶³ South Korea, meanwhile, issued its national cyber security strategy in 2019.⁶⁴

Overall, the EU and its Member States have faced, and continue to face, a high level of global cyber threats, several of which originate from the Indo-Pacific. As such, this security challenge has a direct impact on the EU.

3.3 Organised crime

The Indo-Pacific faces serious challenges when it comes to organised crime. Non-state actors, particularly pirates and criminal networks, enable these illegal activities to thrive across the region. Corruption and trafficking of wildlife, drugs, and migrants, as well as the smuggling of sensitive dual-use technologies and money laundering, are particularly prolific in the Indo-Pacific.⁶⁵ Many of these crimes are inter-related, feeding off one another. Indeed, environmental crime, such as the trade of illegal timber, has been facilitated by the ease of money laundering and a relatively weak border control framework. Corruption is a particular challenge, since it fuels human trafficking and child sex tourism in the region.

Organised crime networks with links to the Indo-Pacific can be found in many EU member states.⁶⁶ In Italy, between 2010 and 2012 the Guardia di Finanza discovered businesses controlled by Chinese groups through which they transferred to China an estimated 4.5 billion euro in illicit proceeds. In Malta, a high number of illicit cigarettes were seized on route from China destined for Panama and Libya. In Romania, Asian, especially Chinese and Vietnamese, criminal groups have been involved in migrant smuggling and illegal trade in goods.

The trafficking of migrants is another aspect of organised crime with direct consequences for the EU. This is because Europe, together with North America, is the most frequent destination for irregular migration and migrant smuggling from Africa and Asia.⁶⁷ Indeed, in December 2019, Europol supported Italian and French police in uncovering a criminal group that allegedly trafficked thousands of Pakistani, Indian and Bangladeshi immigrants from Asia to several European countries.⁶⁸ The recent withdrawal of US and allied forces from Afghanistan in August 2021 is likely to increase this concern in the EU as Afghans (34,154, up 170 % compared to 2018) constitute the highest proportion of irregular migrants crossing all EU external borders (sea and land).⁶⁹

In terms of drug trafficking, the use of opiates and amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS) like methamphetamine is pervasive in Southeast Asia. Much remains to be done to prevent the development of drug use disorder, deliver treatment, and prevent the spread of communicable diseases among drug

⁶³ Ni, A. and Gill, B., 'The People's Liberation Army Strategic Support Force: Update 2019', Jamestown Brief, 2019, available at: <https://jamestown.org/program/the-peoples-liberation-army-strategic-support-force-update-2019/>.

⁶⁴ Pacheco Pardo, R., Kim, T., Ernst, M., Ahn, S. K., and Villa, R. (2020), Beyond Traditional Security: South Korea's Positioning towards the Cyber, Energy, Maritime and Trade Security Domains, KF-VUB Korea Chair, October 2020, pp. 10-11, available at <https://www.korea-chair.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Beyond-Traditional-Security.pdf>.

⁶⁵ Financial Action Task Force (FATF), Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering (APG), available at: <https://www.fatf-gafi.org/pages/asiapacificgrouponmoneylaundryingapg.html>.

⁶⁶ Examples from this section are drawn from Ernesto U. Savona and Michele Riccardi eds., (2018), Mapping the risk of Serious and Organised Crime infiltration in European Businesses – Final report of the MORE Project, available at: https://www.transcrime.it/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/MORE_FinalReport.pdf

⁶⁷ EU policies on human trafficking are available here:

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/659450/EPRS_BRI\(2021\)659450_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/659450/EPRS_BRI(2021)659450_EN.pdf)

⁶⁸ Infomigrants (2019) 'Police arrest suspected criminals for trafficking migrants from Asia to Europe', 12 December 2019, available at: <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/21496/police-arrest-suspected-criminals-for-trafficking-migrants-from-asia-to-europe>

⁶⁹ Understanding EU action against migrant smuggling,

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/659450/EPRS_BRI\(2021\)659450_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/659450/EPRS_BRI(2021)659450_EN.pdf)

users and those in prison settings. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime has a regional Southeast Asian and Pacific Programme dedicated to these challenges.⁷⁰ In the EU, a key concern relates to the impact of the return of Taliban rule in Afghanistan to the global drugs trade. According to a recent EU Counter-Terrorism Action Plan,⁷¹ the Taliban are suspected of controlling most opium production and poppy cultivation in Afghanistan, as well as working on the production or trafficking of synthetic drugs. Ultimately, any increase in opium production in Afghanistan directly influences heroin availability on EU markets.

3.4 Counter-terrorism

Since the 2001 9/11 attacks on the US, the Indo-Pacific has been a global area of interest for counter-terrorism, particularly in relation to Islamic terrorist groups. Outside interest in Islamic terrorist networks and bases in South Asia and Southeast Asia has also grown as the number of attacks on Western soil has increased in the last two decades, including many in Europe. The 2019 country reports on terrorism released in June 2020 by the US Department of State include reports on Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Maldives, Nepal, the Philippines, and Singapore.⁷² An earlier UN report from 2016 on radicalisation in Southeast Asia highlighted concerns over radicalisation in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines.⁷³ Within the region, there have also been large-scale attacks in recent years, including the Islamic State-inspired attacks in Sri Lanka on 21 April 2019, which killed more than 250 people, and the 15 March 2019 mosque shootings in Christchurch, New Zealand, which killed 51.

In tackling this major security challenge, the US has built partnerships on counter-terrorism with Indonesia, the Philippines, and Pakistan, all states key to the US's subsequent 'War on Terror.' These partnerships build on earlier networks like the Five Eyes intelligence sharing network between Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The recent Quad grouping is also tasked with a counter-terrorism role. Within the Indo-Pacific region itself, significant collaboration has taken place in the ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN's 'Our Eyes' intelligence-sharing initiative, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism. There are also bilateral agreements, including between Japan and the Maldives, to provide USD 4.6 million for counter-terrorism. Regional leaders have made clear counter-terrorism policy pronouncements and, through ASEAN, have adopted the ASEAN Convention on Counter Terrorism and the Treaty on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters-Among ASEAN Member Countries.

The US and allies' withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021, and the resurgence of the Taliban there, will only have heightened the risk of Islamic terrorism, stoking fears in European capitals. In the Indo-Pacific, the largest states, China and India, fear terrorist groups that could emerge from the return of the Taliban as leaders of Afghanistan. For India, Afghanistan could become a harbour for anti-Indian terrorist groups such as Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Taiba. For China, Afghanistan already has several links to the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement, which seeks to establish a Uyghur state in Xinjiang.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ UN Office on Drugs and Crime Regional Southeast Asian and Pacific Programme, available at: <https://www.unodc.org/southeastasiaandpacific/>.

⁷¹ Counter-Terrorism Action Plan, 10 September 2021, available at: <https://www.statewatch.org/media/2720/eu-council-afghanistan-ct-action-plan-11556-21.pdf>

⁷² 2019 Country Reports on Terrorism, US State Department (2020), June 2020, available at: <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2019/>.

⁷³ Radicalisation in Southeast Asia: A Selected Case Study of DAESH in Indonesia, Malaysia and The Philippines (2016), UNODC, 2016, available at: https://www.unodc.org/documents/southeastasiaandpacific//Publications/2016/Radicalisation_SEA_2016.pdf.

⁷⁴ China's actions in Xinjiang have for some time amounted to human rights abuses, and now genocide, in the name of counter-terrorism.

Europe's own tragic experience of sustained Islamic attacks over the last two decades, from Madrid and London, to Paris, Berlin, and beyond, make counter-terrorism a direct area of security concern. Collaboration with the Indo-Pacific in this area is thus of direct interest to the EU and Member States.

3.5 Nuclear domain

The Indo-Pacific contains three nuclear armed states that are not members of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), namely India, Pakistan, and more recently, North Korea. North Korea's nuclear and missile tests since 2017 represent a major advancement in capabilities, making it a de facto nuclear weapons state today. These three nuclear armed states in the Indo-Pacific represent the largest grouping of non-NPT members in any regional setting. The region is also split on nuclear disarmament matters, with those that are strong proponents (ASEAN states⁷⁵ and Pacific Islands⁷⁶) and vocal opponents (Russia and the US) of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which passed at the United Nations in 2017.⁷⁷ In terms of nuclear modernisation, there are no strategic-level treaties regulating the build-up (or down) of naval nuclear forces in the Indo-Pacific. The global Seabed Treaty of 1972 is focused only on prohibiting the placement of nuclear weapons on the seabed and ocean floor.⁷⁸ In terms of disarmament and non-proliferation arrangements, the Indo-Pacific is home to the Southeast Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ or Bangkok Treaty), which entered into force in 1997. It has ten member states from ASEAN. The SEANWFZ is different to other NWFZs in that it covers Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) and provides negative security assurances. This is potentially problematic for the South China Sea, however, where there are undefined EEZ and continental shelves. Moreover, China, France, the US, and Russia have not yet ratified the protocol.

Counter-proliferation, nuclear safety, and security are especially relevant to the Indo-Pacific. The South China Sea has been used to transport illicit dual-use materials from and to North Korea as part of the Pakistani nuclear smuggling group, the A.Q.Khan network. US initiatives, like the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) or Container Security Initiative (CSI), were established to counter such activities. Of these two, the PSI has been rejected by China, but has significant support from Singapore, which conducted a PSI exercise in the South China Sea in 2005. Later, in May 2011, a North Korean ship (M/V Light) was intercepted in the East China Sea by a US carrier and turned away. North Korea stated the ship contained chemicals and was destined for Bangladesh, but it was suspected of carrying missiles and parts. The ship was bound for the Malacca Straits, towards Myanmar. Ultimately, the US pressured Singapore and Malaysia to turn the ship away.

The geography of the Indo-Pacific presents unique security challenges for the navies of the region to exercise stable nuclear deterrence. For emerging nuclear navies, the limited range of their submarine launched missiles (SLBMs) means that, if deployed in littoral waters, the submarines (SSBNs) have only tactical (not strategic) value, in terms of deterrence. For a Chinese Jin-class submarine to have strategic value in deterring the continental US, for example, it would have to sail across the East China Sea and into the Pacific Ocean. This involves travelling through various 'bottleneck' points where it would draw attention and be vulnerable to hostile anti-submarine warfare (ASW) from the navies that control these narrow entry points. If China opted not to go through these maritime routes, the alternative would be to

⁷⁵ Statement by H.E. Ambassador Dang Dinh Quy (2019), Permanent Representative of Vietnam to the United Nations on behalf of the Members of the Association of the Southeast Asian Nations at the Thematic discussion on Nuclear Weapons of the First Committee of the 74th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, New York, 21 October 2019, available at: <https://www.un.org/disarmament/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/statement-by-vietnam-on-behalf-of-asean-nw-oct-21-19.pdf>.

⁷⁶ Submitted by Fiji, Nauru, Palau, Samoa, and Tuvalu (2016), Open-ended Working Group taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations, United Nations General Assembly, 3 March 2016, available at: <https://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/OEWG/2016/Documents/WP14.pdf>.

⁷⁷ Weber, A., and Parthemore, C. (2019), 'The future of arms control if global: reconsidering nuclear issues in the Indo-Pacific', *War on the Rocks*, 8 February 2019.

⁷⁸ The treaty counts with over 90 member parties. Burma (now Myanmar), Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, and South Korea joined the Seabed Treaty in 1971, Vietnam joined in 1980, China in 1991, and the Philippines in 1992.

stay within coastal waters, where SSBNs are harder for enemy ASW to detect than the open seas. This does not make complete strategic sense, however. The current Chinese SLBM, the JL-2, is thought to have a range of 7,200 km. If the JL-2 is stationed in the South China Sea, it brings within range Japan, Guam, parts of India and Russia, as well as Hawaii and Alaska, but not the continental US. In a crisis with the US, China could be effectively embargoed into the South China Sea. One way out of this is to either develop longer-range missiles – a destabilising move – or, alternatively, employ a bastion strategy, as the Soviet Union did in the Cold War. Under a bastion approach, China would deploy attack submarines as cover for its SSBNs through the South China Sea. This is potentially destabilising, however, and poses a potentially high cost for the Chinese in diverting conventional capabilities to this role during a crisis in which its conventional naval forces would likely be used in offensive operations against enemy navies in the Indo-Pacific. India faces a similar geographical dilemma for strategic deterrence against China. To target China, the Indian SSBNs would need to pass the Singapore Strait and enter the South China Sea, where China has a dominant maritime and territorial (through the building of artificial islands in recent years) presence. Ultimately, inadvertent escalation between nuclear navies in the Indo Pacific is a real security concern.

Overall, the EU has clear interests and successes in safeguarding the legal and normative underpinnings of the global nuclear non-proliferation regime. The EU has a proven record in this area as a key negotiator for the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) nuclear deal with Iran in 2015. Ultimately, the security consequences of nuclear proliferation in the Indo-Pacific go beyond the region itself. Theft of radiological substances from poorly maintained or insecure sites in the region or the deliberate smuggling and sale of nuclear materials to international terrorist groups is a security concern. Indeed, in 2018, the East Asia Summit highlighted the importance of regional cooperation on nuclear safety and security in the Asia-Pacific. Another security concern relates to nuclear use in South Asia or between the US and China. Nuclear use in the Indo-Pacific, whether deliberate or accidental, and even if only small in scale, risks far-reaching consequences in terms of a ‘nuclear winter’. In a ‘nuclear winter’ scenario, mass loss of life and destruction of the environment is projected for the region and beyond, for decades.⁷⁹ After nuclear use in the Indo-Pacific, mass migration and world-wide famines because of ecological collapse would likely have a direct impact on economic prosperity and security in the EU.

3.6 Summary: Security consequences for the EU

Not all the security challenges discussed in this section have direct and/or immediate consequences for the EU and its Member States, yet they are all relevant to its long-term security and economic prosperity. Of the five challenges discussed in this section, maritime, cyber, and counter-terrorism are of most immediate relevance for the EU. Several EU Member States, including France, Germany, and the Netherlands, have already made the strategic importance of the Indo-Pacific SLOC to national and European interests clear by placing maritime assets in the region, for example. Cyber security is a second area that most EU Member States share concerns over and an area where the EU is already considerably invested at the level of wider strategy and implementation. As such, cooperation with Indo-Pacific partners on cyber security is of direct value. In terms of counter-terrorism and organised crime, the threat of attacks by the Islamic State and wider Islamic groups on European soil as well as the trafficking of drugs and migrants has not receded – it may even have increased following the withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021. Cooperation with states and partners in the Indo-Pacific therefore remains crucial.

Ultimately, the security of the Indo-Pacific is of considerable importance to the EU. All five security challenges outlined here have an impact on the pursuit of ‘open strategic autonomy’⁸⁰ in EU foreign policy

⁷⁹ Witze, A. (2020), ‘How a small nuclear war would transform the entire planet’, *Nature*, 19 March 2020, available at: <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-00794-y>

⁸⁰ On the debate around the merits and demerits of this approach, see Youngs, R. (2021) *The EU’s Strategic Autonomy Trap*, Carnegie Europe, 8 March 2021, available at: <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2021/03/08/eu-s-strategic-autonomy-trap-pub-83955>.

and the objective of reducing EU strategic dependence worldwide. Polarising geopolitical US-China competition within the region complicates the security challenges there and their consequences for the EU and its Member States. This is because the US has an essential role in European security, and has been actively encouraging its European allies to focus more on China as a threat to national and international security. As such, how the EU frames security challenges in the Indo-Pacific, as well as how it implements its Indo-Pacific Strategy, is likely to have significant repercussions for transatlantic relations and, ultimately, European security.

4 The EU's Evolving Indo-Pacific Strategy: Contributing to addressing security challenges

The EU's evolving Indo-Pacific Strategy currently consists of a number of declared documents that all together spell an ambitious overarching intent: for the EU to increase its strategic 'focus, presence, and actions' in the Indo-Pacific.⁸¹ In the security domain, the EU approach towards the Indo-Pacific – hereafter presented as the EU Indo-Pacific Strategy - speaks to stability, security, prosperity, and supporting an open, 'rules-based order'. How all these ambitious goals will be met remains less clear. The first part of this section will identify and evaluate the key points and themes of the EU's current Indo-Pacific Strategy. The second part will look to EU Member States and compare their respective approaches towards the Indo-Pacific and its security challenges.

4.1 Key points and EU Documents on the Indo-Pacific

In the last five years, several important announcements and statements have been released by the EU to signal growing interest in and commitment to the security and stability of the Indo-Pacific. These have not been made in a vacuum, rather they reflect wider re-thinking within the EU around its China policy⁸², and the popular idea of 'connectivity' between Europe and Asia.⁸³

In 2018, the EU launched the 'Enhancing Security Cooperation in and with Asia' (ESIWA) project⁸⁴ to nurture deeper security partnerships with India, Indonesia, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, and Vietnam. The ESIWA mandate started off big, covering maritime security, cyber security, counter-terrorism, and countering

⁸¹ Council conclusions on EU Indo-Pacific Strategy (2021), April 2021 available at:

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/04/19/indo-pacific-council-adopts-conclusions-on-eu-strategy-for-cooperation/>.

⁸² The EU's changing China policy will be examined later in this section. For discussion of this, see Janka Oertel (2020), 'The New China Consensus: how Europe is growing wary of Beijing', European Council on Foreign Relations, September 2020, available at: https://ecfr.eu/publication/the_new_china_consensus_how_europe_is_growing_wary_of_beijing/; Pepijn Bergsen (2020), 'The EU's unsustainable China Strategy', Chatham House, July 2020, available at: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2021/07/eus-unsustainable-china-strategy>; Tim Ruhlrig (2020), 'Towards a more principled European China Policy? Democracy, Human Rights and the Rule of Law in EU-China relations', IFRI, November 2020, available at: <https://www.ifri.org/en/publications/etudes-de-lifri/towards-more-principled-european-china-policy>; and Ian Anthony, Jiayi Zhou, Jingdong Yuan, Fei Su and Jinyung Kim (2021), 'China-EU Connectivity in an era of geopolitical competition', SIPRI, 59, March 2021, available at: <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2021/sipri-policy-papers/china-eu-connectivity-era-geopolitical-competition>.

⁸³ Connecting Europe and Asia: the EU Strategy Factsheet (2019), September 2019, available at:

https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/50699/connecting-europe-asia-eu-strategy_en; and European Parliamentary Research Service (2021), Prospects for EU-Asia connectivity, The 'European way to connectivity', updated briefing, available at [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/690534/EPRS_BRI\(2021\)690534_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/690534/EPRS_BRI(2021)690534_EN.pdf). The earlier report, from 2018 on Connectivity with Asia is the Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the regions and the European Investment Bank, 'Connecting Europe and Asia: Building Blocks for and EU Strategy', 2018, available at: <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/connecting-europe-and-asia-building-blocks-eu-strategy>.

⁸⁴ Enhanced EU Security Cooperation in and with Asia - Council conclusions (2018), 28 May 2018 available at:

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/35456/st09265-re01-en18.pdf>, Council Conclusions on ESIWA, 28 May 2018, available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/35456/st09265-re01-en18.pdf> and EEAS factsheet on ESIWA (2020), October 2020, available at: https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/factsheet_eu_asia_security_october_2020.pdf.

violent extremism, as well as training in peacekeeping. The EU later released additional factsheets on cooperation with Asia and the Indo-Pacific in 2021,⁸⁵ detailing its priorities around maritime security, conflict prevention, non-proliferation, cyber security, hybrid threats, counter-terrorism, and regional cooperation. At the same time, Josep Borrell, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the EC, made clear the need for strengthening of partnerships between the EU and Indo-Pacific powers, like India.⁸⁶ The two most comprehensive EU documents on the strategy have only recently been published; the Council conclusions on EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific in April 2021⁸⁷, and the Joint Communication on cooperation in the Indo-Pacific in September 2021.⁸⁸ These key EU documents, together with earlier statements, constitute the EU's evolving Indo-Pacific Strategy. Four key points can be drawn from the EU's evolving Indo-Pacific Strategy for security in the region, and each will be unpacked here. The first key point is that the EU seeks to maintain and protect an open, free, and rules-based Indo-Pacific. The second key point is an emphasis on maritime security. The third key point is to highlight the centrality of ASEAN as the primary security institution of the region. The fourth and final key point is the importance of partnerships between the EU and Middle and Regional Powers in the Indo-Pacific. Each will be examined below.

4.1.1 Protecting an open, free, and rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific

As noted in section 1 of this IDA, the idea of an open, free, and rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific took shape initially in India, but was not officially promoted as a strategy until the early- to mid-2010s by Australia, Japan, and India. Since then, different versions of what an open and free Indo-Pacific mean have taken shape in the national strategies of states invested in the region. For example, the Japanese version of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) focuses on a legalistic approach to defining a rules-based order, one that is squarely focused on freedom of navigation and the seas. The US version goes beyond the law and economics in its understanding of a 'rules-based order'. At the core of US Indo-Pacific strategy lies the goal of actively defending against a 'whole of society' threat, as it perceives it, from China to the region.⁸⁹ The US version of an open, free, and rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific thus has a strong and explicit security component.

EU strategy for the Indo-Pacific has yet to make a definitive stand on which version it promotes. According to the September 2021 EU Indo-Pacific Joint Communication paper, 'the EU seeks to promote an open and rules-based regional security architecture, including secure sea lines of communication, capacity-building, and enhanced naval presence in the Indo-Pacific in accordance with the legal framework established by the UNCLOS.' This suggests perhaps closer alignment to Japan's legalistic approach. Yet the same document also contains stronger language compared to previous EU statements on the Indo-Pacific. In the Joint Communication of September 2021 it is stated that the EU intends to 'solidify and defend the rules-based international order by promoting inclusive and effective multilateral cooperation based on shared values and principles, including a commitment to respecting democracy, human rights, and the rule of

⁸⁵ EEAS factsheet on EU Indo-Pacific strategy (2021), September 2021, available at:

https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/96740/eu-strategy-cooperation-indo-pacific_en.

⁸⁶ Borrell, J., (2021), The EU needs a strategic approach for the Indo-Pacific, personal blog, 12 March 2021, available at:

https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/94898/The%20EU%20needs%20a%20strategic%20approach%20for%20the%20Indo-Pacific.

⁸⁷ European Council (2021), Council conclusions on EU Indo-Pacific Strategy, April 2021 available at:

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/04/19/indo-pacific-council-adopts-conclusions-on-eu-strategy-for-cooperation/>.

⁸⁸ European Commission (2021), The EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, 16 September 2021; European Commission (2021), Questions and Answers: EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, available at:

https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/QANDA_21_4709.

⁸⁹ US Department of Defense (2019), Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region (Washington, DC: Department of Defence, 2019).

law'. Up to that point, 'fostering' or 'maintaining' a free and open Indo-Pacific were traditionally used in EU statements on the region.

4.1.2 Emphasis on maritime security

While EU documents on the Indo-Pacific speak of a commitment to a broad range of security challenges, including counter-terrorism and cyber security, economic and security concerns around the maritime domain lay at the heart of EU documents on the region. This is also reflected in EU actions so far in the Indo-Pacific, which have included safeguarding maritime routes, tackling piracy at sea, and investing in joint exercises and port calls (such as Indo-Pacific naval units). Indeed, a wider European naval presence in the Indo-Pacific could start to take shape through Coordinated Maritime Presences (CMPs), following on from the pilot in the Gulf of Guinea.⁹⁰ This pilot has enhanced coordination between Members States' assets operating in the area, as well as coastal states, and the organisation of the Yaoundé Architecture to tackle piracy and criminal activity at sea. It involves not just EU funding, but also coordination with the UN, as well as on the ground with local actors, to counter-piracy at sea. Another example is the EU counter-piracy Naval Force Somalia (EU NAVFOR) Operation Atalanta, which has conducted successful joint naval activities with Indo-Pacific partners, including Japan, Pakistan, India, and Djibouti. The EU also runs a capacity-building project for the Southern Pacific, EU Critical Maritime Route Wider Indian Ocean (CRIMARIO), which it is seeking to extend with new partners to tackle drug trafficking, human trafficking, wildlife crime, and illicit financial flows.

4.1.3 Working with ASEAN as the central security institution

The EU and ASEAN already cooperate on maritime issues and cyber security related to the Indo-Pacific.⁹¹ On 1 December 2020, the EU and ASEAN elevated their relationship to a strategic partnership, and will celebrate the 45th anniversary of their bilateral relations in 2022. The EU has made clear it would like to participate in the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM+) structures and the key ASEAN-led summit in the region, the East Asia Summit. The ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, published in 2019, makes its intention to be central to the region clear.⁹² In shaping and developing the Outlook document, Indonesia assumed a leadership role as a Middle Power. Promoting openness, inclusiveness, transparency, respect for international law, and ASEAN centrality in the Indo-Pacific region are key to the 'ASEAN Outlook'. Rather than creating new regional architecture, the East Asia Summit is proposed as a platform for advancing the Indo-Pacific discourse and cooperation.⁹³

The focus on ASEAN makes practical diplomatic sense for the EU. Multilateralism is an established practice for the EU that has yielded impressive results on security matters geographically outside its territory, like the JCPOA nuclear deal with Iran in 2015. There might also be important side-benefits for the EU in working closely with ASEAN. Above all, given that the EU does not have any strategic partnerships with ASEAN member states, ASEAN may eventually act as a useful platform from which the EU can deepen its partnerships with specific Indo-Pacific states (see key point 4 below). Furthermore, working with ASEAN could be a potential way for the EU to validate and extend its influence in the Indo-Pacific region to states that are less supportive of an EU role. Indeed, given the growing lack of interest from Washington in Asian institutions since the Obama era, the EU may find a vacuum it can fill. That said, the centrality of ASEAN to

⁹⁰ EEAS (2021), 'The EU launches its Coordinated Maritime Presences concept in the Gulf of Guinea', 25 January 2021, available at: <https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/91970/eu-launches-its-coordinated-maritime-presences-concept-gulf-guinea-el>.

⁹¹ ASEAN (2019), 'ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific', ASEAN, June 2019, available at: https://asean.org/storage/2019/06/ASEAN-Outlook-on-the-Indo-Pacific_FINAL_22062019.pdf.

⁹² Acharya, A (2019) 'Why ASEAN's Indo-Pacific outlook matters', East Asian Forum, 11 August 2019, available at: <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2019/08/11/why-aseans-indo-pacific-outlook-matters/>.

⁹³ The Jakarta Post, 'Indonesia promotes ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific at middle power meet', 14 February 2021, available at: <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/02/14/indonesia-promotes-asean-outlook-on-indo-pacific-at-middle-power-meet.html>

the security of the Indo-Pacific should not be overplayed. ASEAN has proven resilient, but also limited in its capacity to resolve enduring security problems in the region, particularly disputes over the South China Sea. Moreover, there are internal deep divisions within ASEAN—especially between Cambodia and other member states over China policy and matters related to maritime security. There are also divisions over the role that the US should play in the region.

4.1.4 Partnerships with Regional and Middle Powers

As posts by Josep Borrell and the recent September 2021 Joint Communication highlight respectively, working with regional powers like India is key to EU success in deepening its engagement with the Indo-Pacific. The September Joint Communication even has an entire sub-section entitled ‘The Indian Ocean: A gateway for Europe into the Indo-Pacific’. Developing and deepening relationships between the EU and India, as well as Japan, South Korea, and between ASEAN and the Quad, are key aspects of EU Indo-Pacific Strategy. This approach could potentially balance power asymmetries in the region by supporting Small and Middle Powers from the Pacific Islands to South Korea in the face of great power competition (e.g. between the US and China, and China and India) and regional rivalries (e.g. between China and Japan, and India and Pakistan). This approach also reinforces the EU’s declared goal of working with regional institutions like ASEAN.

One area where the EU is actively developing partnerships with regional and middle powers is the joint Franco-German ESIWA project, which covers counter-terrorism, cyber security, maritime security, and crisis management.⁹⁴ The project works with six countries in the Indo-Pacific (India, Japan, Indonesia, South Korea, Singapore, and Vietnam) and EU military experts are already operating in Indonesia and Vietnam. Beyond this initiative, the EU is deploying military advisors to EU delegations in the region (to date, China and Indonesia) and – in collaboration the EU delegations, as well as with relevant Member States’ embassies around the world – will establish an EU Cyber Diplomacy Network. This network will have tailored activities for each partner, including capacity-building led by DG Connect.⁹⁵ Indo-Pacific partners have already contributed to EU CSDP missions and operations for peace and stability. The EU has also concluded Framework Participation Agreements (FPAs) with Australia, South Korea, New Zealand, and Vietnam.

Overall, fostering multilateralism and lasting partnerships in the Indo-Pacific region represents solid approaches to security in the Indo-Pacific for the EU. These approaches should not become ends in themselves, however. They are best understood instead as an important means towards a free and open Indo-Pacific.

4.1.5 What’s missing in the EU’s evolving Indo-Pacific Strategy?

At present, there are several unanswered questions when it comes to how the EU is approaching security in the Indo-Pacific. Four are highlighted below:

- Multilateralism and engagement do not always work as desired, as US policy on China has demonstrated in the last few years. How can the EU persuade its partners that it will have staying power and remain committed to the region, even if security crises break out? If the strategy fails for the EU, what then?
- While combining engagement with regional institutions (ASEAN) and key Middle Powers is a smart approach for the EU in its approach towards the Indo-Pacific, alignment in fundamental principles will be harder to achieve. Do all EU actors, Member States and partners share the same definition of – and interest in – an open and free Indo-Pacific?

⁹⁴ GIZ (2021), Enhancing Security Cooperation n and with Asia, available at: <https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/87412.html>

⁹⁵ Interview with EEAS official, 7th October 2021, 4.15m.

- What are the respective pressure points for EU Indo-Pacific partners in terms of influence from great powers, like the US and China?
- What is the EU's position on major conflict or war in the Indo-Pacific? If war were to break out over the Korean Peninsula or in Taiwan involving EU partners, would the EU be willing to be politically (and even militarily) entangled in these, or would it want to distance itself? What if EU naval vessels were implicated in any clashes at sea between China and the US or Japan, for instance?

These questions are based on hypothetical scenarios that could play out in the future, and EU Indo-Pacific strategy cannot yet offer an answer to them. While multilateralism remains important to the EU positioning itself as a security actor in the Indo-Pacific, the next step is likely much harder. Once established as a security actor in the region, the EU will inevitably have a stronger stake in – and set of external expectations around – any security crises that break out across the Indo-Pacific.

Any potential region-wide security crises in the Indo-Pacific would likely involve the US (or its allies and partners) and China. Yet China and Russia (and even the US) are largely absent from the discussions of EU Indo-Pacific Strategy so far. The EC's Q&A sheet following the September 2021 EU Indo-Pacific Strategy publication barely mentions China, and completely ignores Russia. These missing elements need to be addressed, at least privately among EU Member States, since they have clear consequences for Europe, as demonstrated by the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014, and the controversial case of China's economic influence in EU Member States like Hungary in recent years. The emerging Strategic Compass may be the EU document that addresses some of these elements, but only if it manages to stake out a clear position: will the EU's security and defence be guided at its core by the pursuit of strategic autonomy, or, will it involve siding and building on the lead and example of the United States?

As for China, EU policy has undergone stark changes in recent years. The Joint Communication 'EU-China: A Strategic Outlook' published on 12 March 2019 represents a clear break from the traditional economic and commercial basis for the EU's relationship with China to consider security risks as well.⁹⁶ A more recent EU report in 2021 reflects these wider security concerns in deepening cooperation with China.⁹⁷

Yet discussions over EU China policy and EU Indo-Pacific strategy are not in alignment. In the September 2021 EU Indo-Pacific Joint Communication there is a mention of China and the need to continue engagement, but it also notes that the EU will 'push back where fundamental disagreements exist'. Nothing more is added here in terms of these disagreements, whether they be over Taiwan, or other security concerns in the Indo-Pacific, nor is there much discussion of EU-China cooperation in the past (cyber security and counter-terrorism, negotiating the nuclear deal with Iran in 2015, and the EU series of bilateral security dialogues with China in recent years, for example).⁹⁸

A broader question remains about whether the EU would want to align itself more closely on security matters with NATO and the US in relation to China and Russia in the Indo-Pacific. From China's perspective, closer EU-NATO alignment on security matters in the Indo-Pacific would not be welcome. Closer alignment between the EU and the Quad might also be considered threatening to China, though as noted earlier in

⁹⁶ European Commission and HR/VP contribution to the European Council (2019), EU-China – A strategic outlook, 12 March 2019, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/communication-eu-china-a-strategic-outlook.pdf>. This builds on from European Parliament (2018), Report on the State of EU-China Relations, available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2018-0252_EN.html. See also Anna Saarela (2018), 'A new era in EU-China relations: more wide ranging strategic cooperation?', July 2018, available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/570493/EXPO_STU\(2018\)570493_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/570493/EXPO_STU(2018)570493_EN.pdf).

⁹⁷ European Parliament (2021), Report on a new EU-China strategy (2021/2037(INI)), Committee on Foreign Affairs, 26 July 2021, available at https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2021-0252_EN.pdf.

⁹⁸ European Institute for Asian Studies (EIAS) (2021), EU-China security cooperation: An intersection of interests?, 3 May 2021, available at: <https://eias.org/op-ed/eu-china-security-cooperation-an-intersection-of-interests/>.

this report, the mandate and scope of the Quad is changing, becoming both less military and China-centric in its agenda. Post-AUKUS, how the US develops its own Indo-Pacific and China strategy will also matter here. A key consideration is the extent to which the US attempts to forge new defence networks and arrangements and whether these might undercut, overlap or reinforce the EU's own attempts at building partnerships in the Indo-Pacific. Upcoming revised US strategies on the Indo-Pacific and China under the Biden administration may shed further light here. For its part, Beijing has been clear: China's 'Policy Paper on the European Union' from December 2018 states that the EU should 'avoid politicising economic and trade issues, and ensure the sustained, steady, and win-win progress of China-EU economic and trade relations'.⁹⁹ In general, China sees the elevation of the Indo-Pacific in national security strategies as problematic and hostile to its growing economic and security interests in the region.¹⁰⁰

4.2 Comparison of EU Member States and the UK

Of the 27 EU Member States, three stand out for their commitment to the Indo-Pacific: France, Germany, and the Netherlands.¹⁰¹ Indeed, the EU's evolving Indo-Pacific Strategy was partly the result of these three countries launching their own strategies.¹⁰² Each will be examined, before this IDA turns to a wider discussion of other Member States.

4.2.1 France

France is the only EU Member State with territories as well as military assets in the Pacific. Since 2006, France has set out several official documents outlining its strategy towards the Indo-Pacific, resulting in a comprehensive and detailed strategy that was released by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2019.¹⁰³ Indeed, in 2018, President Emmanuel Macron described France as an Indo-Pacific power. Consequently, of all EU Member States, France has the most developed Indo-Pacific strategy. A key feature of French Indo-Pacific Strategy is the importance of the region to global security, and the opportunity that engagement offers for the EU in establishing 'strategic autonomy and sovereignty' on global security matters. France sees partnership with India as a particularly important way of developing that commitment, and has included EU Member States Italy, Portugal, and Denmark in its Charles de Gaulle mission to the region in 2019. In general, France is a strong champion of deepening EU engagement with the region on security matters. France has also cooperated with non-EU members, like the United Kingdom (UK) on security matters in the Indo-Pacific.¹⁰⁴ However, following the political debacle over AUKUS, France is unlikely (at least in the short term) to support closer EU alignment with Australia, the UK, and the US, preferring to act with regional middle powers like Japan, India, and South Korea. In this vein, France has also begun to deepen bilateral ties with Southeast Asian Middle Power states like Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Vietnam.

⁹⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People's Republic of China (2018), China's Policy Paper on the European Union, December 2018, available at: https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/2649_665393/t1622890.shtml.

¹⁰⁰ Chen, D., (2018), 'The Indo-Pacific Strategy: A Background Analysis', ISPI, 04 June 2018, available at: <https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/indo-pacific-strategy-background-analysis-20714>.

¹⁰¹ Wacker, G. (2021), 'Europe and the Indo-Pacific: comparing France, Germany and the Netherlands', Real Instituto Elcano, 9 March 2021, available at: http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano_en/contenido?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_in/zonas_in/a/ri29-2021-wacker-europe-and-the-indo-pacific-comparing-france-germany-and-the-netherlands.

¹⁰² Interview with EEAS official, 8th October 2021, 10.30am.

¹⁰³ Ministry for European and Foreign Affairs of France (2019), 'The Indo-Pacific Region: A Priority for France', August 2019, available at: <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/asia-and-oceania/the-indopacific-region-a-priority-for-france/>. The French ministry for Foreign Affairs also released a document on partnerships with the Indo-Pacific in April 2021, see: <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/photos-publications-and-graphics/publications/article/france-s-partnerships-in-the-indo-pacific-apr-2021>. Even the French Ministry for the Armed Forces published a document on the Indo-Pacific in 2018 (and updated in 2019), see https://franceintheus.org/IMG/pdf/France_and_Security_in_the_Indo-Pacific_-_2019.pdf.

¹⁰⁴ Barry, B., and Decis, H. (2021), 'Posturing and presence: the United Kingdom and France in the Indo-Pacific', 11 June 2021, available at: <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/military-balance/2021/06/france-uk-indo-pacific>.

French activities in the Indo-Pacific have concentrated on sending ships as part of the Jeanne d'Arc helicopter carrier mission and using surveillance frigates in New Caledonia, as well as engaging in regional military exercises. Other activities to date include an attack submarine patrolling the South China Sea in early 2021 to reassert the freedom of navigation and protect French EEZs in the Indo-Pacific; a frigate deployed around the same time in the East China Sea to enforce UN sanctions on North Korea; and an amphibious group sailing for several months from the Mediterranean to the Pacific Ocean.

4.2.2 Germany

Germany published comprehensive Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific in August/September 2020.¹⁰⁵ Though published by the Federal Foreign Office, these guidelines were the product of deeper and wider internal consultation and approval within the German federal government. Two key aspects of Germany's Indo-Pacific Guidelines are of note:

1. Promotion of a pan-European approach to the Indo-Pacific.
2. Support for ASEAN and related institutions in the Indo-Pacific.

The guidelines share commonalities in approach to the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, published in 2019. Unlike French strategy, Germany has a narrower geographical definition of the Indo-Pacific, thus limiting the space for strategic involvement of the EU. The guidelines are also different to French strategy, which promotes an autonomous EU security commitment to the region. Germany instead places the emphasis on working with NATO and global partners in the Indo-Pacific, like Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea.

More recently, Germany has tentatively engaged in naval diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific by deploying its frigate, Bayern, to the region in August 2021. This ongoing experience is a mixed success but brings into the spotlight future questions about EU member-state entanglement in maritime disputes or wider crises that may break out in the region, specifically over Taiwan in the near to medium term.¹⁰⁶ For the Bayern, the plan was to make port calls in Australia, China, India, Japan, South Korea, or Vietnam. However, China refused Bayern's entry into its port, displaying issues around freedom of access for EU Member States in this region.¹⁰⁷ The Bayern is now travelling near to the Taiwan Strait waters but is unlikely to enter these given the strained relations between Taiwan and China at present. Beyond this low-level naval diplomacy, Germany has established a ministerial dialogue with Japan. Germany's position on the Indo-Pacific is unlikely to change dramatically in the short term. Following the outcome of the recent national election, a ruling coalition has not yet been negotiated in Germany. To date, under Chancellor Merkel, Germany's China policy has been moderate and trade-focused, and it remains to be seen whether this will continue under a new leader.

4.2.3 The Netherlands

The Netherlands followed Germany in publishing a shorter paper, the Indo-Pacific Guidelines, in November 2020.¹⁰⁸ The Dutch Guidelines on the Indo-Pacific, like the German one, emphasise a pan-European approach to the Indo-Pacific, and it single outs three areas of key interest: safeguarding free and open trade, human rights and a rules-based international order. Like Germany, the Netherlands have also

¹⁰⁵ The German Federal Government (2020), Policy Guidelines for the Indo Pacific, August 2020, available at: <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/blob/2380514/f9784f7e3b3fa1bd7c5446d274a4169e/200901-indo-pazifik-leitlinien--1--data.pdf>.

¹⁰⁶ Deutsche Welle (2021), 'China denies port visit by German warship', 15 September 2021.

¹⁰⁷ Reuters (2021), 'China denies German warship entry into harbour, Berlin says', 16 September 2021, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/china-denies-german-warship-entry-into-harbour-berlin-says-2021-09-15/>.

¹⁰⁸ Government of the Netherlands (2020), Indo-Pacific: Guidelines for strengthening Dutch and EU cooperation with partners in Asia, November 2020, available at: <https://www.government.nl/documents/publications/2020/11/13/indo-pacific-guidelines> (this is an English translation of the official Dutch version).

tentatively engaged in naval diplomacy in the region, thereby putting into practice the stated goal of safeguarding free and open trade overseas.

A clear example of Dutch naval diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific took place in July 2021 when the Dutch frigate HNLMS Evertsen sailed into the South China Sea and participated in a UK-led carrier strike group deployment (CSG21) to Japan. In this instance, the Dutch frigate also participated in a military exercise with Singapore. As this example shows, maritime security cooperation with other states represents a key area for Dutch engagement in the Indo-Pacific. According to the Dutch Guidelines, this naval engagement extends not just to safeguarding freedom of navigation but also conflict prevention and disaster relief. The Guidelines also refer to capacity building for experts on the international law of the sea at a regional level, and in coordination with The Hague. Digital connectivity and the cyber domain represent a second area of focus in the Dutch Guidelines.¹⁰⁹ The intention is to build on the EU Connectivity strategy and address the rising threat of cyber-attacks from the region. So far, the Netherlands has started a cyber dialogue aimed at capacity building for experts from ASEAN countries.

4.2.4 Other EU Member States

While the EU has managed to agree on an Indo-Pacific Strategy, there remains division among Member States about its depth and direction. EU Member States like Portugal, Poland, Italy, and Sweden have been particularly supportive of efforts by France, Germany, and the Netherlands to initiate a pan-European Strategy on the Indo-Pacific, yet a recent survey by the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) highlights different interests and goals driving EU Member States when it comes to the Indo-Pacific.¹¹⁰ For example, Austria, Belgium, Latvia, and Lithuania are supportive of greater engagement in the Indo-Pacific, and see it as an opportunity to counter China's growing influence. Other Member States, like Denmark, see EU engagement as a useful way to support the transatlantic alliance with the United States. Some, like Greece, see it as a tool to hold the US to account, enhance EU strategic autonomy, and build on good relations with China. Many EU states, especially Estonia, Malta, Italy, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, and Sweden, consider EU involvement in the Indo-Pacific an important opportunity to develop European strategic autonomy on the global stage.

4.2.5 The United Kingdom

The United Kingdom, though no longer an EU member state, deserves mention here because it has developed a strategy for the Indo-Pacific, as laid out in its recent Integrated Review released in March 2021.¹¹¹ In the Integrated Review, substantial emphasis was placed on a 'tilt to the Indo-Pacific' in UK global strategy. A clear manifestation of this tilt was the first deployment of the HMS Queen Elizabeth aircraft carrier strike group to the Indo-Pacific in summer 2021 as well as the UK government's application to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) agreement earlier in January 2021. Like France, the UK is building a solid maritime presence in the region. The UK is doing this by working closely with partners in the region such as the United States, Japan, the Republic of Korea and India in addition to Australia and New Zealand, and ASEAN member states like Brunei, Malaysia, and Singapore (which are also Commonwealth members). At its core, the UK tilt to the Indo-Pacific builds on long-standing pre-existing security partnerships the UK has in the region, in particular with Japan, India and

¹⁰⁹ Okano-Heijmans, M., (2021), 'Netherlands and Indo-Pacific: inclusive but not value-neutral', 31 August 2021, available at: <https://www.clingendael.org/publication/netherlands-and-indo-pacific-inclusive-not-value-neutral>

¹¹⁰ Grare, F., and Reuter, M., (2021), 'Moving closer: European views of the Indo-Pacific', European Council on Foreign Relations, September 2021, available at: <https://ecfr.eu/special/moving-closer-european-views-of-the-indo-pacific/#analysis-by-country>.

¹¹¹ United Kingdom HM Government (2021), Global Britain in a competitive age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/975077/Global_Britain_in_a_Competitive_Age_the_Integrated_Review_of_Security_Defence_Development_and_Foreign_Policy.pdf

Australia. That said, the UK tilt implies a significant scaling-up in terms of military commitment to and economic outreach in the Indo-Pacific over the coming years. Maintaining and sustaining this scaling-up in UK commitments to the region might prove crucial to the wider success of the post-Brexit 'global Britain' agenda.¹¹²

5 CSDP missions, toolbox, and security challenges in the Indo-Pacific

The security challenges of the Indo-Pacific region and the EU's own Indo-Pacific Strategy show that there is a role for the EU to play in addressing them. In particular, the EU's existing CSDP missions and toolbox suggest that it stands ready to play a role in the region. In fact, the EU is already involved in guaranteeing the security of the region through CSDP mission EU NAVFOR Somalia/Operation Atalanta. Dating back to December 2008 and running until at least December 2022, Operation Atalanta aims to counter-piracy off the Horn of Africa, demonstrating that the EU already plays a role in the security of the western Indo-Pacific.¹¹³ The broader CSDP toolbox, the recently launched CMPs, and the establishment of PESCO could enhance the security role of the EU in the Indo-Pacific. In general, this would be welcomed by countries in the region, with the big exception of China.

5.1 The role of CSDP missions and the CSDP toolbox

5.1.1 CSDP missions

CSDP missions can play a key role in the implementation of the EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy, particularly in the areas of maritime security, the fight against trafficking, and counter-terrorism. The case of Operation Atalanta is instructive in this respect. The first-ever naval operation of the EU, Operation Atalanta was launched to prevent piracy and armed robbery at sea. However, Operation Atalanta is also tasked with monitoring fishing activities, weapons and drug trafficking, illegal trade, and illegal and unregulated fishing. The operation also contributes to the enforcement of the weapons embargo on Somalia. Bringing together the navies of several Member States, as well as warships and staff officers from non-member states such as Norway, Montenegro, and Serbia,¹¹⁴ Operation Atalanta is an example of how the EU can contribute to security in the western Indo-Pacific and the broader region. This is especially the case when considering the importance of maritime security to the Indo-Pacific. Indeed, Operation Atalanta has helped to reduce the number of recorded piracy incidents in the Gulf of Aden from a peak of 213 in 2009 and 2011 to none in 2020, and to arrest at least 171 pirates out of which 146 have been convicted. Over the years, the operation has broadened its remit that now also includes areas such as food security.¹¹⁵

CSDP capacity-building missions provide another template of the EU's potential security role in the Indo-Pacific. EUCAP Somalia and its predecessor EUCAP Nestor are case in point. Launched in July 2012, EUCAP Nestor was a civilian mission tasked with assisting countries in the western Indo-Pacific with the development of their maritime security capabilities. Following a strategic review in 2016, it was replaced by EUCAP Somalia, which focuses on the development of the capabilities of this country only.¹¹⁶ Working in partnership with Somali authorities, EUCAP Somalia focuses on improving Somalia's maritime legal

¹¹² Patalano, A., (2021), 'The Indo-Pacific 'Tilt' and the Return of British Maritime Strategy', Centre for Defence Studies series on The Integrated Review in Context: A Strategy Fit for the 2020s?, King's College London, 19 July 2021, available at: <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/the-indo-pacific-tilt-and-the-return-of-british-maritime-strategy>

¹¹³ EUNAVFOR (2021), EU Naval Force Somalia Operation Atalanta, available at: <https://eunavfor.eu/mission/>

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ EUNAVFOR (2021), Key Facts and Figures, available at: <https://eunavfor.eu/key-facts-and-figures>

¹¹⁶ EUCAP Somalia (2021), About us, available at: <https://www.eucap-som.eu/about-us/>

framework and law enforcement capacity, with particular focus on the development of coast guard functions that contribute to countering piracy, human trafficking, or smuggling and illegal fishing.¹¹⁷ Similarly, the EU Police (EUPOL) mission in Afghanistan was another civilian mission focused on capacity-building of another country that could be considered part of the western part of the Indo-Pacific region. Running from 2007 until December 2016, EUPOL Afghanistan supported the Afghan government in building a civilian police service respectful of the rule of law and human rights.¹¹⁸ While recent developments in Afghanistan raise doubts about the success of this mission, the principles and actions behind it could be applied elsewhere in the Indo-Pacific.

5.1.2 The CSDP toolbox

The CSCP toolbox has been developing rapidly in recent years.¹¹⁹ It now contains several structures and instruments that can facilitate and support implementation of the EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy in the area of security. Bodies such as the European Union Military Committee (EUMC), the Committee for Civilian Aspects of Crisis Management (CIVCPM), and the Politico-Military Group (PMG) can provide the Political and Security Committee (PSC) with the necessary information in their respective areas of expertise for the PSC to decide on the EU's policy towards the Indo-Pacific. Meanwhile, the EEAS's Security and Defence Directorate (SECDEFPOL), Integrated Approach for Security and Peace Directorate (ISP), European Union Military Staff (EUMS), and Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability (CPCC) can support implementation of Operation Atalanta, EUCAP Somalia, and new missions that the EU might launch in the Indo-Pacific. The Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC) could do the same, were the EU to launch training missions in the region. Meanwhile, the European Security and Defence College (ESDC) and the European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) provide strategic-level education and analysis, respectively, of security developments in the Indo-Pacific, thus serving to enhance the EU's knowledge about the region.

The establishment of PESCO in December 2017 has added a valuable new instrument to the CSDP toolbox. Bringing together 25 EU Member States to develop defence capabilities available to all of them for national and multinational missions and operations,¹²⁰ PESCO supports structural integration and maximising the benefits of defence spending. There are 60 projects under development as part of PESCO, as of November 2020. They cover the areas of training and facilities; land, formations and systems; maritime; air and systems; enabling and joint; cyber and C4ISR (Command, Control, Communications, Computers (C4) Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR)); and space.¹²¹ PESCO's projects in the areas of training and facilities, maritime, and cyber and C4ISR will indirectly support implementation of the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy, given their role in helping to develop human resources and capabilities that will be useful in the region. This applies, in particular, to the case of Member States that may be interested in supporting implementation of the strategy but lack the material resources to do so.

Financing of CSDP missions and PESCO is another instrument in the CSDP toolbox that can support the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy in the area of security. The European Peace Facility (EPF), established in March 2021, has an off-budget fund worth approximately EUR 5 billion for the period 2021–2027 to cover external

¹¹⁷ EUCAP Somalia (2021), Fact sheet, available at: <https://www.eucap-som.eu/fact-sheet/>

¹¹⁸ EUPOL Afghanistan (2021), About EUPOL, available at: <https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/csdp/missions-and-operations/eupol-afg/node/2/index.html>

¹¹⁹ European External Action Service (2021), Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) structures, instruments, agencies, available at: https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/common-security-and-defence-policy-csdp/5392/common-security-and-defence-policy-csdp-structure-instruments-agencies_en; European Parliament (2021), Common Security and Defence Policy, available at: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/159/common-security-and-defence-policy>

¹²⁰ PESCO (2021), PESCO, available at: <https://pesco.europa.eu/>

¹²¹ Ibid.

actions with military or defence implications.¹²² Among other things, the EPF will provide reliable and predictable funding for CSDP missions and operations, support the peace operations of international and regional organisations and partner countries, and provide long-term capacity-building support to EU partners.¹²³ This includes covering the common costs of Operation Atalanta.¹²⁴ Were the EU to launch CMP in the South China Sea, as is currently being discussed, the EPF could be used to cover its common costs as well. Furthermore, the EPF could be used to cover the costs of providing assistance to third countries in the Indo-Pacific, as well as to support capacity-building across the region. These are two areas that the EU has included in its Indo-Pacific Strategy that explicitly fall within the scope of the EPF. The Athena financing mechanism, for example, which was set up in 2004 and in operation until it was replaced by the EPF, provided EUR 4.4 million to cover the common costs of Operation Atalanta in 2021.¹²⁵ More generally, the financial support that the EU could provide through the EPF to less-developed countries in the Indo-Pacific could serve to boost the security of the region, saving the EU from having to deploy military assets that may not be readily available. Since the EPF is designed to ensure that the EU is considered a serious security provider and can influence the security of third regions,¹²⁶ it would support the EU's contribution to the Indo-Pacific region while potentially reducing the need to deploy military assets.

Similarly, the European Defence Fund (EDF) could indirectly be used in support of the EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy. The maritime domain is crucial to the region, and the EDF specifically calls for proposals for 'naval combat'.¹²⁷ The EU could take this into consideration and specifically target investments in this sector, which otherwise may be neglected in favour of projects related to other security issues that are less central to geopolitical dynamics in the Indo-Pacific.

The CSDP toolbox also includes a more robust cyber policy,¹²⁸ and cyber security is one of the top priority areas included in the EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy. Starting from its Cyber Security Strategy of 2013, the EU has developed capabilities that can be useful in the Indo-Pacific. They include the cyber diplomacy toolbox to prevent, deter, and respond to cyber-attacks, and cyber defence coordination and cooperation.¹²⁹ In fact, the EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy calls for the EU to boost its cyber diplomacy Network with EU delegations and relevant Member States' embassies.¹³⁰ More recently, the EU has equipped itself with cyber sanctions, including travel bans and asset freezes. In July 2020, the EU imposed its first ever cyber sanctions. Individuals and institutions from China and North Korea were targeted by the sanctions, making these two Indo-Pacific countries the first to be on the receiving end of cyber sanctions, along with Russia.¹³¹ This shows the potential for a more robust cyber policy, including sanctions, to be used as a potential deterrent against cyber-attacks from the Indo-Pacific region.

Several Member States have established their own security and defence cooperation initiatives in the region. There is added value in a more robust and permanent involvement of the EU, however. To begin

¹²² Council of the EU (2021), EU sets up the European Peace Facility, 22 March 2021, available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/03/22/eu-sets-up-the-european-peace-facility/>

¹²³ European External Action Service (2021), The European Peace Facility, March 2021, available at: https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eu-peace-facility_factsheet_2021-03-22.pdf

¹²⁴ European Parliament Research Service (2021), European Peace Facility: Investing in International Stability and Security, October 2021, available at [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/690641/EPRS_BRI\(2021\)690641_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/690641/EPRS_BRI(2021)690641_EN.pdf).

¹²⁵ EUNAVFOR (2021), op. cit.

¹²⁶ European Parliament Research Service (2021), European Peace Facility: Investing in International Stability and Security.

¹²⁷ European Commission (2021), The European Defence Fund (EDF), available at: https://ec.europa.eu/defence-industry-space/eu-defence-industry/european-defence-fund-edf_en

¹²⁸ European Parliament (2021), Common Security and Defence Policy.

¹²⁹ European External Action Service (2020), Towards a more secure, global and open cyberspace: the EU presents its new Cyber security Strategy, 16 December (2020), available at: https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/common-security-and-defence-policy-csdp/90623/towards-more-secure-global-and-open-cyberspace-eu-presents-its-new-cyber-security-strategy_en

¹³⁰ European Commission (2021), op. cit., p. 14.

¹³¹ Council of the EU (2020), EU imposes the first sanctions against cyber-attacks, 30 July 2020, available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/07/30/eu-imposes-the-first-ever-sanctions-against-cyber-attacks/>

with, CSDP missions and other instruments from the CSDP toolbox allow Member States to bring together their capabilities and can be more cost-effective than individual Member State initiatives – especially if EPF funding is made available, as would seem logical. In addition, EU involvement can act as a catalyst for Member States that would not necessarily get involved in security matters in the region to do so. Operation Atalanta is case in point. Furthermore, the economic and diplomatic strength of the EU cannot be matched by its Member States individually. Therefore, an EU security presence in the region adds to its political muscle, which is beneficial both for the EU itself, as well as for EU Member States with security and defence initiatives in the region.

5.2 Prospects for launching Coordinated Maritime Presences (CMP)

The EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy explicitly states that 'taking into account the lessons learned from the first assessment of the EU CMP concept, the EU will assess the opportunity of establishing Maritime Areas of Interest in the region'.

Adopted by the Council in June 2020 and launched as a pilot project in the Gulf of Guinea in January 2021,¹³² the CMP concept could indeed be an important instrument for the EU to participate in the security of the Indo-Pacific; particularly since CMPs focus on areas such as maritime security, piracy, and transnational organised crime, including smuggling or trafficking.¹³³ Crucially, CMPs in the Indo-Pacific would give the EU a permanent presence in the region that it currently lacks, Operation Atalanta aside.

. As EU Ambassador to Vietnam, Giorgio Aliberti indicated in November 2020 that the CMP concept 'could be used in a not-too-distant future in other parts of the world, including in the South China Sea'.¹³⁴ This is a clear message, and would build on the recent passage of Dutch, French, and German warships through this sea. Arguably, EU Member States' warships aim to uphold international law and underscore the right to freedom of navigation, rather than to act as a deterrent on China in a narrow military sense.¹³⁵ Likewise, establishing a Maritime Area of Interest in the South China Sea would serve the same purpose for the EU. Considering the importance of both international law and the South China Sea as a trade route for the EU, it would not be out of place to establish a permanent CMP. Plus, the CMP could extend to the Malacca Straits, a crucial chokepoint for trade between Europe and Asia that connects the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea, in the Pacific Ocean.

Similarly to the case of CSDP missions and the CSDP toolbox, the EU's presence in the Indo-Pacific through CMPs would allow Member States to bring together their capabilities, thus making their presence more cost-effective; potentially trigger Member States that are more reluctant to launch their own security initiatives in the region to deploy their navies; and add to the political muscle of Member State efforts. In addition, CMPs would enhance the image of the EU as a guarantor of international law and would send a message to countries in the region threatening freedom of navigation.

The CMP would most likely involve burden-sharing with the US and other navies with a regular presence in the region, including Australia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Philippines, South Korea, and Vietnam. Certainly, this could trigger a response from China, which might deter member states more comfortable with deploying assets to support Operation Atalanta that, after all, focuses on Somali pirates. However, the navies of member states including France, Germany, and the Netherlands, as well as another European

¹³² European External Action Service (2021), The EU launches its Coordinated Maritime Presences concept in the Gulf of Guinea, 25 January 2021, available at: <https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/91970/eu-launches-its-coordinated-maritime-presences-concept-gulf-guinea-el>.

¹³³ European External Action Service (2021), Coordinated Maritime Presences, January 2021, https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/coordinated_maritime_presences.pdf.

¹³⁴ Organizing Committee of the South China Sea International Conference Series (2021), Remark by H.E. Amb. Giorgio Aliberti at the welcoming dinner of the 12th South China Sea Conference, available at: <https://scsc12.dav.edu.vn/blogs/news/bai-phat-bieu-an-toi-cua-dai-su-eu-tai-viet-nam>.

¹³⁵ Pugliese, G. (2021), 'Europe's Naval Engagement in the South China Sea', *JOINT Brief*, No. 2.

country, the UK, have been deployed to the South China Sea without apparent direct consequences for their respective relationship with China other than denunciations by the Chinese government. The more countries naval deployments to the region including by non-territorial actors, the more difficult it will become for China to retaliate.

5.3 The potential response of countries in the region

It is likely that most countries in the Indo-Pacific would welcome the EU's involvement in its security. In fact, countries in the region including India, Japan, Singapore, and South Korea have shown their interest already by requesting to meet with EU officials to discuss the Indo-Pacific strategy.¹³⁶ Operation Atalanta corroborates this assessment. The EU has conducted joint naval exercises with India,¹³⁷ as well as Japan, and South Korea. South Korea also deployed some assets as part of Operation Atalanta itself.¹³⁸ Furthermore, the navies of Indo-Pacific countries, including Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand, have also been part of counter-piracy efforts off the coast of Somalia, as part of the Combined Maritime Forces.¹³⁹ China has deployed its navy to the region, and conducted joint exercises with Operation Atalanta as well.¹⁴⁰ In other words, several Indo-Pacific countries share the security concerns of the EU, and even conduct joint exercises with its navy.

In addition, several countries in the region would most probably welcome EPF funding to boost their capabilities. Most countries in the Indo-Pacific region are seeking to strengthen their capabilities and build their capacity. Indeed, military spending in the region has been growing in recent years.¹⁴¹ The EU could therefore leverage its financial power to generate goodwill in the Indo-Pacific region, both with arms transfers making use of the EPF, as well as capacity-building missions financed through this same mechanism. These could include maritime EU Training Missions (EUTMs) to strengthen the capacity of regional actors in this area. In fact, though it does not involve any EU Member States, the announcement of AUKUS generally received a positive reception across the region – or at least, not a negative one. This suggests that countries in the Indo-Pacific region do not reject the security presence of outside powers and even welcome it, including especially from the US but also from Europe.

Having said that, expanding the EU presence in the Indo-Pacific region is likely to create more friction with China. EU-China cooperation off the coast of Somalia is the result of their shared interest in trade flowing through the region, as well as the fact that Somalia is far away from China. However, China has retaliated against EU sanctions.¹⁴² It has also denied a German warship entry into its harbour after it sailed through the South China Sea.¹⁴³ China has been critical of AUKUS, as well.¹⁴⁴ More generally, China is critical of any development in the Indo-Pacific region that it deems part of strategy to prevent its rise, or that it thinks

¹³⁶ Interview with EEAS official, 8th October 2021, 10.30am.

¹³⁷ European External Action Service (2021), EU-India Joint Naval Exercise, 21 June 2021, available at: https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/100358/eu-india-joint-naval-exercise_en.

¹³⁸ EUNAVFOR (2020), EU Naval Force Somalia Operation ATALANTA and the Japanese navy have been developing further their cooperation in the Indian Ocean in order to strengthen maritime security in the region, 26 October 2020 available at: <https://eunavfor.eu/eu-naval-force-somalia-operation-atalanta-and-the-japanese-navy-have-been-developing-further-their-cooperation-in-the-indian-ocean-in-order-to-strengthen-maritime-security-in-the-region/>; EUNAVFOR (2017), EU NAVFOR welcomes back Republic of Korea, 5 December 2017, available at: <https://eunavfor.eu/eu-navfor-welcomes-back-republic-of-korea/>.

¹³⁹ Combined Maritime Forces (2021), Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), available at: <https://combinedmaritimeforces.com/#top>.

¹⁴⁰ EUNAVFOR (2018), EU NAVFOR conducts first exercise with Chinese PLA(N) in Djibouti, 16 October 2018, available at: <https://eunavfor.eu/eu-navfor-conducts-first-exercise-with-chinese-plan-in-djibouti/>.

¹⁴¹ The International Institute for Strategic Studies (2021), 'The Military Balance 2021', London, Routledge.

¹⁴² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China (2021), Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Announces Sanctions on Relevant EU Entities and Personnel, 22 March 2021, available at: https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/t1863106.shtml.

¹⁴³ Reuters, 'China denies German warship entry into harbour, Berlin says', *Reuters*, 16 September 2021.

¹⁴⁴ BBC, 'AUKUS: China denounces US-UK-Australia pact as irresponsible', *BBC*, 17 September 2021.

creates tensions in the region. Therefore, EU-China relations would most likely deteriorate if the EU used CSDP instruments to boost its presence in the region. The EU insisting that its Indo-Pacific Strategy is based on the principle of 'inclusiveness' would be unlikely to change China's perception that third parties are trying to deter it. Thus, the EU may have to consider the benefits and drawbacks of becoming a 'geopolitical' actor in the region in terms of its broader relationship with China.

6 Indo-Pacific partnerships and their role in enhancing the EU's security and defence

Partnerships are central to the Indo-Pacific Strategy of the EU. In fact, it can be said that the whole Strategy is about working with partners.¹⁴⁵ The EU has a network of partnerships with countries and organisations in the Indo-Pacific region that it can leverage to support its strategy. These partnerships can be combined with CSDP missions and the CSDP toolbox at the political, financial, operational, and human levels. In the case of the Indo-Pacific region, these partnerships include strategic partnerships with China, India, Japan, South Korea, and (since December 2020) ASEAN. Three of these strategic partnerships are therefore with so-called 'like-minded' parties (India, Japan, and South Korea), while another is with the largest economy and military power in the region (China), and the last is with the most institutionalised regional organisation in the Indo-Pacific (ASEAN). In addition, the EU also has partnerships in particular security areas with regional countries including Australia, New Zealand, and Vietnam. The way in which each of these partnerships can work together with CSDP missions and the CSDP toolbox to boost the EU's security and defence is, therefore, different.

6.1 Potential role of partnerships in the region

EU partnerships in the Indo-Pacific region involve dialogues on a wide range of issues, including security-related matters such as maritime security, cyber security, nuclear security and non-proliferation, and counter-terrorism. These dialogues are useful in that they allow the EU and its partners to share information, discuss similarities and differences between their policies, learn from each other, and boost cooperation. As the EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy points out, intensifying security dialogues and deploying military advisors, which would give the EU a permanent point of contact to discuss security with partners, are good starting points to boost the security role of the EU in the region.¹⁴⁶

Having said that, the EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy calls for practical cooperation with Asian partners. In this respect, CSDP missions offer the opportunity to work together with partners and boost the EU's security and defence. Four countries in the Indo-Pacific have already concluded Framework Partnership Agreements (FPAs) with the EU. They are Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, and Vietnam.¹⁴⁷ FPAs are an ideal vehicle to boost cooperation between the EU's CSDP missions and partners in the region. The example of Operation Atalanta is very instructive in this respect. South Korea routinely contributes to this operation, and New Zealand did so in the past.¹⁴⁸ In both cases, their respective FPAs with the EU showed their political commitment to cooperation and allowed them to build a level of trust that would have been difficult to achieve otherwise. FPAs have also boosted operational cooperation between the EU on the one hand, and New Zealand and South Korea on the other. Were the EU to launch other CSDP anti-piracy or

¹⁴⁵ Interview with EEAS official, 5th October 2021, 5pm.

¹⁴⁶ European Commission (2021), op. cit., p. 14.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ European External Action Service (2020), Enhancing Security Cooperation In and With Asia', October 2020, available at: https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/factsheet_eu_asia_security_october_2020.pdf.

freedom of navigation-related missions, CMPs, or EUTMs in support of maritime security in the region, FPAs would allow for the deployment of military personnel from these and other partners who may sign FPAs of their own. Admittedly, this level of human and operational cooperation can also be achieved with ad hoc activities, but FPAs symbolise a greater level of political commitment to cooperation with the EU.

Focusing on cyber security, the EU's Cyber Security Strategy calls for strengthening and expanding cooperation with partner countries,¹⁴⁹ while the EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy specifically calls for the establishment of an EU Cyber Diplomacy Network involving EU delegations and relevant Member State embassies.¹⁵⁰ Furthermore, the EU maintains cyber dialogues with several partners in the region. The combination of a Cyber Diplomacy Network and cyber dialogues would enhance information sharing, thus strengthening the human resources of the EU and its partners. Also in relation to cyber security, the EU could consider participation of like-minded partners in the cyber projects being implemented under PESCO.¹⁵¹ Indeed, the Indo-Pacific Strategy prioritises cooperation with like-minded countries in the cyber domain, particularly India, Japan, and South Korea.¹⁵² Australia, Japan, and South Korea, for example, are working to boost their cyber-defence capabilities, and could partner with the EU on relevant PESCO projects, and fund some of their components to reduce the financial burden on the EU. This could also support the EU's policy of trying to universalize its cyber governance norms and standards.

The EU could coordinate its cyber-sanctions with partners in the region. Realistically, coordination can only happen with Australia currently. The Australian government is working to reform and modernise the country's autonomous sanctions law, including cyber-sanctions. The reforms should be in place before the end of 2021.¹⁵³ This would allow Australia to impose sanctions in coordination with the EU and other countries. In contrast, however, other EU partners in the region lack the legal framework to impose cyber-sanctions.

When it comes to nuclear security and non-proliferation, selected Indo-Pacific partners could join PESCO projects in this area. So far, PESCO has put in limited effort in the field, running one project on Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) surveillance.¹⁵⁴ As PESCO launches more nuclear security-related projects, however, there could be more opportunities for cooperation with Indo-Pacific partners. In the meantime, the Southeast Asia EU CBRN Mitigation Centre of Excellence, operating from the Philippines, will probably remain the main way in which the EU cooperates with Indo-Pacific partners. Launched in 2010, the centre promotes capacity-building.¹⁵⁵ There is also a China-led Nuclear Security Centre for Excellence, set up in 2006, which has been a success in terms of providing training around nuclear security both regionally and internationally.¹⁵⁶ It should also be noted that the EU's maritime operations also have a counter-proliferation component, as is the case with Operation Atalanta, and could be the case if other missions or CMPs were established. This could, therefore, be another area of cooperation with partners, particularly considering North Korea's track record of proliferation in the Middle East and North Africa.

¹⁴⁹ European External Action Service (2020), Towards a more secure, global and open cyberspace: the EU presents its new Cyber security Strategy.

¹⁵⁰ European Commission (2021), op. cit., p. 14.

¹⁵¹ PESCO (2021), PESCO.

¹⁵² Interview with EEAS official, 7th October 2021, 4.15pm.

¹⁵³ Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia (2021), Strengthening Australia's sanctions laws, 5 August 2021, <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/marise-payne/media-release/strengthening-australias-sanctions-laws>.

¹⁵⁴ PESCO (2021), Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) Surveillance as a Service (CBRN Saas), available at: <https://pesco.europa.eu/project/chemical-biological-radiological-and-nuclear-cbrn-surveillance-as-a-service-cbrn-saas/>

¹⁵⁵ European Union (2021), EU CBRN Risk Mitigation Centres of Excellence, available at: https://europa.eu/cbrn-risk-mitigation/index_en

¹⁵⁶ Gaspar, M. (2020), 'China's Nuclear Security Technology Centre supports international training effort', IAEA Bulletin, February 2020, available at: <https://www.iaea.org/bulletin/nuclear-security/chinas-nuclear-security-technology-centre-supports-international-training-efforts>

One area in which the EU could leverage its CSDP is capacity-building. EU partners in ASEAN, as well as India, could benefit from the EU mobilising its EPF and experts to this end. In this respect, the ESIWA project could also support the role of CSDP. ESIWA will likely play a crucial role in strengthening links with the selected countries.¹⁵⁷ ESIWA is designed to work concretely with partners including India, Indonesia, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, and Vietnam in the areas of maritime and cyber security, counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism, and training in peacekeeping.¹⁵⁸ Two of ESIWA's pillars are to support security dialogues and confidence-building with these partners, and to promote greater convergence with EU standards and operational procedures in order to enhance cooperation and capacity-building.¹⁵⁹ It could, therefore, be a useful tool to boost capabilities across the region. But ESIWA would ideally be informed by the needs and requests of EU partners in the region. Otherwise partners may feel disinclined to cooperate with the EU.

6.2 Potential partnerships with extra-regional countries

The US is a crucial actor in the Indo-Pacific, as well as a close EU partner. It is, therefore, unsurprising that the EU cooperates with the US in the region. However, it should be noted that the approaches of the EU and the US towards the security challenges of the region are not completely aligned. The US, for example, has a different view from the EU when it comes to the value of multilateralism and the need for inclusivity. Having said that, the EU and the US share threat perceptions and values, and the EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy especially mentions cooperation with the US, as well as with the Quad, of which the US is the most powerful member.¹⁶⁰

The US possesses the strongest military capabilities at the global level by far,¹⁶¹ as well as an unrivalled network of alliances and partnerships. In the Indo-Pacific region, this network includes Australia, Japan, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, and Thailand, as well as India, thanks to the Quad. For the EU, therefore, it would make sense to work together with the US in any potential CSDP operation in the region. Indeed, this type of partnership is already taking place off the Coast of Somalia between Combined Task Force 151 and Operation Atalanta.¹⁶² The same could happen in the South China Sea were the EU to launch a CSDP operation or CMP. This way, the EU and the US could cooperate for the purpose of upholding freedom of navigation, anti-piracy, or counter-proliferation. With regards to the latter, the Proliferation Security Initiative, launched in 2003, shows that it is possible to establish long-term partnerships when interests align.¹⁶³

In addition, the EU could work together with the US to coordinate the imposition of cyber-sanctions. In fact, the US has a long-running cyber-sanctions programme, which dates back to 2012.¹⁶⁴ Similar to the case of the EU, the US has targeted individuals and entities in Indo-Pacific countries China and North

¹⁵⁷ Interview with EEAS official, 5th October 2021, 5pm.

¹⁵⁸ European External Action Service (2021), The EU needs a strategic approach for the Indo-Pacific, 12 March 2021, available at: https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/94898/The%20EU%20needs%20a%20strategic%20approach%20for%20the%20Indo-Pacific

¹⁵⁹ GIZ (2021), op. cit.

¹⁶⁰ European Commission (2021), op. cit., p. 4.

¹⁶¹ The International Institute for Strategic Studies, op. cit.

¹⁶² Combined Maritime Forces (2021), CTF 151: Counter-piracy, available at: <https://combinedmaritimeforces.com/ctf-151-counter-piracy/>.

¹⁶³ U.S. Department of State (2019), About the Proliferation Security Initiative, 19 March 2019, <https://www.state.gov/about-the-proliferation-security-initiative/>.

¹⁶⁴ U.S. Department of the Treasury (2021), Sanctions Related to Significant Malicious Cyber-Enabled Activities, available at: <https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/financial-sanctions/sanctions-programs-and-country-information/sanctions-related-to-significant-malicious-cyber-enabled-activities>.

Korea.¹⁶⁵ Coordinated sanctions between the EU and the US would send a strong political message, and leverage the combined financial power of both of them.

Capacity-building is another area in which the EU could work together with the US. As a case in point, EUPOL Afghanistan had synergies with US capacity-building activities in the country. This could be considered as part of CSDP civilian missions or ESIWA's work. Having said that, the EU would have to be careful that its capacity-building goals are aligned with the US's, and that its own activities are sufficiently visible.

The EU could also cooperate with the Quad, especially as now this group seems to be moving away from 'hard' security issues to focus on areas such as vaccine production and delivery, safe semiconductor supply chains, or educational cooperation as concrete initiatives.¹⁶⁶ One exception has been joint maritime exercises between the navies of the Quad countries.¹⁶⁷ Sometimes, these exercises have included other countries – France, for example.¹⁶⁸ This means that the Quad is open to cooperation with other parties. The EU could be among these parties, were it to establish a CSDP mission or CMP. The Quad statement of September 2021 mentioned cyber security cooperation, with a focus on standards, resilience, and critical infrastructures.¹⁶⁹ The CSDP could allow for joint work in the last two of these areas. In fact, it could be argued that as the Quad moves away from 'hard' security issues, it should be easier to cooperate with the group because it would not be openly targeting and even confronting China.

The EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy also calls for cooperation with the UK.¹⁷⁰ The UK's AUKUS agreement to provide nuclear-powered submarines to Australia and to potentially cooperate in other security areas shows that the UK also wants to have a security role in the region.¹⁷¹ To this end, the UK is willing to closely align with the US to the detriment of its own autonomy of action. This could make cooperation with the EU in the region difficult, even if Brexit-related tensions eventually subside. Despite this, the French and UK navies have conducted joint training exercises.¹⁷² This suggests that cooperation with the EU, as well as its Member States, is possible. Cooperation could thus take place in similar areas to the US's, even if at a smaller scale considering the difference in capabilities between the US and the UK.

¹⁶⁵ US. Department of the Treasury (201), SDN List by Country, available at: <https://www.treasury.gov/ofac/downloads/ctrlst.txt>

¹⁶⁶ The White House, Joint Statement from Quad Leaders, 24 September 2021, available at:

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/09/24/joint-statement-from-quad-leaders/>

¹⁶⁷ Negi, M., and Bhalla, A. (2021), 'Malabar naval exercise with Quad nations to begin on August 26', *India Today*, 25 August 2021.

¹⁶⁸ Sharma, K., and Pene-Lassus, M., 'France to lead Quad naval drill in Indo-Pacific challenge to China', *Nikkei Asia*, 21 April 2021.

¹⁶⁹ The White House, op. cit.

¹⁷⁰ European Commission (2021), op. cit., p. 4.

¹⁷¹ Government of the United Kingdom (2021), UK, US AND Australia launch new security partnership, 15 September 2021, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-us-and-australia-launch-new-security-partnership>.

¹⁷² Government of the United Kingdom (2021), UK Carrier Strike Group to exercise with Indo-Pacific partners, 19 July 2021, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-carrier-strike-group-to-exercise-with-indo-pacific-partners>.

7 Suggestions and proposals: How the EU should approach Indo-Pacific security challenges

The security challenges of the Indo-Pacific have a direct impact on the EU. The region might not be in the immediate European Neighbourhood, but its growing importance to the world economy, simmering tensions, increasing links with Europe, the rise of China, and Sino-American competition are among the reasons why the EU must ensure it is a security player in the region. It is not enough for the EU to be a bystander or to 'outsource' its security policy towards the Indo-Pacific to the US and regional partners. The EU should approach Indo-Pacific security challenges proactively, seeking to influence developments in the region. The EU will not be the central player in Indo-Pacific affairs, but thanks to the ever-growing central securities depositories (CSDs), it can exercise a level of influence that would have not been possible a few years ago. As President von der Leyen indicated in her State of the Union Address last September, the EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy 'reflects the growing importance of the region to our prosperity and security [...] Europe needs to be more present and active in the region'.¹⁷³ The following recommendations suggest ways in which different EU actors and the CSDP can serve this purpose.

7.1 Recommendations for short-term actions

1. The EEAS and EU delegations across the Indo-Pacific should prioritise communication of the Indo-Pacific Strategy and, crucially, its security benefits for partner countries to avoid miscommunication. Partner countries had the opportunity to feed into the strategy formulation process. They should now be invited to feed into the implementation process in ways that boost the EU's and the partner's security, strengthen bilateral security relations between the EU and the partner, and support the goals of the EU's Indo-Pacific policy. In this respect, EU delegations would benefit from an acceleration of the process to appoint military advisors, who should work together with the military attaches of Member States to coordinate messaging and actions.
2. The Council should consider expanding the geographical scope of Operation Atalanta deeper into the Indian Ocean, which may be a welcome move for deepening the partnership between the EU and India. Considering that Operation Atalanta has been welcome by Indo-Pacific partners; its focus on preventing piracy and armed robbery as well as monitoring fishing activities, weapons and drug trafficking, and illegal trade also concerns other parts of the Indian Ocean. Following its success conducting joint activities and training exercises with other navies, the operation has the potential to secure the EU's security and prosperity beyond its current area of operation, enhance coordination among EU navies participating in the operation, and symbolise the EU's commitment to the security of the Indo-Pacific region in the western Indian Ocean.
3. The Council should consider launching a CMP in the South China Sea or the Indian Ocean. Competing territorial claims in the South China Sea and China's alleged growing assertiveness have created tensions. The ASEAN-led process towards a code of conduct in this sea suggests that countries in the region recognise the need to ease these tensions. Tensions are unlikely to disappear, however. EU Member States including France, Germany, and the Netherlands have sent their warships through the South China Sea in support of freedom of navigation, including sailing together with regional partners. An EU CMP would help to stabilise the region, show the EU's commitment to freedom of navigation, and support the EU's own economic security and prosperity.
4. The EEAS and EU delegations should accelerate development of the EU Cyber Diplomacy Network across the region to promote its cyber security vision, norms, and legal framework across the Indo-

¹⁷³ European Commission (2021), 2021 State of the Union Address by President von der Leyen, 15 September 2021, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/ov/SPEECH_21_4701.

Pacific. This should be done together with the strengthening of existing digital partnerships and the establishment of new ones with like-minded partners across the region. Considering that both the EU and like-minded partners allegedly suffer cyber-attacks from China, North Korea, and Russia, the EEAS and EU delegations should explore the potential to raise the EU's concerns in cooperation with partners. DG Connect could take a leading role in this area, sharing the EU's experience but also learning from Indo-Pacific partners.

5. The Council should coordinate the imposition of cyber-sanctions with like-minded partners, including Australia, the UK, and the US. For the purpose of coordination, the Council, the Commission, and the EEAS should further facilitate the exchange of information with these like-minded partners to ensure correct attribution of cyber-attacks. The EEAS and EU delegations should boost exchanges with Indo-Pacific partners suffering from cyber-attacks that do not have their own sanctions regime, as a means to boost cooperation and make the attribution process more reliable.
6. In the case of non-proliferation of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, the EEAS should continue to lead the process of engagement with partners addressing North Korea's proliferation activities. In the case of the European Parliament, the Subcommittee on Security and Defence (SEDE) and the Delegation for relations with the Korean Peninsula should lead the process of engagement with North Korea to raise the EU's concerns, given the constraints that the Council places on the EEAS. The Council should be encouraged to allow a more proactive approach by the EEAS, as well as to support the EU's role as a potential facilitator of dialogue with North Korea, building on its experience as negotiator of the JCPOA with Iran.
7. The EDA and the EEAS, particularly EU Military Staff (EUMS), should be encouraged to explore the possibility of inviting like-minded partners to participate in carefully selected PESCO projects in areas in which they have expertise and/or technological competences that can add value to said projects. Selection would be done on a case-by-case basis and would not necessarily entail access by the partner to all aspects of the project. Examples include potential participation from Australia, Japan, and South Korea in cyber security or maritime security projects.
8. The EPF should be used to provide financial support to countries in the Indo-Pacific facing security challenges, including terrorism, trafficking or nuclear smuggling through their territory (including territorial waters), and cyber-attacks. This support should prioritise capacity-building activities, such as EUTMs, but should also involve the transfer of technology and support for the development of adequate infrastructure. Financial support should include the provision of military equipment to selected partners without adequate defence capabilities, too. In all instances, EPF support should be aligned with the security priorities identified in the EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy.
9. The Commission, and in particular the Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI) should support ESIWA at the highest level to ensure its success in influencing and supporting the policy of its partner countries in a way that strengthens the EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy. The pilot partner countries include India, Indonesia, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, and Vietnam. The EU delegations leading communication and implementation in each partner country should be encouraged to prioritise the areas of interest for partner countries among the four priority areas to ensure buy-in from partner country stakeholders. The four priority areas are counter-terrorism/prevention of violent extremism, cyber security, maritime security, and crisis management.
10. In the case of the European Parliament, SEDE should lead scrutiny of the EU's security policy towards the Indo-Pacific, as well as towards China, as it pertains to the subcommittee's remit. SEDE could also liaise with delegations for relations with countries and regions including Australia, India, Japan, the Korean Peninsula, Southeast Asia, ASEAN, and the US to ensure that they discuss Indo-Pacific security with their counterparts. Given the centrality of Indo-Pacific security concerns to these counterparts, delegations for relations with these countries and regions should investigate areas for potential

cooperation. Furthermore, SEDE should also encourage the delegation to implement relations with China that address Indo-Pacific security, including the EU's concerns, as well as potential areas for cooperation (if any).

7.2 Recommendations for long-term actions

1. The EU should promote its cyber security vision based on a rules-based cyberspace and good governance frameworks as a way to develop standards adopted in the Indo-Pacific region and globally. The EU should prioritise coordination with like-minded partners with strong cyber security capabilities, as they have greater incentives to adopt and promote standards implemented across the region and globally. DG Connect could also host or support the launch of a Cyber Centre in the region, perhaps modelled on the EU CBRN Mitigation Centre of Excellence in ASEAN.
2. The EU should consider the possibility of establishing links with the new government in Afghanistan to prevent the country becoming a safe-haven for terrorist networks following from the decision to reopen the delegation in Kabul. This may also involve boosting cooperation with Pakistan, given its good relationship with the new Afghani government. Concurrently, the EU should coordinate with India and selected countries in Southeast Asia threatened by regional terrorist networks and with incentives to discuss, share intelligence, and cooperate in counter-terrorism.
3. The Council and the EEAS should work to identify areas for security cooperation with the US and the Quad in the Indo-Pacific. This should include exchanges and dialogues on threat perception, capability complementarities, overarching goals, and, more generally, ways in which cooperation with both of them could boost the EU's security and prosperity. This dialogue could include Member States with their own independent capabilities in the region. Maritime security, cyber security, non-proliferation, counter-terrorism, and capacity-building are areas of potential dialogue and cooperation. Post-AUKUS, the shape of this cooperation with the US remains unclear—will US attempts at building new defence networks in the Indo-Pacific undermine or reinforce EU efforts to engage in security matters of the region? In terms of the Quad, EU engagement with India or Japan as core members of the Quad may likely be the better entry point compared to the US or Australia which have presently strong anti-China agendas.
4. The Council and the EEAS should intensify cooperation with NATO, building on the EU's strategic partnership to identify potential areas for cooperation, avoid duplication, and potentially coordinate with common strategic partners in the Indo-Pacific region (i.e. Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea). In particular, the EU and NATO should consider focusing on capacity-building, hybrid threats, non-proliferation of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, and crisis response. The EU should also consider how coordination with NATO could boost the deliverables from PESCO.
5. The Council, the EEAS, and the European Parliament should consider and discuss how to potentially boost cooperation with the UK in the Indo-Pacific. As one of four European countries deploying its military to the region, the UK has shown its commitment to the security of the Indo-Pacific, but the scope of that commitment is still evolving. So far, maritime security, cybersecurity, non-proliferation, counter-terrorism, and capacity-building are areas of potential dialogue and cooperation.
6. The Council, the EEAS, and the European Parliament should carefully consider security relations with China in the Indo-Pacific, including areas of competition and areas of potential cooperation. In the areas of competition, the EU should boost cooperation with like-minded partners with similar concerns about China's alleged assertiveness, including in relation to maritime and cyber security. The EU should also consider how to coordinate actions with like-minded partners to try to steer China towards a more cooperative approach in the area of security.

7. The EU should consider what type of security cooperation might be possible with Taiwan, including the concerns expressed by several institutions regarding peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait. In this respect, the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) should actively consider how to ensure that the 'EU-Taiwan Political Relations and Cooperation' report can spur the Council and the Commission to strengthen security links with Taiwan.¹⁷⁴ This could include visits by European Parliament delegations to Taiwan. Ultimately, if there are EU member states with military presence in the region, these might be entangled in a crisis. If the EU becomes an established security actor in the region, there may be new expectation and pressures to act. In this instance, partnerships, and acting as a collective will be more useful to the EU than acting alone.
8. In the case of the European Parliament, SEDE should scrutinise implementation of the security components of the Indo-Pacific Strategy, focusing in particular on maritime security, cyber security, non-proliferation, counter-terrorism, and capacity-building. SEDE should also scrutinise cooperation between the EU and partners in the region, as the EU is unlikely to achieve its security goals in the Indo-Pacific without it.

Interviews

1. EEAS official, 5 October 2021, 5pm
2. EEAS official, 7 October 2021, 4.15pm
3. EEAS official, 8 October 2021, 10.30am

¹⁷⁴ European Parliament Committee on Foreign Affairs (2021), Draft Report on the European Parliament recommendation the Vice-President /High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on EU-Taiwan political relations and cooperation (2021/2041(INI), 23 April 2021, available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/AFET-PR-691427_EN.pdf.

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