



Between AUKUS and the Quad

Scaling European Interest in the Indo-Pacific

Jagannath Panda, Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses

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Author:

Jagannath Panda,
Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses

Editors:

Paul van Hoof and Tim Sweijjs

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The creation of AUKUS – the new security alliance between the US, United Kingdom (UK), and Australia – on September 15, 2021¹ marked a momentous milestone in the Indo-Pacific geopolitical landscape. Not only did it show continued resilience of the Anglo-nation partnerships, but it also pointed to their shared strategic interests and common vision for the region. The establishment of AUKUS, with its rather broad agenda encompassing critical and advanced defense technologies as well as nuclear defense technology transfer to Australia, has refurbished the image of Australia as a ‘middle power’ with robust political will. Australia’s Prime Minister Scott Morrison has hailed the pact as a “forever partnership”² with clear security benefits at a time when Australia’s relations with China have reached an “all-time low.” AUKUS’ goal of providing atomic-powered submarines (not armed with nuclear weapons) to the Royal Australian Navy is a step in this direction. The partnership has also underscored that post-Brexit UK is serious about its presence in the Indo-Pacific region under a broader ‘Global Britain’ vision. Further, AUKUS is being seen as a sign of Washington’s staunch commitment to the region’s security and a promise of its continued engagement in the region for decades to come.

Simultaneously, however, the announcement of AUKUS also casts serious questions over the US’ leadership after it created a major rift in transatlantic ties. The abrupt cancellation³ of the France–Australia submarine deal, which would have reinforced Paris’ strategic presence and engagement in the Indo-Pacific, not only soured the Paris–Canberra synergy, but also further complicated the interests of France and the EU in the region. In the areas of security and defense, the EU’s approach toward big powers in the Indo-Pacific will now have to be reconsidered, as relying entirely on traditional partners, namely the US and the UK, does not seem feasible. Notwithstanding the current discord, however, these states are like-minded partners, in that they have shown continued commitment to a rules-based Indo-Pacific that seeks to limit Chinese aggressiveness.

The complex narratives surrounding the announcement of the AUKUS trilateral also raise questions about where the grouping fits in the Indo-Pacific security architecture. Most prominently, the AUKUS agreement has had a significant impact on two structures: the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) – comprising the US, Australia, India, and Japan – and the EU. For the Quad, the key question is whether the AUKUS alliance is complimentary or contradictory. In other words, will AUKUS support or negate the work that the revitalized Quad dialogue has been attempting to undertake in the region?

On the other hand, for the EU, the formation of AUKUS – in particular, the perceived betrayal of France (cancellation of the France–Australia submarine deal) and the secrecy and lack of consultation in the process of establishing the framework – has revived and brought focus to the persisting and growing chasm in the EU–US transatlantic partnership. Both AUKUS and the Quad are US-led initiatives, something the EU would have accounted for while charting its own course in the region. As the EU seeks to build its role in the Indo-Pacific, a crucial question remains: How can it navigate between the Quad and AUKUS to forward its own objectives and ambitions in the region? This policy paper argues that the sudden emergence of the

1 The White House, “Joint Leaders Statement on AUKUS,” September 15, 2021, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/09/15/joint-leaders-statement-on-aukus/>.

2 Sky News Australia, “AUKUS Alliance a ‘Forever Partnership’: Morrison,” streamed on September 15, 2021, YouTube video, accessed December 17, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jpOoL2M3Kbg>.

3 Agence France-Presse (AFP), “AUKUS Fiasco: France Accuses Australia, US of ‘Lying’ in Escalating Crisis,” *The Economic Times*, September 22, 2021, accessed December 16, 2021, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/aukus-fiasco-france-accuses-australia-us-of-lying-in-escalating-crisis/articleshow/86334482.cms?from=mdr>.

The announcement of AUKUS also casts serious questions over the US’ leadership after it created a major rift in transatlantic ties

AUKUS alliance will encourage (and compel to an extent) the EU to recalibrate its approach toward fulfilling its Indo-Pacific strategy, considering AUKUS's disregard for EU's sentiments. Transatlantic relations may not have been completely debilitated, but the EU powers certainly would have felt their diminishing importance within the US strategic calculus. However, this recalibration does not indicate weakened prospects for EU involvement within the Indo-Pacific narrative – there is plenty of opportunity for continued collaboration within trilaterals and entities like the Quad. Moreover, by engaging deeper with Quad powers such as India and Japan, the EU may find additional opportunities to assert its growing strategic autonomy, helping combine forces toward the common goal of deterring Chinese aggression.⁴

Transatlantic Ties under the Shadow of AUKUS

At the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) summit in June 2021, US President Joe Biden committed to consult European allies on all major US foreign policy and strategic decisions in a bid to re-strengthen US alliances.⁵ That a US-driven trilateral was perceived as a “stab in the back” by France denotes an intrinsic breakdown of trust in transatlantic ties.⁶ Furthermore, such an action happened in the aftermath of the ill-managed and globally watched withdrawal of US (and NATO) troops from Afghanistan, which put Kabul back into the Taliban's control. Subsequently, French Economy Minister Bruno Le Maire stated that Europe could no longer “rely” on US protection and that Afghanistan was a “wake-up call.”⁷

Paris was angered by the sudden (and rather ruthless) withdrawal of the Australian arrangement with France for building conventional submarines, without any forewarning. Australia had been engaged in secret negotiations with the US and the UK for months, but still reconfirmed to France its intentions of continuing with the submarine contract with French company Naval Group approximately two weeks prior to the AUKUS announcement.⁸ The deal was the biggest ever contract for France's defense industry. Moreover, Paris had hoped that in line with its Rafale sale to India, a major foreign arms sale to Australia would have encouraged further countries in Asia, the Middle East, and even Europe to buy French submarine technology.⁹ Therefore, the loss of the Franco-Australian conventional submarine deal came as a blow to not only French interests in the Indo-Pacific, but also its domestic military industry – especially coming at a politically sensitive time as President Macron gears up for national elections in 2022.¹⁰

4 Dewey Sim, “France to Deepen Ties with Asia after Losing ‘Privileged’ Partnership with Australia in Aukus Snub, Diplomat Says,” *South China Morning Post*, December 7, 2021, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3158815/france-deepen-ties-asia-after-losing-privileged-partnership>.

5 NATO, “Secretary General Welcomes US President to NATO Summit,” June 14, 2021, accessed December 14, 2021, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_185056.htm.

6 France 24, “France Deplores ‘Stab in the Back’ by US, Australia over Subs Contract,” September 16, 2021, accessed December 17, 2021, <https://www.france24.com/en/video/20210916-france-deplores-stab-in-the-back-by-us-australia-over-subs-contract>.

7 Ibid

8 Jack Hawke, “‘No Apology’: Dutton Lets French Fume over Submarine ‘Stab in the Back,’” ABC News, September 16, 2021, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-09-17/france-says-australia-has-stabbed-it-in-the-back-/100469308>.

9 Jamie Shea, “The AUKUS Deal: A Moment of Truth for Europe and for Security in the Indo-Pacific Region,” Friends of Europe, October 1, 2021, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.friendsofeurope.org/insights/the-aukus-deal-a-moment-of-truth-for-europe-and-for-security-in-the-indo-pacific-region/>.

10 Silvia Amaro, “France Election: Who Will Challenge Macron in Presidential Vote,” CNBC, October 25, 2021, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/10/25/france-election-who-will-challenge-macron-in-presidential-vote.html>.

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The fallout of the so-called “betrayal” encompasses not only an increase in tensions between Australia and France – Paris refused to attend the Australia-France-India trilateral meet scheduled on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in September 2021 – but also a declining confidence in the US and its leadership. Thus, AUKUS has only strengthened calls for what EU has termed as its version of “strategic autonomy.”¹¹ Important players in this vision are French President Emmanuel Macron, who has long wished to build a conscious “European sovereignty,” and former German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who has argued that Europe must shape its own future and that dependence on the US was no longer a viable option.¹² With European politics currently in a flux – Macron is preparing for presidential elections in 2022 and Germany has a new chancellor, Olaf Scholz, who succeeds Merkel after her retirement in 2021 – AUKUS has put transatlantic ties in further diplomatic and strategic doubt or disorder.

EU’s Indo-Pacific Strategy: Caught between AUKUS and Quad

The AUKUS announcement also coincided, in what could be amounted to yet another case of bad strategic timing, with the release of the EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, on September 16, 2021.¹³ The strategy has highlighted that the EU “intends to increase its engagement with the region” in a “principled and long-term” manner, seeking to cooperate with partner states in the region. Although key European powers France, Germany, and Netherlands already had Indo-Pacific national strategy documents, the umbrella EU strategy and action plan for the region is a key development that was unfortunately overshadowed by the fanfare surrounding AUKUS. The EU strategy also highlighted strategic autonomy as a core principle for the bloc to bolster its reputation as a global power. Importantly, it drew a direct link between European prosperity and interests and continental Asian and Indo-Pacific security, primarily based on EU economic interests in the Indian Ocean.¹⁴ Approximately 80 percent of the EU’s goods trade transits through the shipping routes, making the upholding of principles like freedom of navigation and the rule of law in the region a vital interest for the EU. In this regard, the Quad, which has proactively emerged as the most vital security grouping in the Indo-Pacific region, holds much sway and importance in the EU strategy. In stating that it plans to “deepen its engagement with partners that already have Indo-Pacific approaches of their own,” the EU also clarified that it is “interested in engaging with the Quad on issues of common interest.”

At the same time, the difference between AUKUS and Quad is important to identify. AUKUS is a collective defense arrangement, while the Quad is a collective diplomatic cooperative forum. AUKUS is defined as an “enhanced trilateral security partnership” that seeks to build

11 Marcin Cesluk-Grajewski, “The EU Strategic Autonomy Debate [What Think Tanks Are Thinking],” Think Tank, European Parliament, March 30, 2021, accessed December 14, 2021, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI\(2021\)690532](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2021)690532).

12 Mathilde Ciulla and Tara Varma, “The Lonely Leader: The Origins of France’s Strategy for EU Foreign Policy,” European Council on Foreign Relations, January 6, 2021, accessed December 17, 2021, <https://ecfr.eu/article/the-lonely-leader-the-origins-of-frances-strategy-for-eu-foreign-policy/>.

13 European Commission, “Questions and Answers: EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific,” September 16, 2021, accessed December 14, 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/QAN-DA_21_4709.

14 Girish Luthra, “An Assessment of the European Union’s Indo-Pacific Strategy,” *ORF Issue Brief* 504, November 10, 2021, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.orfonline.org/research/an-assessment-of-the-european-unions-indo-pacific-strategy/>.

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on the “longstanding and ongoing bilateral ties” between the three states.¹⁵ The partnership aims to focus on “deeper integration of security and defense-related science, technology, industrial bases, and supply chains.” On the other hand, Quad remains a dialogue forum, albeit with growing levels of engagement, for example, through its leadership summits and issue-focused ‘plus’ dialogues. Initiatives under the Quad focus on broader, more comprehensive areas, rather than just defense or military issues, encompassing the COVID-19 vaccine program, climate change and resilience, advanced and critical technologies and their governance, cyberspace cooperation, supply chain diversification, infrastructure development, people-to-people exchanges, and the Afghanistan situation.¹⁶ Apart from implementing joint programs through working groups, the Quad continues to be a largely consultative and political mechanism. Until recently, the Quad ministerial summits had hardly any action-oriented outcomes, and focused on facilitating exchanges, building synergy, and reaffirming commitment to shared principles.

A lack of confidence in Washington (and Canberra) will prove to be detrimental for the Quad, which is a US-backed (if not US-led) venture, as it is seeking to expand its leadership outlook in the region. Third-country ties which the Quad has built over the past year – both individually (on a bilateral level) and collectively – are poised to suffer a setback amid questions on US leadership and strategy, at least in the immediate future. This is true not only for the European partners but also smaller regional powers in Southeast Asia and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). While the EU navigates diminishing trust in the transatlantic partnership and US leadership, for ASEAN, AUKUS has brought to its borders a very real threat of an arms race to an extent by forming a highly visible collective defense alliance that aims to bolster joint capacity in the critical and nuclear military technology domains.

As AUKUS raises concerns – voiced in the broader Southeast Asia, Malaysia¹⁷, North Korea¹⁸, and China¹⁹ – about a growing arms race in the Indo-Pacific, the EU’s own fears regarding “significant military build-up” in the Indo-Pacific are likely to only intensify. For several of the EU states, too, AUKUS has brought up concerns about the rapid escalation of the US-China great power rivalry – a rather unwelcome proposition as the EU (and several of its member states like Germany, Sweden, Hungary, and France) remains highly dependent on the Chinese economy. While the word China was not mentioned in the Joint Leaders Statement on AUKUS,²⁰ this partnership is obviously a reaction to the deteriorating security climate in the Indo-Pacific, incited by China’s aggressive ascent, which has led to Europe terming Beijing a “systemic rival.”²¹ Such a narrative becomes clearer with the realization that AUKUS is ulti-

15 The White House, “Joint Leaders Statement on AUKUS.”

16 The White House, “Joint Statement from Quad Leaders,” September 25, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/09/24/joint-statement-from-quad-leaders/>; The White House, “Quad Principles on Technology Design, Development, Governance, and Use,” September 25, 2021, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/09/24/quad-principles-on-technology-design-development-governance-and-use/>.

17 Ravil Shirodkar, “Malaysia Says AUKUS Alliance May Lead to Arms Race, Provocation,” Bloomberg, September 18, 2021, accessed December 17, 2021, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-09-18/malaysia-says-aucus-alliance-may-lead-to-arms-race-provocation>.

18 BBC, “Aukus Could Trigger a ‘Nuclear Arms Race’, Says North Korea,” BBC News, September 20, 2021, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-58621056>.

19 Sumesh Shiwakoty “AUKUS Will Exacerbate the Arms Race,” CGTN, September 29, 2021, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2021-09-29/AUKUS-will-exacerbate-the-arms-race-13WHPq91g52/index.html>.

20 The White House, “Joint Leaders Statement on AUKUS.”

21 Marcin Ciesluk-Grajewski, “China: From Partner to Rival [What Think Tanks Are Thinking],” Think Tank, European Parliament, October 2, 2020, accessed December 17, 2021, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI\(2020\)659261](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2020)659261).

Much like the Quad, AUKUS has changed regional dynamics. European engagement with the Indo-Pacific will now need to be carefully calibrated to ensure that it does not inflame regional tensions further but can effectively promote maritime security and prosperity goals

mately a thinned-down version of the Five Eyes alliance²², the world's key intelligence-sharing partnership. The introduction of AUKUS has opened the door for a collective defense, or NATO-like, institution; however, whether European powers consider the emergence of such a body as aligned with their regional security interests remains to be seen.

Much like the Quad, AUKUS has changed regional dynamics. European engagement with the Indo-Pacific will now need to be carefully calibrated to ensure that it does not inflame regional tensions further but can effectively promote maritime security and prosperity goals. Accordingly, the EU may consider entering into regular dialogues with the Quad to promote specific shared goals, such as last-mile vaccine delivery and climate action, but should be careful not to get embroiled in the rapidly intensifying great power competition. Nonetheless, increased engagement between the EU and Quad powers could serve as a deterrent against Chinese aggression in the region. As the Quad is not a military alliance, increased liberties can be taken by members and collaborators in sustaining and reinforcing rules-based engagement, without appearing overtly hostile toward China.

In addition, the EU could also emphasize on building ties with middle and small regional powers, like India, Japan, and the ASEAN states, over and beyond the Quad. While this does not mean that the EU will necessarily call out China on issues such as its human rights abuses and growing assertiveness in the maritime theatre, it will bolster its credibility as an independent actor building sustainable long-term engagement, as highlighted in its strategy document. As a well-established Indo-Pacific resident power, which has strong partnerships with India and Japan and a robust presence in regional multilateral institutions across the Indian and Pacific Oceans, France can lead the way for Europe's involvement.

Between complementarity and divergence

AUKUS has led to international strategy challenges for Quad countries in both Europe-Asia and the Indo-Pacific, which is especially worrisome at a time when NATO seems to be navigating troubled waters because of weakening transoceanic ties.²³ Yet, it can also be argued that AUKUS has further highlighted a “strategic reorientation” in the US (and to some extent Australia's) strategy toward the Indo-Pacific.²⁴ For Washington's fellow Quad members (security partner India and treaty alliance partners Japan and Australia), such a reorientation can be a positive development. For instance, the Biden administration's decision to transfer nuclear propulsion technology to Australia, for the first time since sharing it with the UK at the peak of the Cold War, demonstrates to India and Japan the US commitment to security in the region and comes as a reassurance – notwithstanding that India and Japan were left out of the AUKUS consultation process.

22 David Goe, Michael Goodman, and David Schaefer “Five Eyes: The Past, Present and Future of the World's Key Intelligence Alliance,” *Engelsberg Ideas*, March 18, 2021, accessed December 17, 2021, <https://engelsbergideas.com/essays/five-eyes-the-past-present-and-future-of-the-worlds-key-intelligence-alliance/>.

23 NATO, “Secretary General Stresses the Importance of Europe and North America Standing Together in NATO,” October 5, 2021, accessed December 14, 2021, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_187138.htm.

24 Heather A. Conley and Michael J. Green, “Don't Underestimate the AUKUS Rift with France,” *Foreign Policy*, September 22, 2021, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/09/22/aucus-france-biden-europe-allies/>.

Since the Quad has thus far been more of a political-diplomatic forum than a formal military alliance, the impact of the AUKUS announcement has not yet been completely felt. India and Japan have welcomed AUKUS;²⁵ yet, the pact will have an adverse impact on bilateral and mini-lateral ties in the short term.²⁶ While AUKUS theoretically has increased the European presence in the Indo-Pacific (especially in the maritime domain), by enhancing the UK's presence in the region, the bitterness between London and Brussels post-Brexit implies that increased British engagement is not a gateway for broader Europe (or EU) participation in the region. On the contrary, AUKUS has strained the ties between the Quad and France, one of the major EU leaders. Growing India-France, Japan-France, or even potential India-France-Japan relations may not be as affected,²⁷ but France's (and Europe's) engagement with the Quad as a whole is likely to be hindered. Potential ideations,²⁸ such as an India-France-UK trilateral, which could have drawn on mutual commitment to a rules-based maritime order to build a maritime democracy framework enhancing security, blue economy, and third-country cooperation, have now become less likely, if not a complete pipe dream.

The EU has also highlighted focus on the Indian Ocean as a key geographic area wherein it seeks to rely on a “strong network of partnerships” to further its interests. It is important to note that with the Malabar exercise growing to include Australia as well, the same has essentially become a Quad-based maritime drill, which focused on the Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean region in its latest October 2021 edition.²⁹ The Malabar exercises were supplemented by the annual La Pérouse naval exercise,³⁰ led by the French Navy with the participation of the US, Japanese, and Australian navies. The April 2021 edition of La Pérouse, conducted in the eastern Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal, included India for the first time, making it a France-plus-Quad endeavor.³¹ Paris' invitation to India highlighted a growing maritime cooperation between France and India; moreover, La Perouse is one of the most vital engagements by the EU in the Indo-Pacific maritime security domain. Should AUKUS circumvent its successful hosting in the coming year, it would mark a major security failure on the part of the democratic like-minded states in preserving a rules-based, open, and secure maritime order. Notably, France is not the only EU power displaying its presence in the region. In August 2021, in a bold move – the first of its kind in 20 years – representing Germany's aspirations to enhance its presence in the Indo-Pacific, Berlin deployed its Bayern frigate to the region

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25 C. Raja Mohan, “AUKUS Pact Welcomed by India as China Deterrent,” September 16, 2021, accessed December 17, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/09/16/aukus-india-australia-uk-us-submarines/>; Agencia EFE, “Japan Welcomes Defense Pact between Australia, US, UK,” September 17, 2021, accessed December 17, 2021, <https://www.efe.com/efe/english/world/japan-welcomes-defense-pact-between-australia-us-uk/50000262-4631615>.

26 Indrani Bagchi, “Fuming France Cancels Meet with Australia, India,” *The Times of India*, September 24, 2021, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/fuming-france-cancels-meet-with-oz-india/articleshow/86468090.cms>.

27 Indrani Bagchi, “India, France & Japan Plan Indo-Pacific Bloc,” *The Times of India*, January 20, 2021, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/india-france-japan-plan-indo-pacific-bloc/articleshow/80356858.cms>.

28 Eerishika Pankaj, “Ideating an India-France-UK Trilateral for the Indo-Pacific,” *PacNet* 29, June 28, 2021, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://pacforum.org/publication/pacnet-29-ideating-an-india-france-uk-trilateral-for-the-indo-pacific>.

29 Sumit Bhattacharjee, “Malabar Exercise Is to Provide Stability in the Region, Says U.S. Navy Chief,” *The Hindu*, October 14, 2021, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/malabar-exercise-is-to-provide-stability-in-the-region-says-us-navy-chief/article36999669.ece>.

30 Xavier Vavasseur, “Australia France India Japan and the United States Take Part in Exercise La Pérouse,” *Naval News*, April 6, 2021, accessed December 17, 2021, <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2021/04/australia-france-india-japan-and-the-united-states-take-part-in-exercise-la-perouse/>.

31 Milind Kulshreshtha, “French Naval Exercise La Perouse: India Joins to Make It Full QUAD,” *Financial Express*, April 3, 2021, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.financialexpress.com/defence/french-naval-exercise-la-perouse-india-joins-to-make-it-full-quad/2226137/>.

for a six month mission.³² Bayern will assist EU's Operation Atlanta and NATO's Operation Sea Guardian missions in the region, as well as help enforce UN sanctions against the North Korean regime.

Moreover, as EU's post-AUKUS ties with the US and Australia are strained, the mantle will fall on India and Japan to build on their EU bilaterals, involving important stakeholders, to ensure security and stability in the region. The EU already shares strategic partnerships with both New Delhi and Tokyo. Notably, the EU-India 2025 Roadmap identifies areas of cooperation like foreign policy, security, human rights, economy, trade and investment, climate change and the environment, urban development, connectivity, transport, information and communication technology, outer space, artificial intelligence, global governance, and people-to-people exchanges.³³ Similarly, Japan and the EU have signed two foundational agreements: the strategic and economic partnership agreements³⁴ where security and defense; climate change, energy and environment; and digital, physical and industrial connectivity, and research are areas of cooperation.

Notably, India and Japan also rank as the EU's top two connectivity partners in the region, alongside ASEAN. The EU-ASEAN connectivity engagement is coded in the Joint Ministerial Declaration on Connectivity mechanism established in December 2020.³⁵ Furthermore, cooperation in the maritime sphere can also be a vital domain for strategic collaboration. In fact, the announcement of AUKUS has already encouraged France to pursue heightened diplomatic engagement with India and Japan. The EU identifying "cooperation to maintain and ensure maritime security and freedom of navigation" as a key area of focus in its Indo-Pacific outlook is a positive sign, too. With the inaugural India-EU Maritime Security Dialogue held in January 2021³⁶ and the EU-Japan joint naval exercise off the coast of the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea³⁷, the scope for growth in maritime security collaboration between the EU, India, and Japan, including both bilateral and trilateral cooperation, remains high. Such cooperation will not only improve the Quad-EU equation, but also send a clear signal to China that AUKUS is not a fallback for the Quad's ambition to widen outreach. For both India and Japan, building a maritime security connect with the EU can help strengthen their political and strategic postures vis-à-vis China's assertive claims in the East China Sea and rapidly expanding influence and presence in the Indian Ocean. Such an engagement need not take place only via the EU, but can also occur on a bilateral level, such as through France's strong partnerships with both India and Japan.

32 Sebastian Sprenger, "German Warship 'Bayern' Heads to the Indo-Pacific," *Defence News*, August 02, 2021, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2021/08/02/german-warship-bayern-heads-to-the-indo-pacific/>.

33 Ministry of External Affairs, "India-EU Strategic Partnership: A Roadmap to 2025," Government of India, July 15, 2020, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/32828/IndiaEU+Strategic+Partnership+A+Roadmap+to+2025>.

34 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Japan-EU Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA)," March 1, 2021, accessed December 14, 2021, https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/ep/page22e_000707.html.

35 European Commission, "Questions and Answers: EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific," September 16, 2021, accessed December 14, 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/QAN-DA_21_4709.

36 Ministry of External Affairs, "Inaugural India – EU Maritime Security Dialogue," Government of India, January 20, 2021, accessed December 14, 2021, https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/33400/Inaugural_India_EU_Maritime_Security_Dialogue.

37 EEAS Press Team, "Maritime Security: EU and Japan Carry out Joint Naval Exercise," European External Action Service, October 18, 2021, accessed December 14, 2021, https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/security-defence-crisis-response/105762/maritime-security-eu-and-japan-carry-out-joint-naval-exercise_en.

As EU's post-AUKUS ties with the US and Australia are strained, the mantle will fall on India and Japan to build on their EU bilaterals, involving important stakeholders, to ensure security and stability in the region

Summing Up

Whether AUKUS will negate the Quad's long-term goals or complement them remains to be seen, and will largely depend on actions by the US and Australia in rebuilding trust. Clearly, the introduction of AUKUS to the network of security frameworks, arrangements, and alliances in the Indo-Pacific has changed regional dynamics with respect to the power equilibrium equation. This has necessitated a recalculation in the strategic ambit of not only regional but also external powers, particularly the EU and its member states. The AUKUS pact has changed Europe's perspective of the transatlantic partnership and could even prompt a reassessment of its Indo-Pacific strategy in terms of how European powers can contribute to the maritime security and prosperity of the region. However, as the EU reinforces its strategic autonomy concept, it is unlikely to compromise its presence in the region. At present, there remains immense potential for the AUKUS-Quad narrative to ensure continued EU presence in the Indo-Pacific. Nonetheless, despite the differences, it is important to remember that the ultimate focus of all the actors involved is the advocacy of a rules-based, democratic, and open maritime order, which is vital to ensuring a united stand against authoritarian and unilateral actions by states that threaten the stability of the Indo-Pacific.



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