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# Guarding the Maritime Commons

## What role for Europe in the Indo-Pacific

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February 2022





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# Executive summary

1. Open and secure maritime commons are crucial to international trade between Europe and Asia and essential to international peace and security for the world at large. A stable and multilateral order in the Indo-Pacific is the best bet to keep the sealines of communication open and secure.
2. European naval diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific sends a clear signal to regional states, including China, and to the US, that Europe's interests are at stake when maritime freedom of navigation is threatened. In fact, naval capabilities are a necessary component if Europe aspires to a role as a responsible stakeholder in the region.
3. However, tensions between Europe and China are likely to increase as a consequence of an increased European naval presence in the Indo-Pacific. Sending naval vessels alongside the US is at odds with an engagement strategy that also strives to include China. A conflict that would directly or indirectly involve European states is not outside the realm of possibilities.
4. Europeans should therefore be clear about the objectives their naval diplomacy seeks to accomplish and their capacity to do so, and set priorities accordingly. Current European naval capacity in general is still limited and European navies lack the ability to defend even themselves. At present, a European presence in the Indo-Pacific is therefore largely symbolic and not credible, if it is aimed at reassuring regional partners or for deterring actors seeking to change the status quo.
5. Despite broad European agreement on multilateral engagement Europeans must develop more specific policies and capabilities in the context of the overarching EU strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific and national strategies.
6. Europeans can make tangible contributions to the multilateral maritime order in the Indo-Pacific: regional states have real needs for collaboration on comprehensive maritime security issues to do with (1) maritime security and law enforcement; (2) environment and climate security; (3) governance, norms, and conflict prevention.
7. Europe has a choice of partners from regional actors, but needs to acknowledge the tension between actors that are strategically relevant and those with which Europeans share ideological affinity. In the case of Australia, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, both aspects overlap; in the case of other actors they do not or not entirely.
8. To ensure a credible European naval presence that reassures partners in the region and acts as a deterrent, we recommend Europeans use and pool resources and infrastructure already in the region.
9. Specifically, Europeans should designate zones of responsibility from Europe to Asia to secure the sealines of communication. European lead nations, together with Indo-Pacific partners, can cover different regions, but with an emphasis on the waters closer to Europe such as the Western Indian Ocean.
10. In sum, Europeans need to face an unpleasant reality in which they confront difficult choices regarding maritime security in the Indo-Pacific.

The struggle over the future of Asia will define the 21st century for the rest of the world, like the struggle over Europe defined the 20th century.

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The Indo-Pacific region has emerged as the new epicenter of geopolitical competition, due to the growth of the Asian economies in general and of the People's Republic of China in particular. The Sino-American rivalry has intensified over the past decade, as China has increased its assertiveness towards its neighbors in the Western Pacific and the US attempts to maintain its hegemony in the region. The struggle over the future of Asia will define the 21st century for the rest of the world, like the struggle over Europe defined the 20th century. In the wake of the US pivot to the Indo-Pacific, the Europeans have begun their own tilt towards the region. France, the UK, Germany, and the Netherlands, as well as others, have sent ships as part of a naval diplomacy effort to reassure regional states and underline the importance of open and secure sealines of communication. They have published policy statements to reaffirm their preference for a multilateral order, as has the European Union itself. Open and secure sealines, and freedom of navigation, are essential for global trade, enabling the connection of economies over vast distances at low cost, and for trade between Europe and Asia in particular. Consequently, Europeans share their preference for a stable, open, and secure multilateral order with partner states in South, Southeast, and East Asia.

It remains unclear, however, what specific role should Europeans play in the Indo-Pacific. European states do not agree on either how much they should engage with China or how closely their engagement with the region should accord with US policies that are more willing to typecase Chinese behavior as aggressive – as the US underlined in its 2022 strategy for the Indo-Pacific. A more cohesive approach will strengthen the European contribution to security and stability in the region and to the multilateral order, and it avoids sending contradictory signals. In the European Commission's 2021 Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, the EU has offered a broad vision for Europe's participation in the region; we offer foot-holds towards a concrete agenda. This report poses key questions about the European tilt to the region: (a) what could the repercussions be of European involvement in the Indo-Pacific; (b) whom should the Europeans collaborate with; (c) what are the needs for a more comprehensive maritime security agenda; and (d) how can Europeans ensure they can be a more credible naval presence in the region? For each of these questions, the report formulates a series of recommendations for the nature of the European contribution.

## Could the growing involvement of Europeans in maritime security in the Indo-Pacific have counterproductive results?

That the Europeans need to engage to ensure secure and open maritime commons in the Indo-Pacific is clear, but could the growing European involvement in the Indo-Pacific also generate counterproductive results? Until now, Europeans have consciously attempted to pursue an inclusive and multilateral approach to avoid further isolating China, which could lead to a worsening security dynamic in the Indo-Pacific. In contrast, the US has moved towards a strategy aimed at containing and deterring China. Europeans are trying to strike a balance between the centrifugal forces in the Indo-Pacific by reassuring states in the region, while trying to avoid the appearance of ganging up on China. Yet, Europeans must accept that their increased naval presence in the Indo-Pacific—though important and arguably unavoidable to protect European interests and values—has not been welcomed by China.

China is decidedly antagonistic towards the European naval presence, as well as the European statements on behalf of Hong Kong, of Taiwan, and of the Uighur minorities in China. With regards to living up to European values and interests while including China, that ship may have sailed. The 2021 AUKUS deal in which the US and the UK pledged nuclear-powered submarines to Australia shows how difficult that balancing act already is. The multinational UK-led carrier strike group that included both a Dutch and an American ship, also underlines that credible reassurance of regional partners and allies will likely come at a cost in Sino-European relations. European navies operating alongside the US and the Quad grouping that also includes Japan, India, and Australia, will be seen in Beijing as choosing sides against them, as will using NATO as a framework to facilitate European engagements in the region. The risk that this will antagonize China may be an acceptable and, perhaps by now unavoidable, trade-off for the potential to strengthen the multilateral order; however, Europeans must confront the fact that Europeans are unlikely to accomplish all their objectives and that they will have to make difficult choices between engagement with regional states, the credibility of that engagement, and the risk of antagonizing China. How can they do so?

### **Invest in comprehensive maritime security beyond military engagement, but prepare for worst-case scenarios**

Beyond participating in naval diplomacy, Europeans can make other contributions to a multilateral order in the Indo-Pacific and to maritime security. They can collaborate with regional partners as part of minilateral and multilateral approaches to a more comprehensive definition of maritime security that includes (1) maritime security and law enforcement, (2) environmental security, and (3) norms and governance, and conflict prevention.

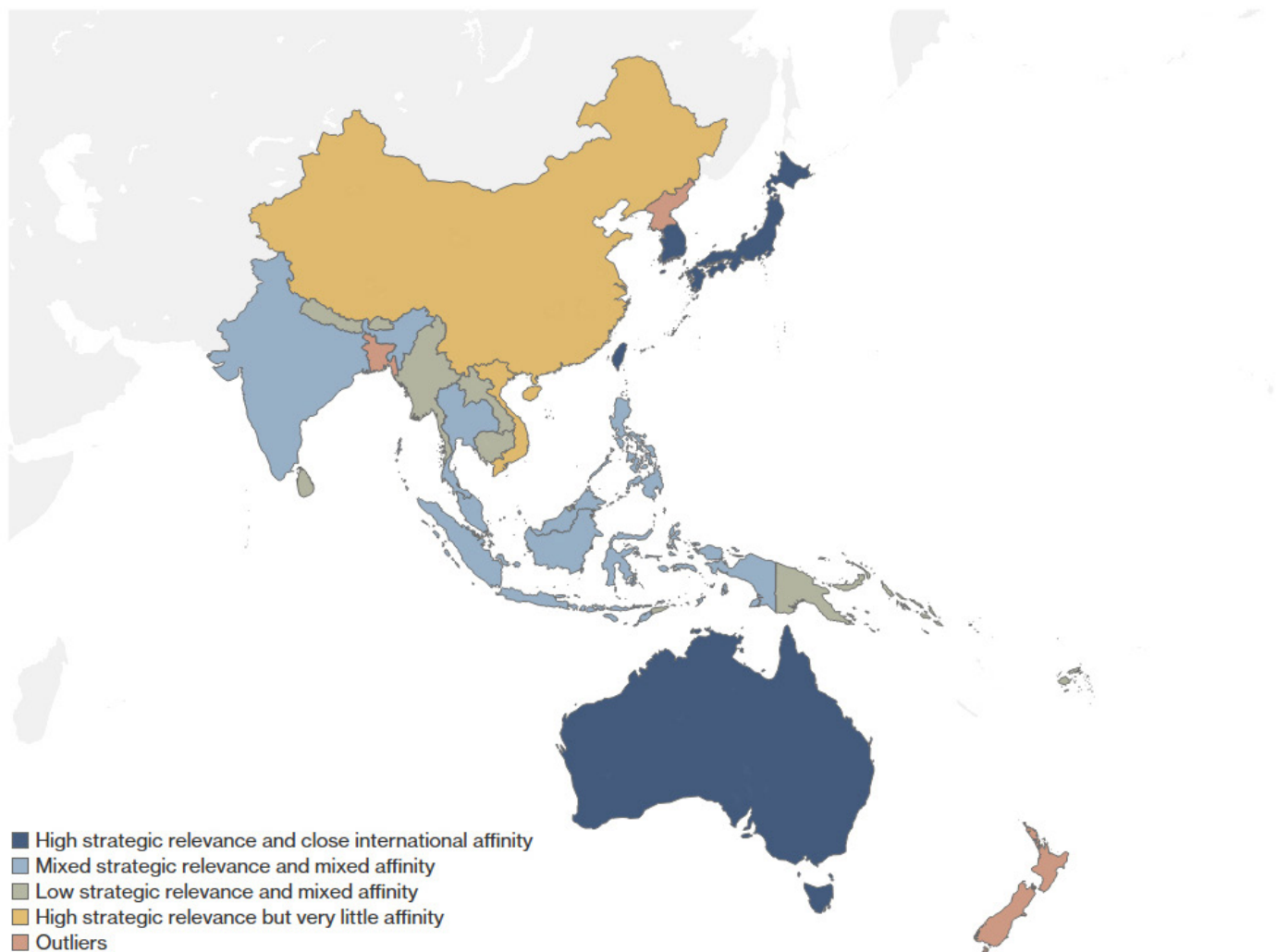
However, if Europeans increase their naval presence in the Indo-Pacific, and the Sino-American competition escalates into open warfare, they must accept that they will be involved politically and militarily. A European role might not involve direct participation in hostilities in the Western Pacific, but Europeans should prepare to backfill US responsibilities for maritime security in the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean, in the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. Moreover, they could be asked to play a role in maintaining open sealines of communication for allies in the (Western) Indian Ocean, and even asked to help close the transport of oil and gas, and other goods, to China. Participating in blockade activities would make Europe a target of Chinese reprisals – whether military within the region, or through economic sanctions or cyber-attacks within Europe. While this represents a highly unwelcome set of scenarios that current European engagement is seeking to prevent, European agency in shaping events in the region is limited. They thus must prepare for the worst-case scenarios as well, and improve their naval capacity.

Europeans will have to make difficult choices between engagement with regional states, the credibility of that engagement, and the risk of antagonizing China.

## Whom should Europeans work with within the Indo-Pacific region?

Europeans need like-minded and strategically relevant partners in the Indo-Pacific if they want a feasible chance to contribute to upholding the multilateral order in the region. Yet, what that means in practice is not always clear. While European states and certain regional states may agree on the importance of keeping the seas open, this does not necessarily mean agreement on other values such as human rights. Moreover, the most capable states do not necessarily share the same values, and those that share them do not always necessarily have sufficient weight to pursue these values. The report therefore introduces a framework that offers a list of economic, political, and security criteria to rank Indo-Pacific states on their strategic relevance and value affinity. We identify several groupings of states in the Indo-Pacific: (1) high strategic relevance and high value affinity; (2) high strategic relevance and low strategic affinity; (3) mixed strategic relevance and affinity; (4) low relevance and affinity. Figure 1 shows our findings, using this methodology. European policymakers can use the framework to identify partners across important dimensions related to European values and interests.

Figure 1. Visualization of country clusters for strategic affinity and relevance



## Pick strategically relevant states, as well as those with which you share ideological affinity, but be ready accept some trade-offs with affinity

The report's findings offer a complex picture of multiple groupings of states that vary on relevance to and affinity with Europe. First, the analysis underlines that states such as Australia, Japan, and South Korea are not only important to Europe because of economic, political, and security reasons, but also because their worldviews and values align with European ones. Taiwan is also in this category of value alignment and strategic relevance, though it is not recognized as a member state by the UN. Second, there are states like Vietnam and China that, despite having considerable strategic relevance for Europe, are very far removed in terms of value compatibility. Third, the assessment reveals that there is a category of countries that fall somewhere in between, in that they are strategically relevant but have a mixed record with regards to their affinity with European values and worldviews, such as India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. The fourth category is the largest, formed largely by insular and smaller states such as Bhutan, Brunei, Cambodia, Fiji, Laos, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, and Timor Leste whose affinity to Europe is mixed and with low strategic relevance in terms of political and economic weight. That said, states like Sri Lanka and Myanmar occupy geographically strategic locations that arguably gives them more relevance out of proportion to their political and economic weight.

Political decisions about cooperation and engagement can use these criteria as general guidelines but certainly by no means as a straitjacket. However, when it comes to finding partners within the region, the presence of several strategically relevant Indo-Pacific states that share the need for guarding sea trade but otherwise have quite different value sets, reminds us of the fact that Europe will face uncomfortable decisions. This yields the following recommendations:

- European leaders may have to partner up with countries that do not see eye-to-eye with Europe in every field. This could have important strategic implications. To wit, antagonizing these countries would be counterproductive and could end up pushing them further away from Europe, an undesirable result when these states are strategically relevant. India would be the most obvious example of an immensely strategically relevant state that has a mixed record regarding values. Europe's engagement in the Indo-Pacific will therefore require a delicate balancing act, but nonetheless one that offers many possibilities.
- In particular, European leaders will have to address the Chinese 'elephant in the room' when approaching the Indo-Pacific arena and find their place in a region that already witnesses superpower competition between China and the US. Cooperation with Beijing is certainly possible in some dimensions, albeit difficult.

European leaders may have to partner up with countries that do not see eye-to-eye with Europe in every field.

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# How and where should Europeans work with states in the Indo-Pacific in the maritime sphere?

Europeans can make meaningful contributions to maritime security in the Indo-Pacific alongside regional partners, beyond simply engaging in naval diplomacy. The report divides the maritime security related issues of Indo-Pacific states into three, partially overlapping, categories: (1) maritime security and law enforcement; (2) environment and climate security; (3) international governance, norms, and conflict prevention. Such a comprehensive understanding of maritime security underlines the opportunities for influence potentially available to European states. Here too we developed a framework with multiple indicators. For *maritime security and law enforcement*, we looked at data on piracy, illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, narcotics use and trafficking, and human trafficking to assess where key Indo-Pacific states are likely to look to strengthen their maritime security and law enforcement. For *environment and climate security* we took into account vulnerability to climate-related hazards. For *governance, norms, and conflict prevention*, we examined maritime tensions and disputes to assess key Indo-Pacific countries' need to reinforce governance, norms, and conflict prevention. The results for the key Indo-Pacific states vary, as table 1 shows, but they point to concrete avenues with which Europeans can engage with the region.

Table 1. Assessment of maritime security needs of key Indo-Pacific States



| Key Indo-Pacific States | Maritime Security and Law Enforcement | Environment and Climate Security | Governance, Norms, and Conflict Prevention |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| Australia               | Low                                   | Low                              | Medium                                     |
| India                   | Low                                   | High                             | Medium                                     |
| Indonesia               | High                                  | High                             | High                                       |
| Japan                   | Low                                   | Medium                           | Medium                                     |
| Malaysia                | Medium                                | Medium                           | High                                       |
| Philippines             | Medium                                | High                             | High                                       |
| Singapore               | Low                                   | Low                              | Low  |
| South Korea             | Low                                   | Low                              | Medium                                     |
| Taiwan                  | Medium                                | Low                              | Medium                                     |
| Thailand                | High                                  | Medium                           | Low  |
| Vietnam                 | High                                  | Medium                           | High                                       |
| China                   | High                                  | High                             | Medium                                     |

## Increase and coordinate European presence in maritime security organizations

Indo-Pacific states face numerous maritime security challenges in the areas of (1) maritime security and law enforcement; (2) environment and climate security; (3) international governance, norms, and conflict prevention. European states have experience, and in some cases considerable expertise, in addressing some of these challenges. There is already considerable cooperation with Indo-Pacific states, but we offer the following recommendations:

- Continue to strengthen the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) regime, which includes taking up the issue of ratification with the US, to stress freedom of navigation principles. Key partners here include Japan, South Korea, and Australia, which are both highly strategically relevant and with which Europeans share high affinity in terms of values. Addressing the conflicts between China and its neighbors is at the core of their concerns.
- Engage on maritime security and law enforcement specifically through important regional organizations including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), specifically the ASEAN-EU meetings, the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), the initiative for Enhancing Security Cooperation in and with Asia (ESIWA), as well as the EU's Critical Maritime Routes program for the Wider Indian Ocean (CRIMARIO). Key partners are Indonesia and Thailand, which both struggle with these issues, as well as Malaysia and the Philippines. These are states that are mixed in terms of both relevance and affinity for Europeans. Moreover, Vietnam, a state with which Europeans have little affinity, but one that is clearly relevant, also presents a prime partner for engagement on maritime security and law enforcement.
- Develop environmental and climate security collaboration through frameworks like International Maritime Organization (IMO) (which also includes China), ASEAN, ASEM, and the Indian Ocean Rim Association. Key partners here are Indonesia, India, and the Philippines, but also, to an extent, Thailand. These are all states that are mixed in terms of both relevance and affinity for Europeans. Again, Vietnam is also likely to be open to more engagement on environmental and climate security.
- Finally, maritime security and law enforcement and environmental and climate security are also the main remaining topics with which Europeans can attempt to maintain the relationship with China on maritime security. Technical engagement with China should not be expected to yield concrete results, but will keep the door open.

## Should Europeans maintain a naval presence in the Indo-Pacific?

Why should Europeans have a naval presence in the Indo-Pacific region given the potential risks involved? Simply put, without any naval assets, Europe cannot make a credible comprehensive contribution to the regional maritime security order within the three policy lines outlined above. Naval diplomacy is an obvious tool to shape politics in regions far from home – ships are mobile and flexible instruments of the state. The presence of European ships in the Indo-Pacific sends a clear signal to regional states, including China, and the US that Europeans perceive they have an interest at stake in keeping the maritime commons in the region open and secure.

The next question is whether European ships present a credible deterrent within the Indo-Pacific or whether they are merely symbolic and a weak signal of commitment? In principle, a European naval presence could reassure regional partners, signal support for US efforts, and

deter China. In practice, European naval capacity is extremely limited. Over the past decades, Europeans have drastically shrunk the number of ships they possess. Only a fraction of the already shrunken European fleets would even be available for deployment; the need for the maintenance and repairs of the vessels, and the training of their crews (not to mention the rest and recuperation) heavily constrain naval capacity. Using a four-to-one deployment ration of ships needed to deploy for an extended period (see Table 2), even the two major European maritime states at present would only manage to deploy four frigates and three-quarters of a destroyer, in the case of France, and three frigates and one destroyer, in the case of the UK. And these deployable ships would also have obligations in other regions. Other European states are even more limited. Moreover, European ships are weighted towards the lighter classes and are equipped with limited defenses. Yet, precision-guided munitions have increased the opportunities at sea for denial strategies by littoral states. European naval presence is therefore indeed a symbol of European interest, but not credible as a deterrent. A European naval presence *could* underline to China that Europe attaches value to an open and secure maritime commons in the Pacific and beyond, but it *will* not if Europeans cannot sustain a reasonable presence.

**Table 2. Ships by class available for deployments for selection of European states**



|                | Ship Type | Total existing ships in class (2021) | Availability (4:1 ratio) |
|----------------|-----------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| France         | Destroyer | 3                                    | $\frac{3}{4}$            |
|                | Frigate   | 17                                   | $4\frac{1}{4}$           |
| United Kingdom | Destroyer | 6                                    | $1\frac{1}{2}$           |
|                | Frigate   | 12                                   | 3                        |
| Italy          | Destroyer | 4                                    | 1                        |
|                | Frigate   | 11                                   | $2\frac{3}{4}$           |
| Germany        | Destroyer | 3                                    | $\frac{3}{4}$            |
|                | Frigates  | 9                                    | $2\frac{1}{4}$           |
| Spain          | Frigate   | 10                                   | $2\frac{1}{2}$           |
| Netherlands    | Frigate   | 6                                    | $1\frac{1}{2}$           |

### **Coordinate European presence in the region with regional partners, ensure access agreements, agree on zones of responsibility**

Given the inherent limits in their naval capacity, Europeans have to more clearly articulate the objectives they are seeking in the Indo-Pacific, and whether these involve reassurance, deterrence, and/or underlining universal worth of open seelines of communication. They must also agree on who the targets are of these efforts, whether these are regional states, China specifically, or the US. Moreover, Europeans should prioritize among these objectives and targets of diplomatic signaling. Crucially, they should either limit their ambition level according to available capacity, or increase their capacity to meet the objectives. This is arguably the most important set of decisions that Europeans face.

We therefore recommend that European countries:

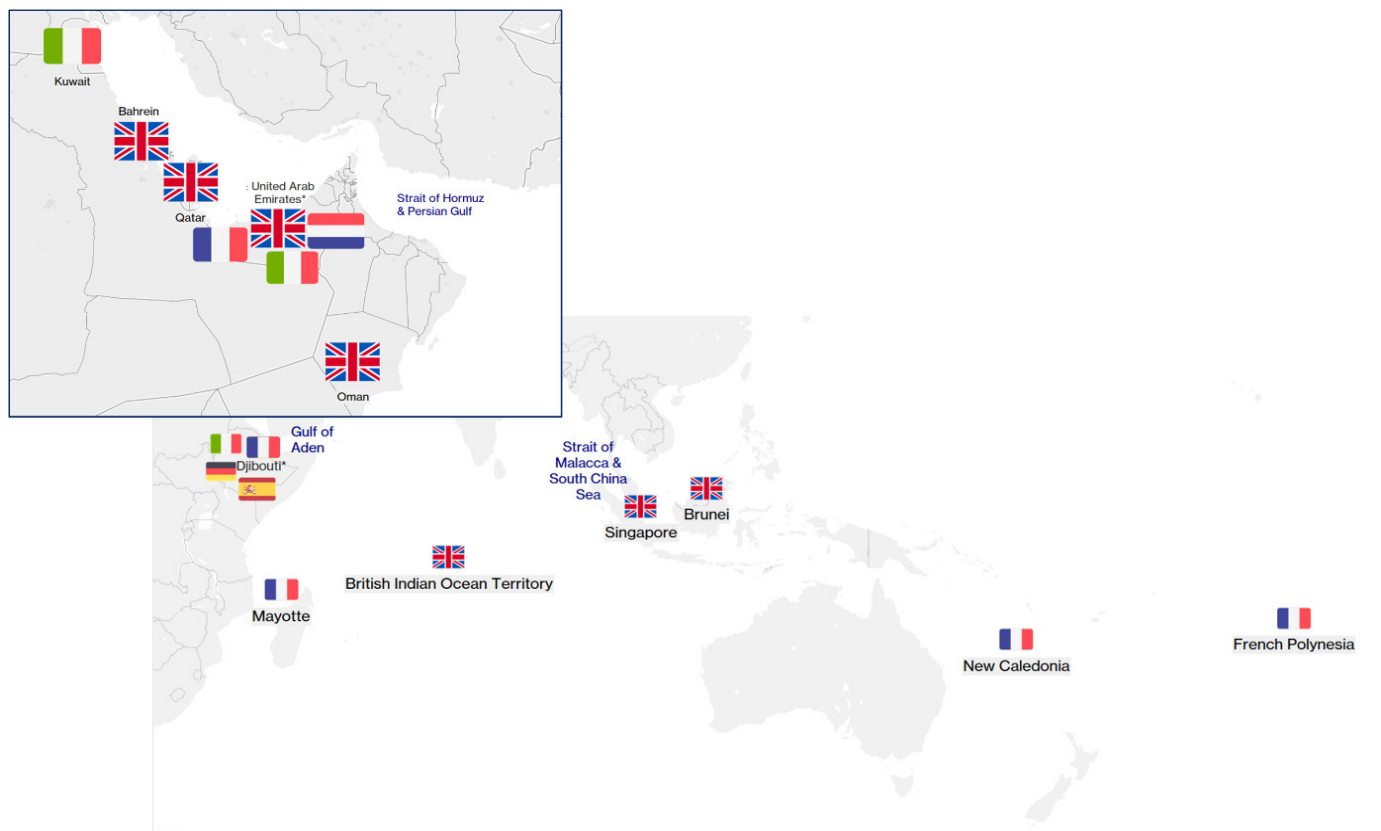
- Articulate attainable objectives, while underlining the risks, and get more out of the existing capacity.

On that basis, Europeans can build a more sustained and meaningful presence for more effective naval diplomacy.

- Multiply Europe's cumulative presence by pooling existing footholds in the Indo-Pacific.

Europeans already have access points in the region through military bases and detachments that are located close to key chokepoints. These access points are either on national territories or through bilateral agreements with host states. France, the UK, and Italy have their own bases, while the Netherlands, Germany, and Spain have smaller forward deployed detachments in the region. Ensuring that European states can access the facilities of the others, and putting in place port access agreements of European states with regional states to sustain European presence in the Indo-Pacific is therefore highly important (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Location of European military bases and strategic hotspots in the Indo-Pacific**



\*Djibouti has 4 bases

- Ensure sustained presence in the Indo-Pacific by pooling resources.

Agreements are already in place between European states to preposition small stocks of materiel on the facilities of other states (for special forces, for example) in the region; these should be expanded to include other materiel. Ensuring that munitions and spare parts are already within the region makes it easier to sustain a prolonged deployment and increases the credibility of deterrence and reassurance efforts by European navies during periods of heightened tension between regional states (See Table 3).

- Plan for the rotational deployment of multinational European contingents in the Indo-Pacific to further strengthen the European presence.

Europeans could keep a naval presence in the Indo-Pacific through rotational deployments of multinational European groupings. Such an approach could build on the model of the EU's Coordinated Maritime Presence concept that has already been applied in the Gulf of Guinea – but preferably including the UK. European ships can rotate in and out of the region, thereby ensuring a sustained presence that signals the European stake in the stability and openness of the region.

- Compartmentalize the sealines of communication between the key European ports and those in East Asia into distinct zones of responsibility to sustain a persistent and predictable European naval presence.

Divide the sealines of communication between the key European ports and those in East Asia into distinct zones of responsibility around the key maritime chokepoints, as a transmission belt of maritime security from East to West and back again. Such a multinational European approach to the Indo-Pacific could result in seven zones of responsibility: (1) the North Sea to Mediterranean; (2) the Red Sea; (3) the eastern coast of Africa; (4) Persian Gulf; (5) the Western Indian Ocean; (6) the Eastern Indian Ocean; and (7) the Western Pacific. France and the UK are the best-positioned European states to take the lead in such an arrangement: France in the Western Indian Ocean and the eastern coast of Africa; the UK in the Persian Gulf and the Eastern Indian Ocean. But their ships, and those of other European states would rotate in and out of those zones.

Table 3. Overview of Status of Forces Agreements and Military Logistics Agreements between key European and Indo-Pacific states, and US

|             | Australia |  | Japan |  | South Korea |  | India |  |
|-------------|-----------|--|-------|--|-------------|--|-------|--|
| France      |           |  |       |  |             |  |       |  |
| UK          |           |  |       |  |             |  |       |  |
| Germany     |           |  |       |  |             |  |       |  |
| Netherlands |           |  |       |  |             |  |       |  |
| Spain       |           |  |       |  |             |  |       |  |
| Italy       |           |  |       |  |             |  |       |  |
| US          |           |  |       |  |             |  |       |  |

No SOFA nor MLA SOFA under negotiation SOFA Military logistics agreement (MLA signed or negotiating)

- Plan multinational European deployments jointly with ships from key Indo-Pacific partners like Japan, South Korea, Australia, and India.

Finally, the European commitment would be further strengthened if these multinational arrangements include ships from key Indo-Pacific partners like Japan, South Korea, Australia, and India. The risk of European entanglement through joint deployments into potential risk-taking behavior by Indo-Pacific partners would be ameliorated by the shared value affinity with these key states that are both strategically relevant and with shared affinity.

## Conclusions: How to guard the commons?

Simply put, the values and interests at stake in the Indo-Pacific make it difficult to avoid European engagement of some kind in the region altogether. The openness of the maritime commons and the stability of East Asia, Southeast Asia, and South Asia are too important for Europe to ignore. Moreover, because regional states welcome European involvement, Europe engagement could, under certain conditions, contribute to bringing stability to the region by expanding the number of actors China has to deal with, making its divide-and-conquer tactics more difficult, and incentivizing it to engage in multilateral frameworks. In this manner, Europeans could possibly contribute to dampening the escalatory pressures within the region. Such a line of thinking has certainly been at the root of the turn towards the Indo-Pacific.

The recent European naval presence in the Indo-Pacific is intended to put European money where their mouth has been, following the series of policy documents that signaled a shift to the region. However, European states individually are limited in their ability to sustain a sizeable naval presence. They risk writing checks they cannot hope to cash. There are options to act though. In addition to outlining problems, the report offers a series of solutions with which Europeans can contribute to guarding the maritime commons in the Indo-Pacific region upon which they so dearly depend. Now it is time to turn words into action.

# Introduction: the European tilt towards the Indo-Pacific

China has become the pacing threat within US defense planning, and the Indo-Pacific has taken the priority over the Euro-Atlantic in US thinking.

The Indo-Pacific region has emerged as the new epicenter of geopolitical competition. The growth of the Asian economies and specifically the growth of the People's Republic of China will ensure that the struggle over the future of Asia will define the 21<sup>st</sup> century for the rest of the world, like the struggle over Europe defined the 20<sup>th</sup> century. China's growth has gone hand in hand with increasing assertiveness towards its neighbors in the Western Pacific. Consequently, China has become the pacing threat within US defense planning,<sup>1</sup> and the Indo-Pacific has taken the priority over the Euro-Atlantic in US thinking.<sup>2</sup> In the wake of the American ship of state 'rebalancing' or 'pivoting' to the region,<sup>3</sup> in part to keep themselves relevant to the US, Europeans<sup>4</sup> have increased their own role in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>5</sup>

Yet, European states have intrinsic interests of their own within the Indo-Pacific.<sup>6</sup> These interests pertain to maintaining a stable regional order, ensuring the security and openness of the maritime commons, and protecting values such as democracy and good governance. The maritime nature of region is particularly relevant. The oceans are the commons of global commerce, enabling the connection of economies at vast distances and allowing for the low-cost transport of goods and people outside of national territories. The commons are also themselves an exploitable resource<sup>7</sup> and they ensure that states can project military power over vast distances.<sup>8</sup>

- 1 Joseph R. Biden, "Interim National Security Strategic Guidance," March 3, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/03/03/interim-national-security-strategic-guidance/>.
- 2 Luis Simón, Linde Desmaele, and Jordan Becker, "Europe as a Secondary Theater? Competition with China and the Future of America's European Strategy," *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 15, no. 1 (2021): 90–115; Paul Van Hooft, "The United States May Be Willing, but No Longer Always Able: The Need for Transatlantic Burden Sharing in the Pacific Century," in *The Future of European Strategy in a Changing Geopolitical Environment: Challenges and Prospects*, ed. Michiel Foulon and Jack Thompson (The Hague, Netherlands: The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, 2021).
- 3 The 2022 Indo-Pacific strategy of the Biden administration recognizes "the strategic value of an increasing regional role for the European Union". White House, "The Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States" (Washington D.C.: The White House, February 11, 2022), 7.
- 4 With Europe, we mean both the EU and the individual European member states, individually or groups of European states. Whenever we specifically refer to the EU, we speak of the EU.
- 5 Against the background of the Sino-American rivalry, as Europe becomes a region of secondary priority, European states must orient themselves to where they can find political currency with the United States and with others.
- 6 The Indo-Pacific stretches from the eastern coasts of Africa to the western coasts of the Americas in the broadest definition, but centers around the transition between the Western Pacific and the Indian ocean the more narrow definition.
- 7 Geoffrey Till, *Seapower: A Guide for the Twenty-First Century* (Routledge, 2018), 310–11.
- 8 American "command of the commons" has enabled US hegemony and allowed it to deter adversaries and reassure allies. Barry R. Posen defined command as the ability of the United States to deny access to the areas that belong to no one state but provide access to much of the globe, in sea, space, and (for now) the airspace above fifteen thousand feet. Barry R. Posen, "Command of the Commons: The Military Foundation of US Hegemony," *International Security* 28, no. 1 (Summer 2003): 5–46.

Guarding those maritime commons in the Indo-Pacific, and keeping them open and secure, is an interest Europeans that share with states in South, Southeast, and East Asia. To achieve those interests, Europeans strongly prefer an inclusive, multilateral approach that foregrounds engagement with regional states, one that strengthens the legal order, and thus reinforces stability.<sup>9</sup> Particularly, both Europeans and Asians have a strong interest in dampening the risks of escalation within the Sino-American rivalry which would have repercussions on global as well as regional peace and security. A robust multilateral regional order could possibly constrain the escalatory dynamics.

But interests and preferred outcomes do not equal actual policy: what role should Europeans in fact play in the Indo-Pacific? Why should Europeans actually engage in the Indo-Pacific? With whom would European states work most effectively? What are key issues within maritime security to focus on, and which international and regional frameworks best address those? What is the role for European navies, given their limits? How can Europeans make more effective use of those limited naval assets? Can Europeans engage in the Indo-Pacific without antagonizing China and worsening the security dynamics in the region? The report looks to answer these and other questions.

## Outline for the report

Within those limits under which Europeans will operate, the report assesses the diplomatic, economic, military, and other means available to Europeans to engage with the region. It underlines the importance of maritime security issues to the region. The report also highlights the difficulties that Europeans are likely to encounter; yet we also emphasize, in chapter 1, that the region is too fundamental for European interests to ignore. The report thus raises multiple uncomfortable questions about the realities of the European role in the Indo-Pacific, but also delivers an assortment of policy solutions. Not all the news is bad: in contrast to previous centuries, current European engagement with the region is not a one-sided affair; this time Asian states are looking for Europeans to engage with them.<sup>10</sup> In December 2020, the 23<sup>rd</sup> ASEAN-EU ministerial meeting's press release highlighted that "ASEAN Member States encouraged the EU to work with ASEAN in promoting the ASEAN Outlook on the

9 "France and Security in the Indo Pacific" (Paris: Ministère des Armées, May 2019); "France's Defence Strategy in the Indo-Pacific" (Paris: Ministère des Armées, 2019); "Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific" (Berlin: The Federal Government of Germany, August 2020); "Indo-Pacific: Guidelines for Strengthening Dutch and EU Cooperation with Partners in Asia" (Government of the Netherlands, November 2020); "Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council - The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific" (European Commission, September 16, 2021), [https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/jointcommunication\\_2021\\_24\\_1\\_en.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/jointcommunication_2021_24_1_en.pdf).

10 H.E. Dr Jaishankar, Minister of External Affairs of India, stated for instance that India "would like to see a strategic EU with its own strategy in the region." Stefania Benaglia, "How Can the EU Navigate the Indo-Pacific?," CEPS (blog), January 28, 2021, <https://www.ceps.eu/how-can-the-eu-navigate-the-indo-pacific/>; "Japan to Propose Dialogue with US, India and Australia," Nikkei Asia, 2017, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics-Economy/International-Relations/Japan-to-propose-dialogue-with-US-India-and-Australia>; Eva Pejsova, "The Indo-Pacific: A Passage to Europe?," Brief Issue (LU: European Union Institute for Security Studies, 2018), <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2815/56656>; Shingo Yamagami, "Stability and security in the Indo-Pacific: the future of the Quad," March 2021, <https://www.frstrategie.org/sites/default/files/documents/programmes/Programme-japon/Publications/2020-2021/202010-prog-japon.pdf>; Catherine Wong, "Japan Urges Europe to Have Stronger Military Presence in Asia to Tackle China," South China Morning Post, June 20, 2021, [https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3138077/japan-urges-europe-have-stronger-military-presence-asia-tackle?utm\\_source=Twitter&utm\\_medium=share\\_widget&utm\\_campaign=3138077](https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3138077/japan-urges-europe-have-stronger-military-presence-asia-tackle?utm_source=Twitter&utm_medium=share_widget&utm_campaign=3138077); "Indonesian Minister Of Foreign Affairs Urges The European Union To Treat Palm Oil Issue Fairly," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, December 2020, <https://kemlu.go.id/portal/en/read/1932/berita/indonesian-minister-of-foreign-affairs-urges-the-european-union-to-treat-palm-oil-issue-fairly>.

Guarding those maritime commons in the Indo-Pacific, and keeping them open and secure, is an interest Europeans that share with states in South, Southeast, and East Asia.

Indo-Pacific,” signaling openness to a consistent European engagement in the region.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, European states are looking to engage with ‘like-minded’ partners and allies. But what does ‘like-minded’ really mean? States might be strategically relevant, but not entirely aligned in terms of values. We explore this important question in chapter 2, clarifying with whom Europeans could work.

In terms of solutions, we highlight various avenues for European engagement on maritime security issues with Indo-Pacific states. We take a comprehensive view of maritime security, and focus on: (1) maritime security and law enforcement; (2) environmental and climate security; and (3) governance, norms, and conflict prevention. In chapter 3 we discuss the needs among Indo-Pacific states, as well as the avenues for engagement. Yet, it is doubtful that Europeans will be credible in these domains without a simultaneous naval presence. In chapter 4, we point out what could go wrong in European engagement in the Indo-Pacific. We also offer options for how to overcome the limits of European naval capabilities. We underline in chapter 5 that pooling resources, ensuring mutual access, and other policies would ensure that Europeans could better maintain a persistent and sustained multinational naval presence in the Indo-Pacific. We recommend that Europeans delineate the routes from Europe to Asia into zones of responsibility that they can secure with regional partners, thereby creating a relay race of maritime security between these point.

Finally, to play an effective role in the region, European states must boost the internal coherence of their various approaches. Though they share common interests and outlooks, many of which are apparent from the 2021 *EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific*, European states still vary immensely among themselves. Moreover, without the UK, effective engagement will be difficult. The report aims to signal some key points around which thinking should coalesce. At the same time, none of this strategic cohesion means much without engagement with regional participants. For that reason, the report is accompanied by a number of written contributions, the result of a workshop held in late 2021. In an overview paper, we discuss the main takeaways from these contributions.

We highlight various avenues for European engagement on maritime security issues with Indo-Pacific states.

11 “Co-Chairs’ Press Release of the 23rd ASEAN-EU Ministerial Meeting,” European Council, December 2020, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/12/01/co-chairs-press-release-of-the-23rd-asean-eu-ministerial-meeting/>.

# 1. Why should the Europeans care about the Indo-Pacific?

The European turn to the region calls to mind F. Scott Fitzgerald's remark about losing money: slowly at first, then all at once. On the one hand, Europe's interest in the Indo-Pacific – or at least Asia – has been building for more than a decade; on the other, it has arguably only come into sharp focus over less than two years (2020 and 2021). In this chapter, we look at several key questions regarding the importance of maritime commons, and of the sealines of communication, and of the waters linking Europe to Asia. The chapter discusses the evolution in the policy positions of various European states and of the EU, with regards to their role in the Indo-Pacific, their preferred approach, and how to position themselves towards China, before finishing with a brief discussion of the value of the maritime instrument and of multilateralism. In short, the chapter looks at why a European interest in maritime security in the Indo-Pacific has suddenly, but unavoidably, shifted.

Throughout history, water has been the natural “great highway”.

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## 1.1. Why are the maritime commons in the Indo-Pacific crucial to Europe? Why is the question of European engagement in the Indo-Pacific unavoidable?

Why do the Europeans stress the need for the security, stability, and openness of the maritime commons? Part of the answer is general support for upholding an international order that accords with their own preferences; we discuss this engagement with 'like-minded' states in chapter 2. But the part of the answer is also that European states depend on security, stability, and openness to unimpeded trade in the Indian and Pacific oceans.

Throughout history, water has been the natural “great highway”,<sup>12</sup> in naval theorist Alfred Thayer Mahan's words.<sup>13</sup> It has always been easier to move heavy goods and people by sea than by land, allowing both commerce and the projection of military power across great

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<sup>12</sup> Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660–1783* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1890), 25.

<sup>13</sup> Ian Speller, *Understanding Naval Warfare* (Routledge, 2018), 17.

distances.<sup>14</sup> The sea lines of communication (SLOCs) refer to the main maritime routes between ports that connect these points.<sup>15</sup> The ability to protect these lines and (potentially) interrupt those of a rival or adversary is therefore crucial.<sup>16</sup> Without that protection, transport of commercial and military goods and personnel will be very costly if not impossible. Consequently, a navy capable of controlling maritime traffic can influence decisions made on land.<sup>17</sup>

International trade is the lifeblood of global economic growth. It accounted for 60 percent of global GDP in 2019 (the year before the Covid 19 pandemic). In the same year, the total value of the annual world shipping trade surpassed 14 trillion USD.<sup>18</sup> Trade is even more important for the EU economy: it generated 90 percent of EU GDP in 2019. For the Netherlands, trade as a percentage of GDP in 2019 was 156 percent, reflecting both the country's position as a trading powerhouse and the extent to which the country's prosperity relies on access to foreign markets.<sup>19</sup>

If international trade is the lifeblood of the global economy, the world's major waterways are the arteries through which the vast majority of international trade is conducted: roughly 80 percent of global trade by volume, and 70 percent by value, is transported by sea. Approximately 11 billion tons of goods are transported by ship each year, equivalent to 1.5 tons per person in the world. The majority of the EU's international trade travels by water. Shipping accounts for 80 percent of total exports and imports by volume, and some 50 percent by value.<sup>20</sup> Almost 90 percent of the EU's external freight trade is seaborne.<sup>21</sup> 75 percent of goods shipped to Europe by external partners enter by sea.<sup>22</sup>

For international trade, the most important waterways are those that link Europe with Asia. The two continents are now each other's leading trade partners: trade between Europe and Asia generates 65 percent of the global economy, and 55 percent of global trade. Four

14 Speller, 19. Paul Van Hooft, "All-in or All-out: Why Insularity Pushes and Pulls American Grand Strategy to Extremes," *Security Studies*, 2020. Writing around the turn of the seventeenth century, the English explorer and statesman Sir Walter Raleigh observed, "Whosoever commands the sea commands the trade; whosoever commands the trade of the world commands the riches of the world, and consequently the world itself." *The Works of Sir Walter Raleigh* VIII, 325.

15 Mahan argues the key lies in *communications*. "the lines of movement by which a military body, army or fleet, is kept in living condition with the national power". Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783* (Little, Brown, 1890), 52.

16 Reynolds B. Peele, "Maritime Chokepoints: Key Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) and Strategy," *US Army War College*, 1997.

17 Jeremy Stöhs, *The Decline of European Naval Forces: Challenges to Sea Power in an Age of Fiscal Austerity and Political Uncertainty* (Naval Institute Press, 2018), 14. With the exception of the decades when it was a hegemonic power during the 17th Century, the Netherlands lacked the power to guarantee maritime stability and to safeguard SLOCs themselves. Instead, the Netherlands has relied on tools such as international law, and alliances such as NATO, to protect its ability to prosper economically through (largely sea-based) trade. In his 1609 book *Mare Liberum*, the Dutchman Hugo Grotius argued that the high seas – as opposed to territorial seas – should be open to all states for navigation and trade, a principle that remains widely accepted today and underpins much of the massive and varied movements across the maritime spaces. Geoffrey Till, *Seapower: A Guide for the Twenty-First Century* (Milton Park, UK: Routledge, 2018), 62-64.

18 'Shipping and World Trade: Driving Prosperity', accessed 7 June 2021, <https://www.ics-shipping.org/shipping-fact/shipping-and-world-trade-driving-prosperity/>.

19 'Trade (% of GDP) | Data', accessed 22 June 2021, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NE.TRD.GNFS.ZS>; 'Trade (% of GDP) – European Union | Data', accessed 22 June 2021, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NE.TRD.GNFS.ZS?locations=EU>;

20 'Shipping and World Trade: Driving Prosperity', accessed 7 June 2021, <https://www.ics-shipping.org/shipping-fact/shipping-and-world-trade-driving-prosperity/>.

21 John Smith, 'Maritime: What Do We Want to Achieve?', Text, *Mobility and Transport – European Commission*, 22 September 2016, [https://ec.europa.eu/transport/modes/maritime\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/transport/modes/maritime_en).

22 'Maritime Trade and Its Risks: EU's Imports from Asia and the Middle East', IHS Markit, 2 July 2020, <https://ihsmarkit.com/research-analysis/maritime-trade-and-risks-eu-imports-from-asia-and-middle-east.html>.

For international trade, the most important waterways are those that link Europe with Asia.

of Europe's top 10 trading partners are in the Indo-Pacific: China, Japan, South Korea and India. China is the EU's foremost source of imports and its second-largest export market. On average, the EU and China trade over €1 billion per day. But there is more to EU-Asia trade than China. ASEAN, as a whole, is the EU's third largest trading partner, after China and the US. In 2020, EU-ASEAN trade amounted to more than €189.47 billion.<sup>23</sup> Trade with Asia is crucial to Dutch economic prosperity.<sup>24</sup>

### 1.1.1. Chokepoints

The sea may seem endless, but it remains defined by land. Coastlines, peninsulas, and islands create chokepoints that connect one sea to the next, and through which ships must pass. In fact, seventy-five percent of global trade has to squeeze through a small number of canals and straits.<sup>25</sup> These chokepoints are where the arteries of seaborne trade can be cut. Protection of these chokepoints has been a core responsibility of navies.<sup>26</sup>

Europe's trade with the Asian economies is highly vulnerable to disruptions of the waterways between Europe and Asia: 60 percent of maritime trade passes through Asia; in fact, an estimated one-third of global shipping transits through the heavily disputed South China Sea.<sup>27</sup> Clamping down these maritime arteries would immediately have a negative impact on European economic prosperity. In many cases, there is no real alternative to these trade routes.<sup>28</sup>

23 'Explained, the Economic Ties between Europe and Asia', World Economic Forum, accessed 9 June 2021, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/05/ways-asia-and-europe-together-connected/>; European Commission. Joint Research Centre., Exploring ASEM Sustainable Connectivity :What Brings Asia and Europe Together? (LU: Publications Office, 2019), <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2760/260457>; 'China – Trade – European Commission', accessed 22 June 2021, <https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/countries/china/>; 'Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) – Trade – European Commission', accessed 9 June 2021, <https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/regions/asean/>; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Indo-Pacific: Guidelines for Strengthening Dutch and EU Cooperation with Partners in Asia – Publication – Government.NL', publicatie (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 13 November 2020), <https://www.government.nl/documents/publications/2020/11/13/indo-pacific-guidelines>.

24 Outside of Europe, the Asia-Pacific region is the Netherlands' biggest export market. 11 percent of Dutch exports go the region and 22.5 percent of the country's imports originate in the Asia-Pacific. At 1.8 percent – admittedly a small number – China is the top destination for Dutch exports. Given demographic trends, the Asia-Pacific region's economic importance for the Netherlands is likely to grow. Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Indo-Pacific: Guidelines for Strengthening Dutch and EU Cooperation with Partners in Asia – Publication – Government.NL', publicatie (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 13 November 2020), <https://www.government.nl/documents/publications/2020/11/13/indo-pacific-guidelines>.

25 Stöhs, *The Decline of European Naval Forces*, 2018.

26 As the sea itself has no intrinsic value to protect, and convoy-and-escort tasks that protect transport ships themselves are rarely popular among navies. They therefore sought to protect these focal points and string them together in a chain of sanctuaries. Till, *Seapower*, 231–33.

27 According to the CSIS ChinaPower Project, \$3.4 trillion in trade passed through the South China Sea in 2016; other experts estimate that the actual number is as high as \$5.3 trillion. For key countries, the relative weight makes the issue even clearer: 39.5 percent of all China's trade passed through the South China sea in 2016; 30.6 percent of India's, 19.1 percent of Japan's; 9 percent of Germany's; 8 percent of Italy's; and 7 percent of France's overall trade. 'How Much Trade Transits the South China Sea?', ChinaPower Project (blog), 2 August 2017, <https://chinapower.csis.org/much-trade-transits-south-china-sea/>; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Indo-Pacific: Guidelines for Strengthening Dutch and EU Cooperation with Partners in Asia – Publication – Government.NL', publicatie (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 13 November 2020), <https://www.government.nl/documents/publications/2020/11/13/indo-pacific-guidelines>; Stephen Kuper and Stephen Kuper, 'The Indo-Pacific's Maritime Choke Points: Straits of Malacca', 14 June 2019, <https://www.defenceconnect.com.au/key-enablers/4233-the-indo-pacific-s-maritime-choke-points-straits-of-malacca>.

28 For instance, maritime trade with many nations in the Indo-Pacific region must pass through the South China Sea. Other SLOCs, such as the Strait of Malacca, are very difficult for shipping to avoid because the cost of alternative routes renders some shipping much more expensive or even economically unviable

Europe's trade with the Asian economies is highly vulnerable to disruptions of the waterways between Europe and Asia.

The full list of chokepoints that could affect trade between Europe and the Indo-Pacific is long. The world's most important chokepoints are depicted in Figure 3. The key ones for European states that want to connect to the Asia-Pacific are: the Suez Canal; the Strait of Hormuz; Strait of Malacca; Taiwan Strait; Luzon Strait; Sunda Strait; Lombok Strait. These are depicted in Figure 4. The costs of closure are significant. For example, the Suez Canal connects the Mediterranean and Red Seas through the Isthmus of Suez. About 12 percent of world trade passed through the canal in 2020, carrying more than 1 billion tons of cargo. Thanks to an episode in early 2021, we know exactly how much it costs when the Suez Canal is closed to shipping. In March 2021, the *Ever Given*, a container ship, was stuck for six days. According to one estimate, the blockage reduced global trade by \$6bn to \$10bn and reduced annual trade growth by 0.2 to 0.4 percentage points. The average ship traveling from Rotterdam to Taiwan had its journey time increased by more than 6,000km, or from 25.5 to 34 days.<sup>29</sup> The Strait of Hormuz lies between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, and provides the only sea passage from the Persian Gulf to the open ocean. About 33 percent of oil shipped by sea and 25 percent of the world's liquefied natural gas travel via the strait. In 2018, approximately 21 million barrels of oil per day transited the narrow strait that is vulnerable to closure.<sup>30</sup> The Strait of Malacca is located between Malaysia and the Indonesian island of Sumatra, and is used for 25 percent of global shipping; approximately 100,000 vessels travel via the Strait annually. The Strait is especially important for China, Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, Singapore, Japan, Taiwan and South Korea.<sup>31</sup> A week-long closure of The Strait would result in approximately \$64.5 million in additional shipping costs.<sup>32</sup> The Taiwan Strait between Taiwan and the mainland would likely be dangerous or inaccessible during periods of Sino-Taiwanese tensions, let alone conflict. The Luzon Strait connects the Philippine Sea to the South China Sea, the Sunda Strait and the Lombok Strait link the Java Sea to the Indian Ocean: the worst case scenario, in which all three closed and shipping traffic is forced to take a detour around the southern side of Australia, would cost the global economy an estimated \$2.8 billion per month.<sup>33</sup>

Simply put, maintaining open routes between Europe and Asia is highly important to European states. Yet these routes are vulnerable and susceptible to disruption. In an era of intensifying Sino-American competition, alongside with other regional disputes, openness cannot be assumed. To a large extent, European engagement with the region is unavoidable.

29 The Canal was also closed due to shipping accidents in 2004, 2006, and 2017. Yelena Dzhanova, 'The Suez Canal Has a Contentious History and Has Been Blocked and Closed Several Times since Opening', *Business Insider*, accessed 25 June 2021, <https://www.businessinsider.com/the-suez-canal-blocked-and-closed-several-times-since-opening-2021-3>.

30 Joshua R. Itzkowitz Shiffrinson and Miranda Priebe, 'A Crude Threat: The Limits of an Iranian Missile Campaign against Saudi Arabian Oil,' *International Security* 36, no. 1 (2011): 167–201; Caitlin Talmadge, 'Closing Time: Assessing the Iranian Threat to the Strait of Hormuz,' *International Security* 33, no. 1 (2008): 82–117.

31 Stephen Kuper and Stephen Kuper, 'The Indo-Pacific's Maritime Choke Points: Straits of Malacca', 14 June 2019, <https://www.defenceconnect.com.au/key-enablers/4233-the-indo-pacific-s-maritime-choke-points-straits-of-malacca>.

32 'How Much Trade Transits the South China Sea?', ChinaPower Project (blog), 2 August 2017, <https://chinapower.csis.org/much-trade-transits-south-china-sea/>.

33 'How Much Trade Transits the South China Sea?', ChinaPower Project (blog), 2 August 2017, <https://chinapower.csis.org/much-trade-transits-south-china-sea/>.

Figure 3. Global Ocean Chokepoints<sup>34</sup>

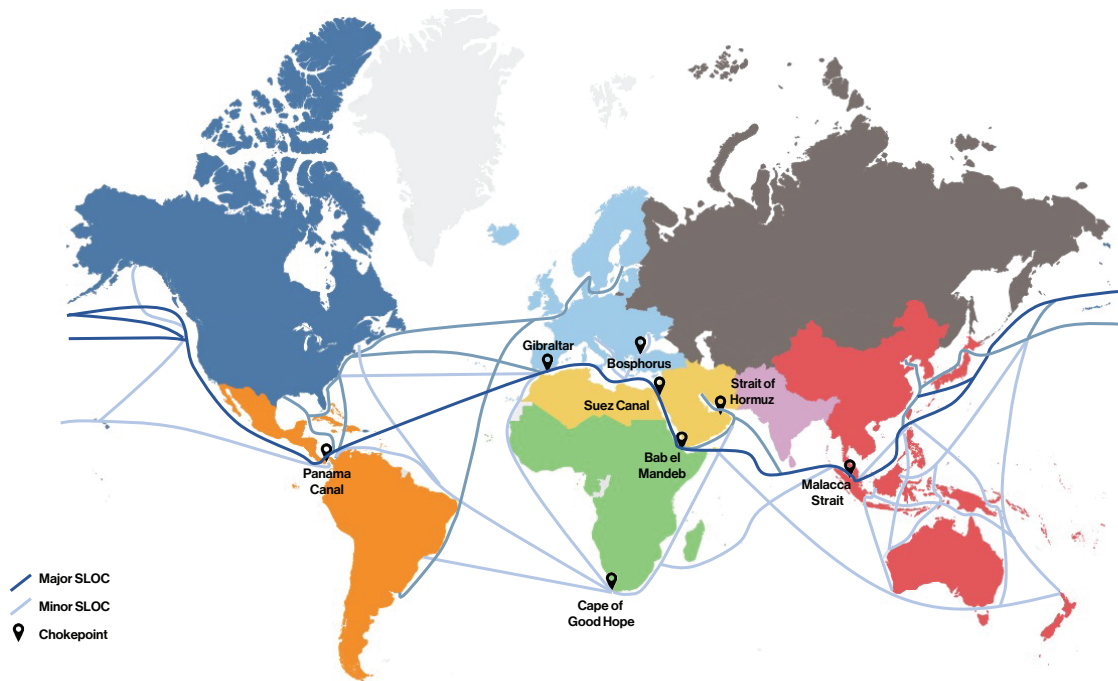
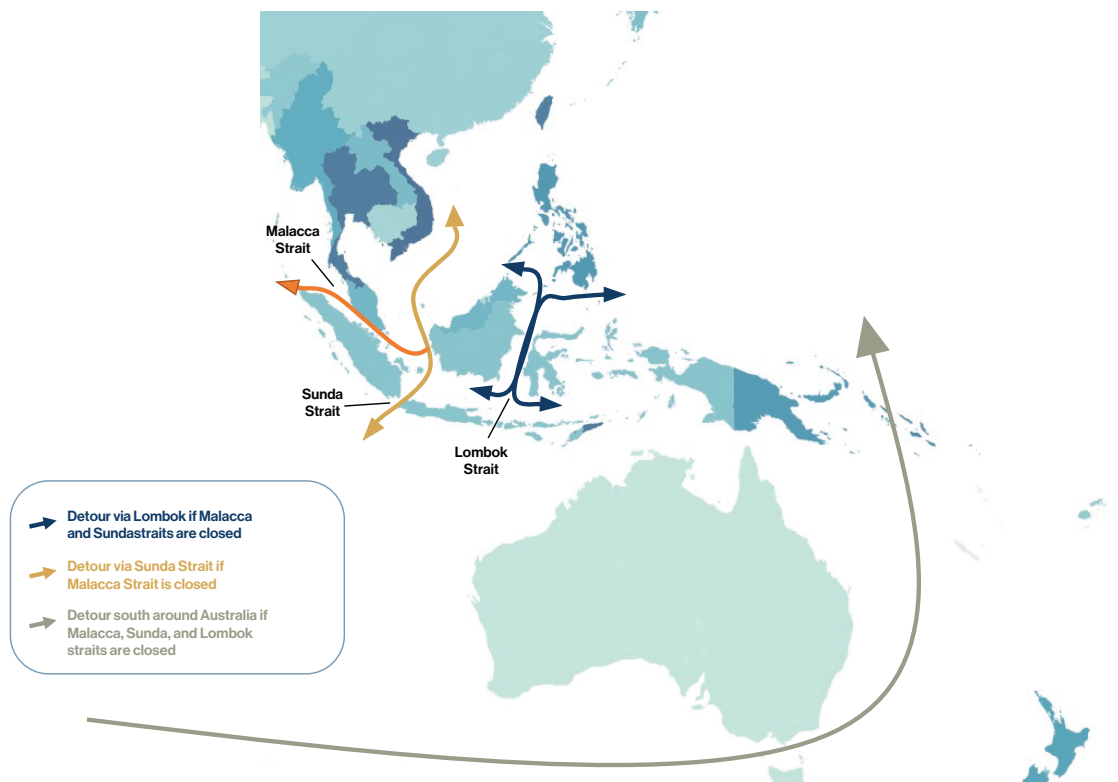


Figure 4. Closure of main SLOCs in South China Sea



34 Tim Sweijjs, Hugo van Manen, Katarina Kertysova, Frank Bekkers, "Flow Security and Dutch Defense and Security Policies," HCSS 2018; SLOC and choke-point data adapted from Jean-Paul Rodrigue, Claude Comtois, and Brian Slack, The Geography of Transport Systems (New York: Routledge, 2017).

## 1.2. Why the sudden European shift to the Indo-Pacific?

The importance of the maritime commons in the Indo-Pacific and their vulnerability to disruption have been apparent for decades: why are European states showing such a sudden interest in engagement with the Indo-Pacific? The growing share of Asia in global economy only tells half the story; the intensifying Sino-American competition in the Western Pacific is the other half. The competition has intensified partly as a result of China's increasing assertiveness. In response to the US ability to project power into its vicinity, China has invested in a suite of capabilities to target US ships, airfields, and ports.<sup>35</sup> It has built artificial islands in the South China Sea.<sup>36</sup> The threat to forcibly reunify Taiwan with the mainland is growing.<sup>37</sup> The militarization of the Western Pacific and the heightened risk of actual conflict have real consequences for the unimpeded access of European states to the region's waters.<sup>38</sup> Given that regional stability is not as cost-free as before, European states are seeking paths to dampen the risk of escalation.

Beyond the risk of regional instability directly affecting European access, the indirect consequences of the growing importance of the region for European security are also apparent. The focus of the United States has been shifting to Asia since the turn of the century,<sup>39</sup> although that shift was partly obscured by the post 9/11 conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa and Afghanistan. During much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Europe was the preeminent region of concern. But a decade after the Cold War, the consolidation of a Europe "whole, free, and at peace" was mostly considered complete.<sup>40</sup> For the United States, Europe is now a theater of secondary concern.<sup>41</sup>

European states are thus searching for a way to keep themselves relevant to US administrations and prevent decoupling within the transatlantic relationship.<sup>42</sup> From the US point of view, the support of European countries, especially the UK and France, is critical to promoting

35 Sam Tangredi, *Anti-Access Warfare: Countering Anti-Access and Area-Denial Strategies* (Naval Institute Press, 2013); Evan Braden Montgomery, "Contested Primacy in the Western Pacific: China's Rise and the Future of US Power Projection," *International Security* 38, no. 4 (2014): 115–149; Stephen Biddle and Ivan Oelrich, "Future Warfare in the Western Pacific: Chinese Antiaccess/Area Denial, US AirSea Battle, and Command of the Commons in East Asia," *International Security*, 2016.

36 Zhuo Chen, "China Launches New System to Defend Islands and Reefs in South China Sea – China Military," *China Military Online*, April 1, 2019, [http://english.pladaily.com.cn/view/2019-04/01/content\\_9464939.htm](http://english.pladaily.com.cn/view/2019-04/01/content_9464939.htm); Andrew S. Erickson and Joel Wuthnow, "Barriers, Springboards and Benchmarks: China Conceptualizes the Pacific 'Island Chains,'" *The China Quarterly* 225 (2016): 1–22.

37 Yimou Lee, David Lague, and Ben Blanchard, "China Launches 'Gray-Zone' Warfare to Subdue Taiwan," *Reuters*, December 10, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/hongkong-taiwan-military/>.

38 Joris Teer et al., "China's Military Rise and the Implications for European Security" (The Hague Centre For Strategic Studies, November 10, 2021).

39 Nina Silove, "The Pivot before the Pivot: US Strategy to Preserve the Power Balance in Asia," *International Security* 40, no. 4 (2016): 45–88.

40 Paul Van Hooft, "Land Rush: American Grand Strategy, NATO Enlargement, and European Fragmentation," *International Politics* 57 (2020): 530–53.

41 Simón, Desmaele, and Becker, "Europe as a Secondary Theater?"; Van Hooft, "The United States May Be Willing, but No Longer Always Able: The Need for Transatlantic Burden Sharing in the Pacific Century."

42 For example, the British 2021 integrated review linked the new carriers to the bilateral relationship of the UK with the United States. "Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy" (HM Government, March 2021), 6, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/969402/The\\_Integrated\\_Review\\_of\\_Security\\_Defence\\_Development\\_and\\_Foreign\\_Policy.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/969402/The_Integrated_Review_of_Security_Defence_Development_and_Foreign_Policy.pdf).

American interests in the region.<sup>43</sup> Consequently, the United States must “ensure that Europeans play a valuable and coordinated role in the region.”<sup>44</sup> Yet, as the AUKUS case shows, the United States will continue to put itself in the driver’s seat.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, their engagement in the Indo-Pacific thus has an additional strategic impetus for Europeans that interacts with the inherent reasons to engage with the region.

### 1.2.1. What have the Europeans said about the Indo-Pacific?

The emerging European interest in the region is apparent from a series of recent policy statements, both by the EU itself, and by European states separately. France, Germany and the Netherlands published policy documents specifically dedicated to the region, with the UK, Italy, and Spain giving it significant weight in broader policy statements. Common themes unite the various policy documents, but differences in accents are apparent. While the need for multilateralism, engagement, open access to the maritime commons, international law, and environmental policies are shared among the Europeans, there is distinct difference to how the issue of China is treated. France and the UK are more explicit about the risk that China poses to the existing Indo-Pacific order, and specifically to the Western Pacific.

**France.** France was the first European state to formally elaborate an Indo-Pacific strategy, as well as to follow up on it.<sup>46</sup> The French focus is on maintaining stability in the region, on protecting French national territories in the area, and on promoting greater involvement of the EU in the Indo-Pacific. Its Indo-Pacific strategy also frames the role in view of its military capabilities, including those deployed in the region.<sup>47</sup> Like for the other European states, maintenance of multilateralism and the preservation of open access to the region’s maritime commons are the key themes in the French outlook.<sup>48</sup> Maintaining a multilateral order based on the observation of maritime law is emphasized again and again within the French texts, but so is the increasing weakness of maritime international law in the Indo-Pacific. In response, France reiterates its preparedness to defend the principle of freedom of maritime and air navigation included in UNCLOS,<sup>49</sup> and underlines support for “the establishment of a binding code of conduct.”<sup>50</sup> Another prominent recurring theme is the need to counter climate change and the promotion of dialogue among Indo-Pacific states as a way of ensuring the sustainable management of their natural resources, with particular focus on fisheries.<sup>51</sup> French strategies, finally, also highlight the state’s priority “to counter piracy, illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, maritime terrorism and any kind of trafficking.”<sup>52</sup> Unlike

43 Pierre Morcos, “France: A Bridge between Europe and the Indo-Pacific?,” CSIS, 2021, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/france-bridge-between-europe-and-indo-pacific>; Ben Dolven and Bruce Vaughn, “Indo-Pacific Strategies of U.S. Allies and Partners: Issues for Congress,” *Congressional Research Service*, January 30, 2020.

44 Morcos, “France: A Bridge between Europe and the Indo-Pacific?”

45 Benedetta Girardi and Paul Van Hooft, “Did AUKUS Torpedo Transatlantic Cooperation In The Indo-Pacific?” (The Hague, Netherlands: The Hague Centre For Strategic Studies, December 2021), <https://hcass.nl/report/snapshot-did-aukus-torpedo-transatlantic-cooperation-in-the-indo-pacific/>.

46 The first one, published in May 2019 by the Ministry of the Armed Forces is titled *France and Security in the Indo-Pacific*. Later, the same Ministry published *France’s Defence Strategy in the Indo-Pacific*. Lastly, in June 2019, the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs released the *French Strategy in the Indo-Pacific: For an Inclusive Indo-Pacific*.

47 “France and Security in the Indo Pacific,” May 2019, 6.

48 For example, “France supports the strict application of the United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea” (UNCLOS) “France and Security in the Indo Pacific,” 4.

49 “France and Security in the Indo Pacific,” 14–15.

50 “France’s Defence Strategy in the Indo-Pacific” (Paris: Ministère des Armées, 2019), 16.

51 “France’s Defence Strategy in the Indo-Pacific,” 19; “France and Security in the Indo Pacific,” 12.

52 “France’s Defence Strategy in the Indo-Pacific,” 2019, 18.

While the need for multilateralism, engagement, open access to the maritime commons, international law, and environmental policies are shared among the Europeans, there is distinct difference to how the issue of China is treated.

the other European policy statements, the way the French texts portray China varies. While the first document covers China in a relatively balanced manner, the second report quite explicitly identifies China as a threat. The *Defence Strategy in the Indo Pacific* notes that the growing military capabilities of China pose a challenge to democratic values and that China's increasing influence in the region "generate[s] deep-seated concerns" for France.<sup>53</sup>

**Germany.** The protection of multilateralism and the rules-based order is also central to Germany's strategy for its involvement in the region,<sup>54</sup> which highlights the importance of UNCLOS in promoting a rules-based order, and emphasizes the necessity to improve the maritime security of trading routes.<sup>55</sup> Another commonality with the French strategy is the emphasis on environmental protection and the need to address climate change. The German guidelines stress the security implications of climate change, and encourage regional synergy in building climate resilience, with a particular focus on creating energy partnerships between Germany and Indo-Pacific states.<sup>56</sup> A major difference with regards to France is the relative emphasis Berlin puts on trade. In fact, commercial exchanges are identified as one of the main policy areas in the German strategy, with particular emphasis on the importance of trade and investment agreements with regional states and the preservation of open access to the region's commons.<sup>57</sup> In comparison to France, Germany is more cautious when discussing China's role in the Indo-Pacific, preferring to again focus on the economic dimension. China is framed as an important trading partner in the region and Germany advocates for the EU to level the playing field with Beijing when it comes to commerce.<sup>58</sup> In general, the policy guidelines make it clear that Germany considers itself a trading rather than a military power in the Indo-Pacific. While it mentions the importance of security and of fighting piracy and terrorism in the region, the guidelines mainly focus on trade, investment, and development, as well as on the preservation of a rules-based order through international legal frameworks.<sup>59</sup>

**The Netherlands.** The Netherlands is the third EU state with official Indo-Pacific strategic guidelines. In contrast to France and Germany, the Dutch strategy places the Netherlands' role in the Indo-Pacific within a wider EU context. It proposes a European framework through which the Netherlands can promote Dutch and European interests in the region. The main focus areas of the Dutch document are the preservation of multilateralism and the rules-based order, the promotion of sustainable trade, the need to address the negative effects of climate change, and the support for stability and security.<sup>60</sup> Like France and Germany, the Netherlands encourages the application of UNCLOS and of other international legal frameworks to further maritime security.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, the Dutch document also highlights the importance of furthering FTA-negotiations with Indo-Pacific states to facilitate open and free commerce routes.<sup>62</sup> China is only obliquely referred to with reference to a "great power contest."<sup>63</sup> The military dimension goes largely unmentioned, while non-proliferation,

53 "France's Defence Strategy in the Indo-Pacific," 8.

54 "Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific," August 2020, 23–26.

55 "Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific," 35.

56 "Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific," 31–32.

57 "Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific," 49.

58 "Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific," 49.

59 "Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific," August 2020.

60 "Indo-Pacific: Guidelines for Strengthening Dutch and EU Cooperation with Partners in Asia," November 2020.

61 "Indo-Pacific: Guidelines for Strengthening Dutch and EU Cooperation with Partners in Asia," 5.

62 "Indo-Pacific: Guidelines for Strengthening Dutch and EU Cooperation with Partners in Asia," 6.

63 "Indo-Pacific: Guidelines for Strengthening Dutch and EU Cooperation with Partners in Asia," 5.

disarmament, the fight against piracy, and export controls are mentioned as areas in which the EU and the Netherlands should increase their engagement with the Indo-Pacific.<sup>64</sup>

**The United Kingdom.** While the UK does not have an official Indo-Pacific strategy, the importance of the Indo-Pacific for the UK's national interests is underlined in its 2021 Integrated Review. London's outlook is mainly economic, with emphasis on striking bilateral and multi-lateral trade agreements with countries in the region, as well as enhancing British investment opportunities.<sup>65</sup> The UK's Review also mentions the importance of strengthening maritime security and defense capabilities in the region. With regards to China, it notes that the UK will "invest in enhanced China-facing capabilities" to gain a "better understanding of China and its people", but simultaneously respond to "the systemic challenge that [China] poses to our security, prosperity and values – and those of our allies and partners".<sup>66</sup> Like the other European states, the essential preservation of freedom of navigation, the British commitment to upholding UNCLOS, and the importance of tackling environmental challenges in the Indo-Pacific all play prominent roles.<sup>67</sup>

**Italy, Spain, and other Europeans.** Italy and Spain have also not formulated an official Indo-Pacific strategy. However, both countries have close contact with important actors in the region. In particular, Italy has strengthened its ties with India through the Joint Declaration and Plan of Action, which defines the "priority areas and strategic goals on which the bilateral partnership for the period 2020-2025 will be based upon."<sup>68</sup> A communication from the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation confirms that cooperation with Indo-Pacific states is a priority for Italy, especially when it comes to reinforcing security in the region.<sup>69</sup> Similarly, the Indo-Pacific is gaining in importance for Spain, with Madrid strengthening its ties to key regional states, including Japan.<sup>70</sup> In 2018, the Spanish government highlighted the importance of the Asia Pacific, underlining Spain's commitment to be present in the area but it also points out the state's limited resources to carry out proper interventions.<sup>71</sup> Like the Netherlands, the strategy asserts the importance for Spain to be part of a wider EU framework when engaging with the Asia Pacific.<sup>72</sup> Even Greece, despite its close ties to China, signed on to India's vision for the Indo-Pacific in June 2021, acknowledging the need for a free, open, inclusive, and cooperative Indo-Pacific.<sup>73</sup> In a bilateral meeting with foreign minister Japanese Hayashi Yoshimasa, the foreign minister of Denmark Jeppe Kofod remarked the importance for Denmark to engage in the Indo-Pacific, as previously done by prime minister

64 "Indo-Pacific: Guidelines for Strengthening Dutch and EU Cooperation with Partners in Asia," November 2020.

65 "Global Britain in a Competitive Age," March 2021, 67.

66 "Global Britain in a Competitive Age," 22.

67 "Global Britain in a Competitive Age," 66–67.

68 Vincenzo de Luca, "From Multilateralism to Indo-Pacific, India and Italy Deepen Bonds," Hindustan Times, November 12, 2020, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/analysis/from-multilateralism-to-indo-pacific-in-dia-and-italy-deepen-bonds/story-RIUODAiHgphpQMgqqhFzYO.html>.

69 "Italia-ASEAN: verso una cooperazione in materia di sicurezza transnazionale," Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale, September 25, 2020, [https://www.esteri.it/mae/it/sala\\_stampa/archivionotizie/eventi/2020/09/italia-asean-verso-una-cooperazione-in-materia-di-sicurezza-transnazionale.html](https://www.esteri.it/mae/it/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/eventi/2020/09/italia-asean-verso-una-cooperazione-in-materia-di-sicurezza-transnazionale.html).

70 "Madrid acoge un seminario sobre la estrategia global de la UE y de la estrategia Indo-Pacífico: España y Japón," ASIANortheast.com, March 21, 2018, <https://asianortheast.com/madrid-acoge-seminario-la-estrategia-global-la-ue-la-estrategia-indo-pacifico-espana-japon/>.

71 "A Strategic Vision for Spain in Asia 2018-2022" (Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores y de Cooperación, 2018), [http://www.exteriores.gob.es/Portal/es/SalaDePrensa/Multimedia/Publicaciones/Documents/2018\\_02\\_ES-TRATEGIA%20ASIA%20ENG.pdf](http://www.exteriores.gob.es/Portal/es/SalaDePrensa/Multimedia/Publicaciones/Documents/2018_02_ES-TRATEGIA%20ASIA%20ENG.pdf).

72 "A Strategic Vision for Spain in Asia 2018-2022."

73 "China's 'ally' Greece Aligns with India for a 'Free' Indo-Pacific," The Times of India, June 27, 2021, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/chinas-ally-greece-aligns-with-india-for-a-free-indo-pacific/articleshow/83884327.cms>.

Mette Frederiksen in India.<sup>74</sup> Portuguese and Norwegian officials also made similar remarks and underlined their countries' interests in the region.<sup>75</sup>

**European Union.** The same themes are, unsurprisingly, represented in the EU position on the Indo-Pacific. In April 2021, the EU released its strategy for the Indo-Pacific, in which it positions itself as a promoter of multilateralism and the respect for human rights and maritime laws – especially of UNCLOS – in the region.<sup>76</sup> Additionally, the policy document stresses the importance of addressing climate change and of fostering economic relationships with Indo-Pacific states through bilateral and multilateral agreements.<sup>77</sup> When it comes to security and defense, the aim is to “strengthen synergies with likeminded partners and relevant organizations” to promote nuclear non-proliferation, arms control, maritime security, and the fight against cyber threats and terrorism.<sup>78</sup> The text from early 2021 is not explicit about China's role in the region, nor does it frame it as a potential threat. Rather, the emphasis is placed on guaranteeing multilateralism as well as free access to maritime resources and trade. The 2021 strategy follows a series of others steps towards the region undertaken by the EU in recent years. In 2018, the EU signed a Strategic Partnership Agreement and an Economic Partnership Agreement with Japan,<sup>79</sup> which was followed by Free Trade Agreements (FTA) with Singapore (2018), and Vietnam (2019).<sup>80</sup> These initiatives complement previous ones, such as the establishment of Strategic Partnerships with India in 2004 and South Korea in 2010.<sup>81</sup> Additionally, in 2018, the EU affirmed its commitment to deepen its security engagement in and with Asian partners.<sup>82</sup> Most recently, in December 2020, the EU and ASEAN officially became Strategic Partners, in an agreement which “elevates their partnership with a commitment to regular summits at leaders' level.”<sup>83</sup>

**The Chinese elephant.** How to address the Chinese elephant in the room? International relations sometimes move fast. In September 2021, the Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council regarding the EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific was published, highlighting the “significant military build-up, including by China” and acknowledges growing tensions in the South and East China Sea and in the Taiwan Strait and their potential

74 “India-Denmark Welcome Recent Announcement of EU Strategy on Indo-Pacific,” ANI News, accessed December 23, 2021, <https://www.aninews.in/news/world/asia/india-denmark-announces-eus-engagement-in-indo-pacific-region20211009223924/>; “Joint Press Release on the Occasion of the Meeting between the Foreign Minister of Japan, Hayashi Yoshimasa and the Foreign Minister of Denmark, Jeppe Kofod in Tokyo 24 November,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, November 24, 2021, <https://um.dk/en/news/newsdisplaypage/?newsid=cdb34d4b-e547-4e1d-9aea-b8fc337bc231>.

75 Sofia Branco, “Portugal Wants to Be Remembered for ‘Rebalancing Relationship with Asia,’” *www.euractiv.com*, May 13, 2021, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/eu-council-presidency/news/portugal-wants-to-be-remembered-for-rebalancing-relationship-with-asia/>; “Norway Well Represented at Raisina Dialogue 2021,” Royal Norwegian Embassy in New Delhi and Consulate General in Mumbai, April 16, 2021, <https://www.norway.no/en/india/norway-india/news-and-events/new-delhi/news/norway-well-represented-at-raisina-dialogue-2021/>.

76 “Council Conclusions on an EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific” (Council of the European Union, April 16, 2021), <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7914-2021-INIT/en/pdf>.

77 “Council Conclusions on an EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific,” 6–7.

78 “Council Conclusions on an EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific,” 8.

79 “EU-Japan Strategic Partnership Agreement,” *EurLex*, 2018, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=LEGISSUM:4359401&from=EN>.

80 Benaglia, “How Can the EU Navigate the Indo-Pacific?,” January 28, 2021.

81 “EU Strategic Partnerships with Third Countries,” *ETIAS*, 2021, <https://www.etiasvisa.com/etias-news/eu-strategic-partnerships>.

82 “Deepening EU Security Cooperation with Asian Partners: Council Adopts Conclusions,” *European Council*, May 28, 2018, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2018/05/28/deepening-eu-security-cooperation-with-asian-partners-council-adopts-conclusions/>.

83 “EU-ASEAN Strategic Partnership,” Text, *EEAS – European External Action Service*, December 1, 2020, [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/89626/eu-asean-strategic-partnership\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/89626/eu-asean-strategic-partnership_en).

Tellingly, the newest EU statement on the Indo-Pacific steers clear from the issues most likely to provoke China.

impact on European security.<sup>84</sup> Its “multifaceted engagement”<sup>85</sup> with China means the EU is open to cooperation with China in areas such as climate security, ocean governance, and economic affairs. But Brussels will be “pushing back where fundamental disagreements exist with China.”<sup>86</sup> Previously, in the April 2021 Council Conclusion, China was mentioned only once, in relation to the creation of a Comprehensive Agreement on Investment.<sup>87</sup> In contrast to those earlier documents, the most recent EU statement has a concrete military dimension. The Communication adds a section on naval presence, committing to more joint exercises and port calls, strengthening EU naval diplomacy, and enhancing naval deployment in the region.<sup>88</sup> Increasing security engagement with ASEAN is prospected, as well as tighter cooperation with India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, and Vietnam under the project Enhancing Security Cooperation in and with Asia (ESIWA).<sup>89</sup> The Communication underlines the EU’s will to “deepen its engagement with partners that already have Indo-Pacific approaches of their own – ASEAN, Australia, India, Japan, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, the United Kingdom and the United States.”<sup>90</sup> The document further expands on the ways in which engagement will be deepened for all the aforementioned states. Tellingly, the newest EU statement on the Indo-Pacific steers clear from the issues most likely to provoke China. Yet, unlike the previous Council Conclusion where it was absent, Taiwan is mentioned several times, with the EU stating that its will to deepen its partnership with Taiwan, especially in economic terms.<sup>91</sup>

In short, the individual European states and the EU as a collective seek to strengthen political, economic, and security ties with likeminded countries in the Indo-Pacific, to promote a rules-based order and support a multilateral governance system for the maritime commons, in accordance with international law. The latter is more and more explicitly framed in the context of the intensifying Sino-American geopolitical competition. Section 4.1 goes further into these differences towards China among European states.

### 1.2.2. Why do the Europeans focus on a multilateral approach?

Why do European states stress multilateralist approaches? The core European states share an assumption that multilateralizing maritime security with partners in the region can accomplish two things: (1) maintain openness, security, and stability without further militarization of

84 It highlights the same areas of interest for Europe in the Indo-Pacific as the Council Conclusion of April 2021 (strengthening local partnerships, economic prosperity, green transition, digitalization, connectivity, security and defense) but reflects a change in the EU position towards China. “Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council – The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific” (European Commission, September 16, 2021), 2, [https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/jointcommunication\\_2021\\_24\\_1\\_en.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/jointcommunication_2021_24_1_en.pdf).

85 “Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council – The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific,” 4.

86 “Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council – The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific,” 4.

87 “Council Conclusions on an EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific” (Council of the European Union, April 16, 2021), 7, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7914-2021-INIT/en/pdf>.

88 “Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council – The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific” (European Commission, September 16, 2021), 13, [https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/jointcommunication\\_2021\\_24\\_1\\_en.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/jointcommunication_2021_24_1_en.pdf).

89 “Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council – The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific,” 14.

90 “Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council – The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific,” 4.

91 “Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council – The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific,” 6–7.

Europe can leave a positive footprint in the region through cooperation, the construction of technical and institutional capacities, and the defense of the rule of law.

the region; (2) manage to keep European commitments proportionate to limited European capabilities (see the discussion in chapter 5).

First, by explicitly pursuing a multilateral approach in the region, and by promoting dialogue with both the US and China, the Europeans hope to avoid adding to the perception that they are aligning with the United States. Instead, the EU would act as a normative power in the region, promoting a rules-based order and multilateralism.<sup>92</sup> In that sense, the EU's approach would be in line with the dominant idea during the 1990s and 2000s that the EU could play a normative role with prospective EU members and in its direct neighborhood.<sup>93</sup> Similar arguments are made by experts across Europe. The EU should build its Indo-Pacific presence by using its "institutional and operational expertise in multi-stakeholder maritime governance". As Eva Pejsova argues, Europe can leave a positive footprint in the region through cooperation, the construction of technical and institutional capacities, and the defense of the rule of law.<sup>94</sup> It is essential for Europe to establish close partnerships with regional middle powers. Deepening ties with Japan, for instance, is seen as the ideal way to obtain more influence in the region, further the EU's economic interests in the Indo-Pacific and close the geographical gap between Europe and this area.<sup>95</sup> Specifically, focusing on Europe's role in climate security initiatives in the region, because environmental security represents an area that "offers many avenues of cooperation".<sup>96</sup> Though outside of the EU, the UK could take a leading role together with France to guide European efforts in the region that are "increasing but uncoordinated".<sup>97</sup>

Second, European naval assets are limited (see section 5.1), specifically if they would be asked to contribute more than incidental presence in the region as part of a more overt attempt to contain and balance growing Chinese power. In contrast, European assets in the economic, diplomatic, and institutional realm are more robust. The European unease and ambiguity regarding how to treat China is duly noted.<sup>98</sup> It is apparent that Europeans "cannot remain on the side-lines in the unfolding process of great power competition in the area."<sup>99</sup> An inclusive, multilateral approach is thus an avenue to contribute to regional stability through European institutional strengths, rather than weaknesses. But that begs two questions: where can European contribute the most and which regional partners should they target foremost?

92 Like the policy papers, think tank pieces emphasize the need for the EU to develop a comprehensive Indo-Pacific strategy that encompasses economic, security, political and environmental, dimensions. Benaglia, "How Can the EU Navigate the Indo-Pacific?," January 28, 2021; Felix Heiduk and Gudrun Wacker, "From Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific: Significance, Implementation and Challenges," *SWP Research Paper*, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.18449/2020RP09>.

93 Ian Manners, "The EU's Normative Power in Changing World Politics," *Normative Power Europe in a Changing World: A Discussion*, Netherlands Institute of International Relations, 2009, 9–24.

94 Eva Pejsova, "The EU as a Maritime Security Provider" (European Union Institute for Security Studies, December 2019), 8, [https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Brief%2013%20Maritime\\_0.pdf](https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Brief%2013%20Maritime_0.pdf).

95 Luis Simón and Ulrich Speck, "Natural Partners? Europe, Japan and Security in the Indo-Pacific," *Real Instituto Elcano*, December 11, 2018, [http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano\\_en/contenido?WCM\\_GLOBAL\\_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano\\_es/zonas\\_es/asia-pacifico/policy-paper-2018-natural-partners-europe-japan-security-indo-pacific](http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano_en/contenido?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_es/zonas_es/asia-pacifico/policy-paper-2018-natural-partners-europe-japan-security-indo-pacific).

96 Méliissa Levaillant, "Defence Diplomacy and Environmental Security: Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific and Beyond," *ORF*, May 17, 2021, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/defence-diplomacy-environmental-security-cooperation-indo-pacific-beyond/>.

97 Alice Billon-Galland and Hans Kundnani, "UK and France Should Collaborate on Indo-Pacific Security," *Chatham House*, March 26, 2021, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2021/03/uk-and-france-should-collaborate-indo-pacific-security>.

98 Frédéric Grare, "The EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy: A Chance for a Clear Message to China and Europe's Allies – European Council on Foreign Relations," *ECFR (blog)*, April 22, 2021, <https://ecfr.eu/article/the-eus-indo-pacific-strategy-a-chance-for-a-clear-message-to-china-and-europes-allies/>.

99 Simón and Speck, "Natural Partners? Europe, Japan and Security in the Indo-Pacific."

### 1.2.3. Why are the Europeans sending ships to the Indo-Pacific?

Why has it become suddenly so important for the Europeans to establish a naval presence in the Indo-Pacific? Obviously, as discussed in section 1.1, part of the answer is that most of the security issues in the Indo-Pacific involve the ability to control or deny the military use of the seas, or the extraction of resources maritime in nature. Consequently, there is a need to guard the maritime commons and keep the sealines of communication open.

But the maritime instrument has advantages of its own. The movement of a state's military forces signals that the interests of state are in play. However, it is difficult and costly to move armies over great distances across land, due to terrain and neutral territories. Navies are not so constrained, but, as Ian Speller notes, their presence in a region still provides a visible and tangible symbol of a state's interest.<sup>100</sup> In contrast to land-based forces, the maritime instrument is inherently flexible due to the openness of the domain it makes use of.<sup>101</sup> As Geoffrey Till and Edward Luttwak note, an oceanic navy specifically has inherent flexibility, geographic reach, mobility, and controllability; all of which make it useful as an instrument of policy, including during peacetime.<sup>102</sup> Again, in contrast to land-based forces, ships can 'hang around' in a region for prolonged periods (though not indefinitely), without necessitating long-term commitments.<sup>103</sup> And as Speller points out, a warship can also quickly switch roles to that of humanitarian relief or non-combatant evacuation.<sup>104</sup>

Though naval diplomacy has been undertheorized in terms of objectives, mechanisms, and targets, Kevin Rowlands notes it remains an underrated peacetime tool of statecraft.<sup>105</sup> Indeed, Till agrees that the wartime uses of navies have been much better studied.<sup>106</sup> Though naval diplomacy has been studied in terms of 19<sup>th</sup> century 'gunboat diplomacy', it has remained useful as a policy tool.<sup>107</sup> Naval presence comes in different shapes, varying from a routine and continuous presence in crucial regions where a state seeks to demonstrate a permanent interest, to periodic, where interests are less acute or a state's capacity is absent.<sup>108</sup> Luttwak consequently categorizes naval suasion from very passive and latent, through routine and undirected deployments, to highly assertive and active.<sup>109</sup> In turn, James Cable distinguishes four kinds of naval force: definitive (through fait accompli), purposeful (or persuasive, in line with Luttwak), the catalytic (to trigger responses), and the expressive.<sup>110</sup> Yet, an ill-considered

100 Speller, *Understanding Naval Warfare*, 83. As Ian Speller notes, a warship can also quickly switch roles to that of humanitarian relief, non-combatant evacuation or shore bombardment.

101 Colin S. Gray, *The Leverage of Sea Power: The Strategic Advantage of Navies in War* (Free Press, 1992), 2; Speller, *Understanding Naval Warfare*, 25. Patrick Porter, *The Global Village Myth: Distance, War, and the Limits of Power* (Georgetown University Press, 2015); Van Hooft, "All-in or All-out: Why Insularity Pushes and Pulls American Grand Strategy to Extremes."

102 Till, *Seapower*, 280–81. Edward Luttwak, *The Political Uses of Sea Power*, 23 (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 1.

103 Speller, *Understanding Naval Warfare*, 81.

104 Speller, 83. Of course, such an approach is specifically useful against weaker states, as a more powerful state might interpret and act according to the worst-case scenario. Moreover, the ability to switch roles from civilian to military, is exactly how China's PLAN uses its paramilitary fleet of "fishing" ships, or how, historically, privateering made use of such strategic role-switching. Still, the point stands regarding the advantages of the maritime instrument.

105 Kevin Rowlands, *Naval Diplomacy in the 21st Century: A Model for the Post-Cold War Global Order* (Routledge, 2018).

106 Till, *Seapower*, 271, 274.

107 Christian Le Mièrre, *Maritime Diplomacy in the 21st Century: Drivers and Challenges* (Routledge, 2014).

108 Till, *Seapower*, 279.

109 Luttwak, *The Political Uses of Sea Power*, 1.

110 James Cable, *Gunboat Diplomacy, 1919-79: Political Applications of Limited Naval Force* (Springer, 2016).

Naval presence in a region still provides a visible and tangible symbol of a state's interest

presence could be escalatory.<sup>111</sup> The flexibility of a naval presence can work at odds with the ability to signal sufficient interests at stake, and states that rely on maritime power might inadvertently overcommit themselves to compensate for an inherent asymmetry in interests.<sup>112</sup> Indeed, because of this flexibility, there is a risk that maritime power can be more escalatory.<sup>113</sup>

### 1.3. Conclusion: how to proceed

This chapter has laid out some of the basics of why Europeans have begun to make maritime security in the Indo-Pacific one of their main concern. It has addressed the importance of seaborne trade with Asia for European economies, and the vulnerability of the sealines of communication to disruption. The chapter has underlined why Europeans prefer multilateral approaches as a way to dampen the escalatory pressures within the Indo-Pacific regions and why a European naval presence sends a clear signal to partners and to revisionist states that Europeans see their interests at stake should the security and openness of the maritime commons be threatened. The following chapters build on these ideas. Chapters 2 and 3 examine who Europeans could partner with further in the region and which frameworks have the most potential. The potential for escalation is discussed in chapter 4. The limited capacity of European states to generate a naval presence in the Indo-Pacific is examined in chapter 5, as are ways to compensate for those limits.

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<sup>111</sup> Till, *Seapower*, 279.

<sup>112</sup> Van Hooft, "All-in or All-out: Why Insularity Pushes and Pulls American Grand Strategy to Extremes."

<sup>113</sup> Erik Gartzke and Jon R. Lindsay, "The Influence of Sea Power on Politics: Domain-and Platform-Specific Attributes of Material Capabilities," *Security Studies* 29, no. 4 (2020): 601–636.

## 2. Work with whom?

### Indo-Pacific states: value affinity and strategic relevance

Some states have affinity in terms of values with key European states, others do not. Nor do values run in parallel to relevant capabilities; the most capable do not necessarily share the same values, nor do those that share them necessarily have the weight to pursue these values.

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Europeans need partners in the Indo-Pacific if they want have a credible chance to contribute to upholding the multilateral order in the Indo-Pacific. Multilateralization is the main theme of the policy papers surveyed (see section 1.2.1.), preferably with so-called like-minded Indo-Pacific partners with values compatible with those of Europe. What that means in practice is often left unclear.

Who can and should European states work with in the Indo-Pacific region? Some states have affinity in terms of values with key European states, others do not. Nor do values run in parallel to relevant capabilities; the most capable do not necessarily share the same values, nor do those that share them necessarily have the weight to pursue these values. This chapter proposes a framework that consists of multiple criteria to identify and prioritize partners in the region. Having identified the likeminded, strategically relevant partners, the next chapter explores the avenues through which to engage them.

### 2.1. International affinity and strategic relevance

European states will have to look both at shared values and interests to drive the choice for partnerships, as well as at states that have the strategic means to achieve European values and interests. In an ideal world, Europe would establish closer partnerships with Indo-Pacific countries that share similar values in terms of political constitution, human rights record, economic regulatory system, and support for international law, and not only those that are strategically relevant due to their resources, military capabilities, or geographic position. The emphasis on shared values is not cosmetic, states that share values are more likely to pursue congruent foreign policies in various ways. Mansfield et al. assert for instance that democracies tend to cooperate better with other democracies, as a result of, among others, the political accountability of their leaders and shared values.<sup>114</sup> In fact, Brian Lai and Dan Reiter argue that states with similar political regimes are more likely to conclude

114 Brian Lai and Dan Reiter, "Democracy, Political Similarity, and International Alliances, 1816-1992," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 44, no. 2 (2000): 203; Edward D. Mansfield, Helen V. Milner, and B. Peter Rosendorff, "Why Democracies Cooperate More: Electoral Control and International Trade Agreements," *International Organization* 56, no. 3 (2002): 478.

alliance agreements.<sup>115</sup> Geoffrey Wallace asserts that more tightly knit alliance institutionalization facilitates better inter-alliance coordination and is therefore likely to harmonize the military strategy of alliance members.<sup>116</sup> Along similar lines, Bruce Russett et al. argue that shared regime type, shared intergovernmental organization membership and economic interdependence all have a powerful positive effect on peaceful interstate relations,<sup>117</sup> with diplomatic connections in turn strengthening the creation of socialized norms and values that facilitate the development of networks of allied countries.<sup>118</sup> Eric Neumayer suggests that “ideological affinity [...] raises the benefits of diplomatic representation and promises its smooth functioning given the friendly relations it is supposed to maintain, thus also lowering the costs of representation.”<sup>119</sup> Maoz Zeev et al., finally, look at international affinity defined as “the degree of common traits or interests over a wide set of relationships or attributes” and consider various forms of affinity in security (alliances), economics (trade), international diplomacy (intergovernmental organizations), and assert that higher degrees of affinity lower the probability of conflict between states.<sup>120</sup>

Building on these insights, we use the concept of *international affinity* to examine which Indo-Pacific countries share important values with Europe. Similar (a) political regime, (b) economic system, and (c) a shared stance on issues such as environmental protection and international law are key elements of international affinity. Indo-Pacific countries with converging values are assumed to be more likely to mobilize their resources toward objectives that align with European ones.

Affinity is not the only criterium; an Indo-Pacific country's *strategic relevance* also matters to European interests. Countries can be strategically relevant both in indirect and direct ways for an assortment of (a) political, (b) economic, and (c) military reasons. Indirectly, countries can be strategically relevant, because they wield outsized political influence in regional relations, constitute an economic powerhouse, or possess coercive military capabilities.<sup>121</sup> The larger the economy of an Indo-Pacific country, the greater its ability to introduce policies or engage in other types of activities that influence regional markets. Countries can also be important political players that are able to use their resources to shape other states' behaviors and achieve political gains.<sup>122</sup> This depends both on their overall level of influence and on their ability to use their resources to exert influence in bilateral or multilateral relations which

115 Lai and Reiter, “Democracy, Political Similarity, and International Alliances, 1816-1992,” 203; Mansfield, Milner, and Rosendorff, “Why Democracies Cooperate More,” 478.

116 Geoffrey P.R. Wallace, “Alliances, Institutional Design, and the Determinants of Military Strategy,” *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 25, no. 3 (July 1, 2008): 224–43, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07388940802218978>.

117 Bruce Russett, John R. Oneal, and David R. Davis, “The Third Leg of the Kantian Tripod for Peace: International Organizations and Militarized Disputes, 1950–85,” *International Organization* 52, no. 3 (1998): 441–67, <https://doi.org/10.1162/002081898550626>. Leeds and Long moreover find that increased levels of trade are supported by the joint negotiation of economic and security issues, highlighting the relation between international trade and security. See Andrew G. Long and Brett Ashley Leeds, “Trading for Security: Military Alliances and Economic Agreements,” *Journal of Peace Research* 43, no. 4 (July 1, 2006): 433–51, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343306065884>.

118 See David H. Bearce and Stacy Bondanella, “Intergovernmental Organizations, Socialization, and Member-State Interest Convergence,” *International Organization* 61, no. 4 (2007): 729, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818307070245>.

119 Eric Neumayer, “Distance, Power and Ideology: Diplomatic Representation in a World of Nation-States,” *Area* 40, no. 2 (June 2008): 228–36, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4762.2008.00804.x>, p.8.

120 Zeev Maoz et al., “Structural Equivalence and International Conflict: A Social Networks Analysis,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50, no. 5 (October 2006): 669, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002706291053>.

121 van Manen et al., 9-12.

122 Jonathan D Moyer et al., “China-US Competition: Measuring Global Influence” (Washington DC: The Atlantic Council of the United States; Frederick S. Pardee Center for International Futures, May 2021), 5.

can promote policy diffusion,<sup>123</sup> as well as further the convergence of foreign policy objectives.<sup>124</sup> Finally, military power is an important, foundational pillar of other tenets of statecraft and allows a state to shape regional relations.<sup>125</sup> In the context of the security of the maritime commons, a country's naval capabilities are particularly relevant. In addition to indirect relevance, countries can also be relevant in a more direct sense, because they are important trading partners and military partners for Europe or are endowed with rare earth materials that are critical to the energy transition.<sup>126</sup> Bilateral trade volumes, in turn, are important indicators of economic relevance. High bilateral trade volumes point towards other types of dyadic economic relations as well, including FDI and informational flows.<sup>127</sup> Out of the scope of our methodology for strategic relevance is geographic location; we do believe this is important, but consider this a more difficult concept to capture with indicators. After all, most of the states we cover are located at points alongside the seelines of communication. We will note that certain states, like Sri Lanka and Myanmar, are more important for geographical reasons than can be captured by these numbers.

## 2.2. Operationalization of international affinity and strategic relevance

International affinity and strategic relevance have been operationalized into measurable indicators in order to assess the 'fit' of Indo-Pacific countries as partners. Table 4 and Annex A provides a summary of the concepts, indicators and data sources. Table 5 offers the country results across these indicators.

123 Katharina Füglistner, "Where Does Learning Take Place? The Role of Intergovernmental Cooperation in Policy Diffusion," *European Journal of Political Research* 51, no. 3 (2012): 339, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2011.02000.x>.

124 Bearce and Bondanella, "Intergovernmental Organizations, Socialization, and Member-State Interest Convergence."

125 Moyer et al., "China-US Competition: Measuring Global Influence," 2.

126 Tim Sweijts et al., "Why Are Pivot States so Pivotal? The Role of Pivot States in Regional and Global Security," HCSS Strategic Monitor 2014 (The Hague Center for Strategic Studies, 2014), [https://mk0hcscnlsb22xc4fhr7.kinstacdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Why\\_are\\_Pivot\\_States\\_so\\_Pivotal\\_The\\_Role\\_of\\_Pivot\\_States\\_in\\_Regional\\_and\\_Global\\_Security\\_C.pdf](https://mk0hcscnlsb22xc4fhr7.kinstacdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Why_are_Pivot_States_so_Pivotal_The_Role_of_Pivot_States_in_Regional_and_Global_Security_C.pdf); S Bobba et al., "Critical Raw Materials for Strategic Technologies and Sectors in the EU: A Foresight Study" (JRC, European Commission, 2020), 10.

127 See Beata S. Javorcik et al., "Migrant Networks and Foreign Direct Investment," *Journal of Development Economics* 94, no. 2 (2011): 238 for empirical analysis of relationship between migrant flows and FDI and; Bang Nam Jeon, Linghui Tang, and Lei Zhu, "Information Technology and Bilateral FDI: Theory and Evidence," *Journal of Economic Integration* 20, no. 4 (2005): 624 for empirical analysis of relationship between R&D spillover (information) and trade, FDI, migration.

Table 4. Summary of concepts, indicators and data sources



| Concept   |           | Research Question  | Indicator  | Data   |
|-----------|-----------|--|--|--|
| Affinity  |           | Is the country democratic?   | Regime type (democracy, anocracy, autocracy)   | Polity 5   |
|           |           | Does the country respect principles of rule of law and judicial freedom? | Rule of Law (strong, medium, weak)   | V-Dem database   |
|           |           | Is the country a champion or significant underminer of human rights?     | Human rights record (free, partly free, not free)  | Freedom House (Freedom in the World status)                            |
|           |           | Does the country adhere to principles of mare liberum?                   | Participation in UNCLOS (party, signatory)   | Manual Coding from the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea |
|           |           | Does the country support liberal economic values?                        | Economic openness (high, medium, low)  | International Property Rights Index (overall score)                    |
|           |           | What is the country's environmental performance?                         | Environmental performance (high, medium, low)  | Environment Performance Index (EPI Score)                              |
| Relevance | Economic  | Is the country an important trading partner of the EU?                   | Bilateral trade (very large, large, moderate, limited)   | UN Comtrade  |
|           |           | Is the country an important regional trading actor?                      | Regional trade (very large, large, moderate, limited)  | UN Comtrade  |
|           |           | Does the country possess critical natural resources?                     | REE reserves (yes, no)   | US Geological Survey   |
|           | Political | What is the country's potential influence capacity?                      | International influence (Very high, high, moderate, limited)   | Formal Bilateral Influence Capacity Index                              |
|           |           | What is the level of the country's diplomatic representation?            | Diplomatic representation (High, medium, low)  | Diplometrics   |
|           | Security  | Does the country have strong military coercive capabilities?             | Share of international military power (Super, major, regional, minor)  | Global Power Index   |
|           |           | What type of navy does a country have?                                   | Type of Navy (Multi-regional power projection, regional power projection, regional offshore coastal defense, Inshore constabulary, token navies) | Kirchberger and Military Balance 2020                                  |

Table 5. Summary of results per country, across all indicators



|            | Affinity    |             |              |           |                   |                           | Strategic Relevance |              |              |           |           |                |                                   |
|------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|-----------|-------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|--------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|----------------|-----------------------------------|
|            | Regime Type | Rule of Law | Human Rights | UNCLOS    | Economic Openness | Environmental Performance | Economic            |              |              | Political |           | Security       |                                   |
|            |             |             |              |           |                   |                           | EU Trade            | Global Trade | REE Reserves | Influence | Diplomacy | Military Power | Navy                              |
| Australia  | Democracy   | Strong      | Free         | Party     | High              | High                      | Moderate            | Moderate     | Yes          | High      | Medium    | Regional       | Regional power-projection         |
| Bangladesh | Autocracy   | Weak        | Partly Free  | Party     | Low               | Low                       | Moderate            | Limited      | Yes          | Moderate  | Medium    | Minor          | Regional power-projection         |
| Bhutan     | Democracy   | Strong      | Partly Free  | Signatory | N/A               | Medium                    | Limited             | Limited      | No           | Limited   | Low       | Minor          | N/A                               |
| Brunei     | N/A         | N/A         | Not Free     | Party     | Medium            | Medium                    | Limited             | Limited      | No           | Limited   | Low       | Minor          | Regional offshore coastal defense |
| Cambodia   | Anocracy    | Weak        | Not Free     | Signatory | N/A               | Low                       | Limited             | Limited      | No           | Limited   | Low       | Minor          | Inshore constabulary              |
| China      | Autocracy   | Medium      | Not Free     | Party     | Medium            | Low                       | Very Large          | Very Large   | Yes          | Very High | High      | Super          | Multi-regional power-projection   |
| Fiji       | Anocracy    | Medium      | Partly Free  | Party     | N/A               | Low                       | Limited             | Limited      | No           | Limited   | Low       | Minor          | Inshore constabulary              |
| India      | Democracy   | Medium      | Partly Free  | Party     | Medium            | Low                       | Large               | Moderate     | Yes          | High      | Medium    | Major          | Multi-regional power-projection   |
| Indonesia  | Democracy   | Medium      | Partly Free  | Party     | Medium            | Medium                    | Moderate            | Moderate     | Yes          | High      | Medium    | Regional       | Regional offshore coastal defense |
| Japan      | Democracy   | Strong      | Free         | Party     | High              | High                      | Large               | Large        | No           | High      | High      | Major          | Regional power-projection         |
| Laos       | Autocracy   | Medium      | Not Free     | Party     | N/A               | Low                       | Limited             | Limited      | No           | Limited   | Low       | Minor          | N/A                               |
| Malaysia   | Democracy   | Medium      | Partly Free  | Party     | Medium            | Medium                    | Moderate            | Moderate     | Yes          | High      | Medium    | Minor          | Regional offshore coastal defense |
| Maldives   | N/A         | Medium      | Partly Free  | Party     | N/A               | Low                       | Limited             | Limited      | No           | Limited   | Low       | Minor          | N/A                               |

Table 5. Summary of results per country, across all indicators (continued)

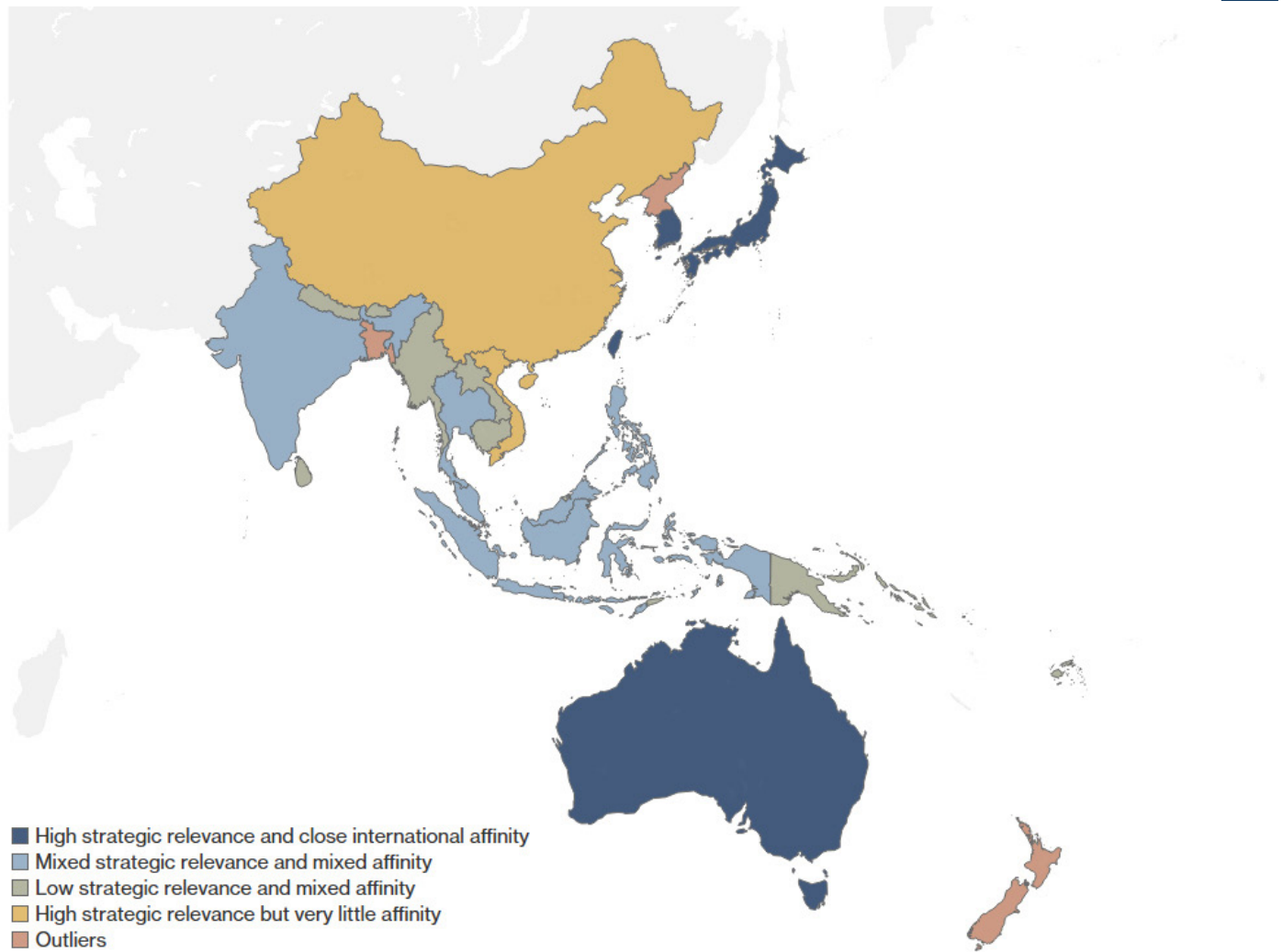


|                  | Affinity    |             |              |           |                   |                           | Strategic Relevance |              |              |           |           |                |                                   |
|------------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|-----------|-------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|--------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|----------------|-----------------------------------|
|                  | Regime Type | Rule of Law | Human Rights | UNCLOS    | Economic Openness | Environmental Performance | Economic            |              |              | Political |           | Security       |                                   |
|                  |             |             |              |           |                   |                           | EU Trade            | Global Trade | REE Reserves | Influence | Diplomacy | Military Power | Navy                              |
| Myanmar          | Autocracy   | Medium      | Not Free     | Party     | N/A               | Low                       | Limited             | Limited      | Yes          | Limited   | Low       | Minor          | Inshore constabulary              |
| Nepal            | Democracy   | Medium      | Partly Free  | Party     | Medium            | Low                       | Limited             | Limited      | No           | Limited   | Low       | Minor          | N/A                               |
| New Zealand      | Democracy   | Strong      | Free         | Party     | High              | High                      | Limited             | Limited      | Yes          | Moderate  | Low       | Minor          | Regional power-projection         |
| North Korea      | Autocracy   | Weak        | Not Free     | Signatory | N/A               | N/A                       | Limited             | Limited      | Yes          | Limited   | Medium    | Minor          | Regional power-projection         |
| Papua New Guinea | Anocracy    | Medium      | Partly Free  | Party     | N/A               | Low                       | Limited             | Limited      | No           | Limited   | Low       | Minor          | Token navies                      |
| Philippines      | Democracy   | Medium      | Partly Free  | Party     | Medium            | Medium                    | Moderate            | Moderate     | Yes          | Moderate  | Medium    | Minor          | Inshore constabulary              |
| Singapore        | Anocracy    | Strong      | Partly Free  | Party     | High              | Medium                    | Moderate            | Moderate     | No           | High      | Low       | Minor          | Regional offshore coastal defense |
| Solomon Islands  | Democracy   | Medium      | Free         | Party     | N/A               | Low                       | Limited             | Limited      | No           | Limited   | Low       | Minor          | N/A                               |
| South Korea      | Democracy   | Strong      | Free         | Party     | Medium            | Medium                    | Large               | Large        | Yes          | High      | Medium    | Regional       | Regional power-projection         |
| Sri Lanka        | Democracy   | Medium      | Partly Free  | Party     | Medium            | Medium                    | Limited             | Limited      | Yes          | Limited   | Low       | Minor          | Inshore constabulary              |
| Taiwan           | Democracy   | Strong      | Free         | N/A       | High              | Medium                    | N/A                 | N/A          | Yes          | Moderate  | Low       | Minor          | Regional power-projection         |
| Thailand         | Anocracy    | Medium      | Not Free     | Party     | Medium            | Medium                    | Moderate            | Moderate     | Yes          | High      | Medium    | Minor          | Regional offshore coastal defense |
| Timor-Leste      | Democracy   | Medium      | Free         | Party     | N/A               | Low                       | Limited             | Limited      | No           | Limited   | Low       | Minor          | Inshore constabulary              |

## 2.3. Countries in the Indo-Pacific: An Assessment

On the basis of country scores for international affinity and strategic relevance, four clusters of countries can be distinguished: (1) countries with high strategic relevance and generally close affinity with European values; (2) countries with high strategic relevance but whose value systems are generally at odds with European values (3) countries that are relatively relevant in strategic terms but who have a mixed record in terms of affinity and (4) countries with low strategic relevance and mixed affinity. Three countries do not fit into these four clusters, and are hence categorized as outliers (see figure 5).

Figure 5. Visualization of country clusters for strategic affinity and relevance



The three countries that stand out as having high economic, political, and security relevance and close affinity with Europe are Japan, South Korea, and Australia.

### 2.3.1. High strategic relevance and close international affinity

Unsurprisingly, the three countries that stand out as having high economic, political, and security relevance and close affinity with Europe are Japan, South Korea, and Australia (see figure 6). Japan and South Korea have compatible regime types and strong rule of law, strong protection of political and civil rights, are supporters of UNCLOS, and have high standards with regards to economic openness and environmental protection. In addition, Japan and South Korea are both important players in the regional Indo-Pacific market, they have stable commercial partnerships with Europe, noticeable political influence and, despite the fact that Japan continues to be hamstrung by the constraints put upon it by its post Second World War constitution limiting Japan to a Self Defense force, relatively well-developed military capabilities. For these reasons, they are highly compatible and relevant to Europe. Taiwan is an actor that also belongs in the category of close affinity; it is arguably the foremost target of China's assertiveness.

**Figure 6. Indo-Pacific actors with high strategic relevance for and high international affinity with European states**



### 2.3.2. High strategic relevance but very little affinity

This category is comprised of countries that are valuable for economic, political, and security reasons but at the same time are farther removed from Europe in terms of shared values. The two key members of this group are China and Vietnam (see figure 7). Unsurprisingly, China is by far the most important country when it comes to strategic relevance, not only because of its economic superiority with regards to other Indo-Pacific states, but also because of its political influence and military capabilities. However, China shows opposite results in terms of value compatibility, especially when it comes to regime type, human rights record, and environmental performance. Vietnam, in turn, lacks sizeable military power but is nonetheless strategically relevant due to its economic and political influence in the region. Like China, Vietnam does not enjoy high levels of affinity with Europe because of its autocratic regime, the constrictions on civil liberties, and its relatively poor environmental performance. However, in practice, Europe has looked for engagement with Vietnam due to its geographic importance in the region.

**Figure 7. Indo-Pacific states with high strategic relevance for but very little international affinity with European states**



### 2.3.3. Mixed strategic relevance and mixed affinity

Countries in this group are strategically relevant to Europe but have a mixed record with regard to value compatibility (see figure 8). India is a good example. India has a considerable strategic relevance, especially in economic and security terms, but also when it comes to political influence. India is also a party to UNCLOS and a democracy, but it does not perform well in environmental protection and its human rights record is far from immaculate. Indonesia follows the same pattern of India, although its military relevance is lower and its environmental performance somewhat better. Two other prominent countries in this group are Thailand and Malaysia. The two countries are strategically relevant, although less so than India and Indonesia, but on important value aspects they diverge significantly from Europe. Thailand, for instance, has suffered considerable democratic setbacks in recent years, and Malaysia human rights record is mixed. Singapore is also a state with mixed affinity and strategic relevance for Europe. Its considerable economic openness and strong rule of law encounter European favour, but its anocratic government and mediocre human rights record influence its overall affinity to Europe. The Philippines is also part of this group.

**Figure 8. Indo-Pacific states with mixed strategic relevance for and mixed international affinity with European states**



### 2.3.4. Low strategic relevance and mixed affinity

There is a last group of countries that are not strategically relevant to Europe and whose values only partially align to European ones. Countries such as Bhutan, Brunei, Cambodia, Fiji, Laos, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, and Timor Leste do not possess economic, political, or security characteristics that make them strategically relevant to European objectives. In fact, this cluster of states include those minor powers with limited shares of global and regional trade, no known rare earth reserves, limited international influence, low diplomatic representation, and scarce naval and military capabilities. Many of these countries also present mixed affinity with Europe, with values that are only partially compatible with European ones. For example, the Solomon Islands are a fully free democracy and a party to UNCLOS, but only have medium levels of rule of law and poor environmental performance. Maldives, Fiji, and Papua New Guinea are partly free anocracies with low environmental performance that are party to UNCLOS.

Three states stand out as outliers from the aforementioned categories: New Zealand, Bangladesh, and North Korea. In fact, New Zealand has close international affinity to Europe, but mixed strategic relevance. Bangladesh yields not only low strategic relevance but also low affinity with Europe. North Korea has the same low levels of affinity with Europe but is moderately strategically relevant.

Annex B looks at the performance of Indo-Pacific countries across these different dimensions in greater detail.

## 2.4. Conclusion: acknowledge the tension between relevance and affinity

The assessment of Europe's peers and partners in the Indo-Pacific unveils an interesting yet complex environment. In fact, there are several strategically relevant countries in the region, but not all of them align with Europe when it comes to international affinity. States such as Australia, Japan, and South Korea are not only important to Europe because of economic, political, and security reasons, but also because their worldviews and values align with European ones. But there is a large category of states that are strategically relevant but have a mixed record with regards to their affinity with European values and worldviews. India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand fall into this last category.

Cooperation and engagement do not have to follow these criteria. However, when it comes to finding partners within the region, the presence of several strategically relevant Indo-Pacific states might force Europe to make some uncomfortable decisions regarding their policy priorities. European leaders might have to partner up with countries that do not see eye-to-eye with Europe in every field and this could have important strategic implications. Antagonizing these countries would be counterproductive and could end up pushing them further away from Europe, an undesirable result when these states are strategically relevant. Moreover, China has emerged as the regional superpower. European states will have to address this 'elephant in the room' when approaching the Indo-Pacific arena and find their place in a region that already witnesses superpower competition between China and the US. Europe's engagement in the Indo-Pacific will therefore require a delicate balancing act, but nonetheless one that yields many possibilities. The following chapter builds upon these findings to consider where and how Europe can make contributions to the security of the maritime commons.

There is a large category of states that are strategically relevant but have a mixed record with regards to their affinity with European values and worldviews.

# 3. Work on what?

## Identifying avenues for European engagement with the Indo-Pacific

While a naval presence is essential, more effective avenues of engagement will play to European strengths, and, by developing and strengthening issue-driven coalitions, in turn these can strengthen the existing multilateral order in the region.

Where and how can Europeans engage most effectively in the Indo-Pacific? As chapter 5 of this report shows, European states are limited in their naval capacities. But there is more to sea power than “grey-painted ships with numbers on the side”.<sup>128</sup> While a naval presence is essential, more effective avenues of engagement will play to European strengths, and, by developing and strengthening issue-driven coalitions, in turn these can strengthen the existing multilateral order in the region.<sup>129</sup> To establish these avenues of engagement, this chapter examines the needs of key states in the Indo-Pacific region that pertain to maritime security, as well as existing areas of expertise on the part of European states, and the European Union. By comparing and contrasting these two lists, the chapter identifies areas of current and potential collaboration for the two regions.

### 3.1. Needs of Indo-Pacific states

European engagement with partners in the Indo-Pacific must be a two-way process rather than one flowing from Brussels and European capitals; this chapter therefore considers a comprehensive definition of maritime security in the region.

We consider these needs and avenues for engagement across several dimensions. Geoffrey Till notes that sea has traditionally had four attributes: (i) resources that can be exploited; (ii) a medium for transportation and international trade; (iii) the means to exchange information; and (iv) a source of geopolitical power. While the latter receives most of the attention, the first three aspects represent historical values of the sea.<sup>130</sup> The chapter therefore divides the maritime

<sup>128</sup> Till, *Seapower*, 4–5. Speller also includes port infrastructure, merchant shipping or a capacity for marine insurance. Speller, *Understanding Naval Warfare*, 6.

<sup>129</sup> Garima Mohan, “A European Strategy for the Indo-Pacific,” *The Washington Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (2020): 171–85.

<sup>130</sup> Till, *Seapower*, 310–11. Within those first three, we consider the avenues where Europeans can engage with partners in the Indo-Pacific: how to manage resources such as oil and gas, or fishing; how to protect the ocean’s resources; how to protect shipping against threats such as piracy and terrorism; and how to manage the lawful use of the sea, against threats such as the drug trade, human trafficking, and other illegal acts. Till, 310–24. Similarly, Jeremy Stöhs divides sea power into four elements: (1) international commercial trade by sea; (2) using the ocean’s resources, whether oil and gas, or fisheries; (3) naval forces or economic instruments to support national instruments; and (4) actual naval operations. Stöhs, *The Decline of European Naval Forces*, 2018, 11.

security related issues of Indo-Pacific states into three, partially-overlapping categories: (1) maritime security and law enforcement; (2) environment and climate security; (3) governance, norms, and conflict prevention. We discuss these specifically in light of where needs within the region can be found among potential partners and what European states and the EU can do and are already doing in specific forums and initiatives. Such a comprehensive understanding of maritime security that goes beyond exclusively the military approach underlines the opportunities for influence potentially available for European states.

The chapter focuses on the states identified in chapter 2 that have high strategic relevance and close international affinity with Europe (Australia, Japan, and South Korea), high strategic relevance and very little affinity (China and Vietnam), and mixed strategic relevance and mixed affinity (India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand).

### 3.1.1. Methodology

Similar to our approach in chapter 2, we consider multiple criteria for each of the three dimensions to ascertain needs within the region.

**Law enforcement.** We have examined piracy, illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, narcotics use and trafficking, and human trafficking to assess where key Indo-Pacific states are likely to look to strengthen their maritime security and law enforcement. For IUU fishing, the ranking of the IUU Fishing Index has been used to determine in which states IUU fishing is more present. For narcotics use, the share of population with drug use disorders has been employed as a reference of the severity of drug use. For narcotics trafficking, kilograms of seized drugs (ketamine, crystalline methamphetamine, cocaine, heroin, ecstasy, and cannabis herb) has been used as an indicator. Lastly, the declared number of human trafficking victims was considered as proxy for human trafficking. After an analysis of the states' performance across all categories, they have been divided into four categories: states with (1) low, (2) medium, and (3) high needs for strengthening maritime security and law enforcement.<sup>131</sup>

**Environment and climate.** We have looked at climate-related hazards as an indicator of proneness to environmental risks.<sup>132</sup> Countries more prone to security risks connected to climate are more likely to welcome aid/assistance in the environmental and climate security field. The scores have been normalized to obtain a rank, from which it was possible to extract which states have (1) low, (2) medium, and (3) high need for environment and climate security assistance.

**Governance, norms, and conflict prevention.** The presence of maritime tensions and disputes has been used to assess key Indo-Pacific countries' need to reinforce governance, norms, and conflict prevention. Maritime disputes with all states in the region (not only among key Indo-Pacific states) have been considered. After mapping out the number of current disputes and among which states they are playing out, three criteria have been used to establish if key Indo-Pacific have (1) low, (2) medium, and (3) high needs when it comes to governance, norms, and conflict prevention. Because China is the regional superpower, as well as the state with the highest number of ongoing maritime disputes (10 disputes), it has been used

<sup>131</sup> While all data were gathered from reliable sources, the topics present inherent difficulties with comparability. For instance, Australia is the country with the highest share of population with drug use disorders. This might depend also from the fact that in many other states in the region drug use is still a taboo or a criminal offense. Without facilities that treat drug disorders, people in countries other than Australia might be reluctant to declare their disorders, making data collection more difficult.


<sup>132</sup> Femke Remmits, Elisabeth Dick, and Michel Rademaker, "Climate Security Assessment" (The Hague Centre For Strategic Studies, December 2020).

as a benchmark for the establishment of the three criteria. If a state with a navy capable of regional power projection (see sections 2.1 and 2.2) and also has a dispute with China, its need for support in governance, norms, and conflict prevention has been judged to be 'medium'. States that have ongoing disputes with China, but less strong navies, belong to the category 'high'. States that do not have a dispute with China are placed in the 'low' category.

### 3.1.2. Findings

Using the methodology above, we found a distinct set of patterns in terms of needs for engagement among Indo-Pacific states. These are summarized in table 6.

**Table 6. Assessment of maritime security needs of key Indo-Pacific States**



| Key Indo-Pacific States | Maritime Security and Law Enforcement | Environment and Climate Security | Governance, Norms, and Conflict Prevention |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| Australia               | Low                                   | Low                              | Medium                                     |
| India                   | Low                                   | High                             | Medium                                     |
| Indonesia               | High                                  | High                             | High                                       |
| Japan                   | Low                                   | Medium                           | Medium                                     |
| Malaysia                | Medium                                | Medium                           | High                                       |
| Philippines             | Medium                                | High                             | High                                       |
| Singapore               | Low                                   | Low                              | Low  |
| South Korea             | Low                                   | Low                              | Medium                                     |
| Taiwan                  | Medium                                | Low                              | Medium                                     |
| Thailand                | High                                  | Medium                           | Low  |
| Vietnam                 | High                                  | Medium                           | High                                       |
| China                   | High                                  | High                             | Medium                                     |

**Maritime law enforcement.** Unsurprisingly, Australia, Japan, Singapore, and South Korea have very low need to step up their maritime law enforcement. While India's scores are close to those of the aforementioned four states, its maritime security and law enforcement are somewhat weaker due to frequent piracy around its vast coastline and a considerable number of human trafficking victims. Malaysia, Philippines, and Taiwan need more support in enforcing law and maritime security, albeit for different reasons. China, Indonesia, Thailand, and Vietnam all score high on the need for enhanced maritime security and law enforcement. China due to issues related to drug trafficking and IUU; Indonesia because of significant levels of piracy acts and human as well as narcotics trafficking; Thailand and Vietnam have major weaknesses related to narcotics use and trafficking and IUU fishing.

What is the picture behind the data? The SLOCs most affected by piracy were the South China Sea and the Singapore Strait.<sup>133</sup> Though IUU fishing is a global problem, it disproportionately affects states in the region because 75 percent of the world's seafood is produced in the region.<sup>134</sup> Narcotics use and trafficking is another problem with a strong maritime component for the region. Overall, Asia ranked first in terms of drug users in 2018, at an estimated 80 million, and ranks first in projected drug use by 2030, at 86 million.<sup>135</sup> Human trafficking is widespread in the Indo-Pacific region, with 13,613 victims of human trafficking were detected in South Asia, East Asia, and the Pacific in 2018 – more than in any other region.<sup>136</sup> In sum, many of the states in the region need help with maritime law enforcement.<sup>137</sup>

**Environment and climate security.** The analysis shows that environment and climate security are areas of great concern for many Indo-Pacific states. China, India, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam suffer the most from climate hazards, with China and India being the most vulnerable states. Japan and Malaysia are less prone to climate risks than the aforementioned countries, but still struggle — the former particularly with tropical storms, while the latter with riverine flooding. Wildfires and tropical storms are of concern for both South Korea and Australia, but overall these two states fare better than the others. While almost all key Indo-Pacific countries are prone to climate related risk, Singapore and Taiwan suffer considerably less consequences than other key Indo-Pacific states, and hence their need for cooperation in the field of environment and climate security is very low.

What is the picture behind the data? Absent significant action to curb climate change, the Indo-Pacific region will face significant problems. Between 2008 and 2018, 54.5 million people were displaced by weather-related natural disasters across Southeast Asia. By 2050, between 600 million and one billion people in the Indo-Pacific will be at risk of annual lethal heatwaves. Even according to optimistic scenarios, sea levels will rise 50-70 centimeters by 2100, posing an existential threat to the 77 percent of Southeast Asians who live along the coast or in low lying river deltas.<sup>138</sup>

133 97 acts of piracy and armed robbery against ships were reported in Asia in 2020. Though this is still below the recent high of 203 incidents, in 2015, it still represents a 17 percent increase from the previous year and the third year in a row of increases. "Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships in Asia Annual Report," Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia, 2020.

134 The region loses an estimated USD 5 billion annually as a result of IUU. 'Asia-Pacific Revenues and Livelihoods Threatened as Billions Lost Annually to Illegal, Unreported, Unregulated Fishing – UN FAO', accessed 12 July 2021, <http://www.fao.org/asiapacific/news/detail-events/en/c/1196430/>.

135 In terms of amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS) seizures by region in the period 2015-2019, East and Southeast Asia ranked second overall, at 466,364kg, trailing only North America. 'World Drug Report 2021', United Nations : Office on Drugs and Crime, accessed 12 July 2021, [//www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/wdr2021.html](http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/wdr2021.html); Methamphetamines are the biggest challenge for anti-narcotics efforts in the region. Myanmar is the most important site for the production of methamphetamines, though Cambodia is emerging as an additional hotspot for production. 169 tons of methamphetamines were seized in 2020, a new record for the region. Five states, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam, accounted for 71 percent of seizures. '2021 Regional Synthetic Drugs in East and Southeast Asia', United Nations : Office on Drugs and Crime, accessed 12 July 2021, [//www.unodc.org/unodc/en/scientists/2021-regional-synthetic-drugs-in-east-and-southeast-asia.html](http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/scientists/2021-regional-synthetic-drugs-in-east-and-southeast-asia.html).

136 In South Asia, most people are trafficked within the region. In East Asia and the Pacific, most victims are either trafficked to the Middle East or to Europe. East Asia is also an important transit zone for global trafficking and for trafficking within the region. "Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020," United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

137 Eva Pejsova, 'The Indo-Pacific – A Passage to Europe?' (European Union Institute for Security Studies, 15 March 2018).

138 The region could face an annual economic loss of \$2.8 to \$4.7 trillion because of increased heat and humidity, and the estimated annual economic loss from flooding by 2050 will be \$1.2 trillion. 'Southeast Asia's Coming Climate Crisis', accessed 13 July 2021, <https://www.csis.org/blogs/new-perspectives-asia/south-east-asias-coming-climate-crisis>; "Climate risk and response in Asia," McKinsey Global Institute, November 24, 2020.

Europe is strongly committed to the upholding of maritime security and law enforcement.

**Governance, norms, and conflict resolution.** An analysis of current maritime disputes in the Indo-Pacific offers three main conclusions. First, China emerges as the state with the highest number of maritime disputes (ten), with the second highest having only five (Malaysia). Beijing has currently a tense relationship with Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Taiwan, Brunei, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and India, mainly over Chinese claims in the South China Sea and the construction of artificial islands. Second, certain dyads, specifically those between China and states with regional power projection navies, have been scored as more significant than other disputes. For example, although Australia has only one ongoing maritime dispute, it is with China. The potential is greater for a dispute with China to have major consequences for international stability than, for example, one between Singapore and Malaysia. Third, the total number of maritime disputes in the region (thirty-nine), presents Europe with opportunities for engagement in the field of governance, norms, and conflict prevention. Yet, most of the key disputes in the region involve territorial claims by China, and most of those disputes involve China's nine-dash line. In addition, all of the key disputes involve Taiwan, which makes the same claims as China under the nine-dash line. The involvement of Taiwan ensures that it includes ideological and national security concerns at the very top of China's agenda.

## 3.2. Avenues for engagement

As highlighted in section 3.1.2, key Indo-Pacific states face a variety of security challenges related to maritime security and law enforcement, environment and climate security, and governance, norms and conflict prevention. European states have several opportunities of engagement to help Indo-Pacific states meet their maritime needs.

### 3.2.1. Maritime security and law enforcement

Europe is strongly committed to the upholding of maritime security and law enforcement. Its participation in several global and regional initiatives fighting against piracy, human and narcotics trafficking and IUU fishing show European willingness to engage in these matters and promote a secure maritime environment and the safety of the maritime commons.

Almost all European states are party to UNCLOS, and the EU has considerable expertise in several of the working areas of UNCLOS, for instance when it comes to fishing disputes, including EEZ-related issues.<sup>139</sup> Furthermore, Europe works through agencies such as Interpol and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime to ensure maritime security globally. While the scope of these two organizations is wide and varied, they also contribute to the fight against human trafficking and smuggling of narcotics in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>140</sup>

Besides these global initiatives, European states engage in several other regional forums that promote maritime security and law enforcement. The ASEAN-EU Strategic Partnership offers several venues for engagement in the field of maritime security, such as the ASEAN-EU Work Plan to Combat Terrorism and transnational crime; the ASEAN Convention Against

<sup>139</sup> Esa Paasivirta, 'The European Union and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea', *Fordham International Law Journal* 38, no. 4 (1 August 2015): 1045, <https://ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/ilj/vol38/iss4/5>.

<sup>140</sup> "INTERPOL | The International Criminal Police Organization," accessed October 28, 2021, <https://www.interpol.int/>; "United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime," United Nations : Office on Drugs and Crime, accessed October 28, 2021, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/index.html>.

Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (ACTIP) and the ASEAN Plan of Action Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children; and ASEAN Work Plan on Securing Communities Against Illicit Drugs. Additionally, EUROPOL and ASEAN law enforcement agencies constantly exchange best practices and expertise in the areas of mutually agreed interests.<sup>141</sup> While regional organizations such as ASEAN seek to facilitate cooperation in the areas of maritime security and law enforcement, it is difficult to find a legal framework acceptable to all the member states and to deploy sufficient resources.<sup>142</sup> The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) fosters intergovernmental dialogue on maritime security, freedom of navigation, and anti-piracy measures and is complimented by the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), which contributes to the discussion of themes such as human trafficking and piracy.<sup>143</sup> The EU also sponsors the Maritime Security Programme (MASE), made up of a number of projects aimed at enhancing maritime security in East and Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean.<sup>144</sup> Additionally, the EU contributes to capacity building and anti-piracy initiatives in the region through Operation ATALANTA and the EU Critical Maritime Routes program for the Wider Indian Ocean (CRIMARIO). The former focuses on fighting piracy off the coasts of Somalia, and has become a stepping stone and learning experience for the EU in the region. CRIMARIO focuses on enhancing maritime domain awareness in the Western Indian Ocean.<sup>145</sup> The EU and the German Federal Foreign Office commissioned the project Enhancing Security Cooperation in and with Asia (ESIWA). The pilot partners are India, Indonesia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Singapore and Vietnam, with EU military experts already operating in Indonesia and in Vietnam.<sup>146</sup>

European states individually participate in regional forums on maritime security besides their involvement through the EU. For example, France is a party to the Indian Ocean Rim Association, to which Germany, Italy and the UK are dialogue partners.<sup>147</sup> France is also the only European member of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), that aims at enhancing maritime security and debate regional maritime issues. The Netherlands, Italy, Germany, and Spain, as well as China have observer status in IONS.<sup>148</sup> The Netherlands, Norway, Denmark, the UK, and Germany are also contracting parties to the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP), as well as China and the US.<sup>149</sup> Lastly, initiatives such as the “Netherlands Law of the Sea Training with ASEAN Countries,” contribute to European efforts to meet Indo-Pacific maritime needs regarding maritime security and law enforcement.<sup>150</sup> A number of European countries also have bilateral

141 “ASEAN-EU Plan of Action (2018-2022),” ASEAN, August 5, 2017, <https://asean.org/asean-eu-plan-of-action-2018-2022-2/>.

142 “Fighting Piracy on the ASEAN Seas,” Asia Sentinel, March 16, 2018, <https://www.asiasentinel.com/p/fighting-piracy-asean-seas>.

143 “ASEM InfoBoard,” ASEM, accessed September 27, 2021, <https://www.aseminfoboard.org/about/pillars-of-asem/political>; “Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF),” accessed October 28, 2021, <https://asef.org/all-projects/open-calls/>.

144 “The Maritime Security Programme,” INTERPOL, accessed October 28, 2021, <https://www.interpol.int/Crimes/Maritime-crime/The-Maritime-Security-Programme>.

145 “Missions | Eunavfor,” Eunavfor.eu, accessed October 28, 2021, <https://eunavfor.eu/mission/>; “EU CRIMARIO | Rationale & Objectives,” Crimario.eu, accessed October 28, 2021, <https://www.crimario.eu/en/the-project/rationale-objectives/>.

146 “Enhancing Security Cooperation in and with Asia,” GIZ, accessed October 29, 2021, <https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/87412.html>.

147 “IORA – Indian Ocean Rim Association,” Indian Ocean Rim Association, accessed October 28, 2021, <https://www.iora.int/en>.

148 “Welcome to Indian Ocean Naval Symposium,” Indian Ocean Naval Symposium, accessed October 28, 2021, <https://www.ions.global/>.

149 “Combating Piracy at Sea, Maritime Piracy, Sea Piracy,” accessed October 28, 2021, <https://www.recaap.org/>.

150 “Law of the Sea Training for ASEAN Diplomats and Officials,” Clingendael, February 20, 2021, <https://www.clingendael.org/news/law-sea-training-asean-diplomats-and-officials>.

strategic partnerships and/or dialogues with Indo-Pacific states, through which they promote cooperation on maritime security issues.

Maritime security and law enforcement is challenging for many states in the region. The vastness of the area makes it difficult to perform effective maritime surveillance and the complexity of these transnational crimes complicates the enforcement of laws, but the maritime nature of the activities means that they are frequently interconnected.<sup>151</sup> The participation of European states in numerous initiatives to promote maritime security and law enforcement in the Indo-Pacific denotes their interest in engaging in such matters in the region and highlight the venues for future cooperation with regional states. Nonetheless, opportunities for further engagement and enhancement of European contributions to maritime security and law enforcement in the Indo-Pacific remain. Partnerships with actors such as ASEAN can be deepened, and European states could move beyond their observer/dialogue partner status in regional fora.

### 3.2.2. **Environment and climate security**

The European Union, and the Netherlands, position themselves as world leaders in fighting climate change and its impact on security. The European Green Deal commits EU member countries to attain climate neutrality by 2050. It is more ambitious than a comparable plan by China; US plans for a Green Deal are unlikely to be approved by Congress.<sup>152</sup> Part of the European Green Deal involves outreach efforts to other countries to promote initiatives in areas such as low carbon and circular economies, biodiversity strategies, sustainable food production, reducing pollution, safe drinking water and sanitation, green cities and infrastructure, and sustainable investment.<sup>153</sup>

Europe is particularly active in promoting environmental sustainability, climate resilience, and preservation of maritime biodiversity at the global level. European states are party to the Paris Agreement, as well as to the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Coalition for Disaster Resilience Infrastructure, and the International Solar Alliance.<sup>154</sup> The EU is also committed to achieving the SDGs, several of which are climate-related.<sup>155</sup>

The EU only has observer status in the International Maritime Organization (IMO), a UN agency focused on the regulation of shipping matters and one which includes in its mission addressing the environmental impact of shipping. Yet, European states play an active role in the organization. European countries participate in five of the nine ongoing IMO projects and partnerships and massively contribute to its funding. For example, of the £11.44 million in voluntary contributions received by IMO in 2019, Norway was the leading donor, with £3.12

151 Dr Erika Techera and Dr Jade Lindley, "Curtailling Maritime Crime," Indo-Pacific Defense Forum, December 5, 2016, <https://ipdefenseforum.com/2016/12/curtailling-maritime-crime/>.

152 Matthew Dalton in Paris and Sha Hua in Hong Kong, 'EU, China Unveil Sweeping Plans to Cut Greenhouse-Gas Emissions', Wall Street Journal, 15 July 2021, sec. World, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/eu-to-propose-sweeping-economic-plan-to-combat-climate-change-11626251377>.

153 Anonymous, 'Green Alliances and Partnerships', Text, International Partnerships – European Commission, 3 November 2020, [https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/topics/green-deal\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/topics/green-deal_en).

154 "The Paris Agreement," United Nations Climate Change, accessed October 28, 2021, <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement>; "Convention on Biological Diversity," Convention on Biological Diversity, accessed October 28, 2021, <https://www.cbd.int/>; "Home | CDRI," Coalition for Disaster Resilience Infrastructure, accessed October 28, 2021, <https://cdri.world/>; "International Solar Alliance," International Solar Alliance, accessed October 28, 2021, <https://isolaralliance.org/>.

155 Daniel Sabev, "Sustainable Development Goals," Text, European Commission, July 2, 2019, [https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/sustainable-development-goals\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/sustainable-development-goals_en).

The participation of European states in numerous initiatives to promote maritime security and law enforcement in the Indo-Pacific denotes their interest in engaging in such matters in the region and highlight the venues for future cooperation with regional states.

The undeniable European engagement in the field of environment and climate security can be the stepping stone to promote deeper engagement with Indo-Pacific partners in this field.

million (11 percent of the total). The European Union was third, with £1.49 (13 percent). The United Kingdom was eighth (£299,500 or three percent) and Germany was tenth (£212,480 or two percent).<sup>156</sup> The same goes for the International Whaling Commission, which oversees the conservation of global whale stocks. For its 2020 overall budget of £1,656,663, European countries constituted seven of the top ten contributors. The United Kingdom ranked second, with £73,939 in contributions, followed by Italy in third place, Germany in fifth place, France in sixth, Norway in seventh, Iceland in eighth, and Denmark in ninth.<sup>157</sup>

On top of these global commitments, European states engage with their Indo-Pacific counterparts through several regional initiatives aimed at solving climate security risks in the region. The ASEAN-EU Partnership and the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) address climate-related issues and foster informal constructive dialogue between European and ASEAN leaders with respect to these matters.<sup>158</sup> In concrete terms, the EU or member states typically offer funding and expertise for the management of projects, especially for the poorest states in the region. The most important EU partnership is with ASEAN; a multi-faceted relationship has emerged, with cooperation on green growth and the environment serving as one of the pillars.<sup>159</sup> The Indian Ocean Rim Association is also an engagement venue for Europe when it comes to climate matters. This forum provides space for dialogue and the outlining of actions to be undertaken to contrast the increasing security risks related to climate change.<sup>160</sup> European states are also active outside of these fora in engaging with Indo-Pacific partners. For example, the German government partnered up with Indonesia, Malaysia, and Philippines for a project to protect coral, for which it has spent €7 billion between 2012 and 2018.<sup>161</sup> France also funded several project regarding biodiversity conservation and water management in Indo-Pacific states in the last decade.<sup>162</sup> The Netherlands prioritizes international outreach in the areas of the environment and climate security through several projects managed by the Dutch Fund for Climate and Development.<sup>163</sup>

The undeniable European engagement in the field of environment and climate security can be the stepping stone to promote deeper engagement with Indo-Pacific partners in this field. Given the distress caused in the region by climate disaster, European states have the opportunity to enhance their cooperation with local governments to meet their climate-related maritime needs. New projects can be implemented both at the EU-ASEAN and bilateral levels.

156 'IMO Financial Statements', accessed 7 September 2021, <https://www.imo.org/en/OurWork/Pages/Financial-Statements.aspx>.

157 'IWC Funding', accessed 7 September 2021, <https://iwc.int/iwcfiancing>.

158 'ASEM InfoBoard'; 'ASEAN-EU Plan of Action (2018-2022)'.

159 Ivan CHAER, 'Asia', Text, International Partnerships – European Commission, 5 September 2019, [https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/where-we-work/asia\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/where-we-work/asia_en); 'GREEN GROWTH AND THE ENVIRONMENT – EU-ASEAN', accessed 13 July 2021, <https://euinasean.eu/cooperation/green-growth-and-the-environment/>; 'Larger than tigers: Inputs for a strategic approach to biodiversity conservation in Asia -- synthesis report,' European Commission, 2018.

160 'IORA – Indian Ocean Rim Association.'

161 The project is: "Support to the Implementation of the Regional Plan of Action of the Coral Triangle Initiative on Coral Reefs, Fisheries and Food Security in the Sulu Sulawesi Seascape Countries". "List of Ongoing Biodiversity Projects Funded by the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety" (Federal Ministry of the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety, 2018), [https://www.international-climate-initiative.com/fileadmin/Dokumente/2018/180213\\_List\\_of\\_ongoing\\_projects\\_as\\_of\\_Feb\\_2018.pdf](https://www.international-climate-initiative.com/fileadmin/Dokumente/2018/180213_List_of_ongoing_projects_as_of_Feb_2018.pdf).

162 "Map," AFD – Agence Française de Développement, accessed October 28, 2021, <https://www.afd.fr/en>.

163 Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 'Climate Change – Development Cooperation – Government.NL', onderwerp (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 4 April 2014), <https://www.government.nl/topics/development-cooperation/the-development-policy-of-the-netherlands/climate-change-and-development-cooperation>.

### 3.2.3. Governance, norms, and conflict prevention

European states are engaged in a limited number of venues promoting governance in the region. Europe is a major supporter of UNCLOS and freedom of navigation principles around the world and participates to several dialogues on the topic.<sup>164</sup> Europe also supports the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf, which “facilitates the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (the Convention) in respect of the establishment of the outer limits of the continental shelf.”<sup>165</sup> Stressing the importance of multilateralism to the European outlook, France and Germany have founded the Alliance for Multilateralism, which is “an informal network of countries united in their conviction that a rules-based multilateral order is the only reliable guarantee for international stability and peace and that our common challenges can only be solved through cooperation.”<sup>166</sup> At the regional level, the EU engages with ASEAN states on themes related to maritime governance and implements the initiative Incident and Conflict Prevention in the South China Sea through the Center of Humanitarian Dialogue.<sup>167</sup>

When it comes to a specific regional focus on the Indo-Pacific rather than support for global institutions such as UNCLOS, Europe’s engagement in the field of governance, norms, and conflict prevention is limited. Given their commitment to multilateralism and rules-based interstate relations, the EU and European states have considerable experience and expertise in both the resolving disputes in multilateral fora and in the technical aspects of how these fora operate. Thus, they could play a bigger role by helping to internationalize regional disputes, as this is an objective shared by many of the Indo-Pacific states.

### 3.2.4. Engagement with or without the US and China?

Europeans have sought multilateral engagement in the region to deescalate the risks inherent to the Sino-American competition. From that perspective, multilateral engagement in the Indo-Pacific that includes both superpowers could increase the chances at successful de-escalation. Simply put, the thinking is that China’s inclusion in regional institutions could go a long way in lessening the perception in Beijing of a US-led balancing coalition against itself. That is not the outlook of the United States, which support a European role in the region but it would prefer one that strengthens the containment (by another name) of China. In turn, what Europeans might consider a *collective security* approach, could be understood as *collective defense* in Beijing. Chapter 4 delves further into that discussion, with important implications for European policies. Table 7 below summarizes the initiatives for the Indo-Pacific region in which European states engage with China, with the United States, and with both. Arguably, while inclusiveness is not possible for all issues, focusing on selective issues could still maintain some constructive engagement with China – or at least test the proposition that this engagement might dampen escalatory dynamics over other issues or in other domains.

164 Esa Paasivirta, “The European Union and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea,” *Fordham International Law Journal* 38, no. 4 (2015), <https://ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2395&context=ilj>.

165 “FUNCTIONS OF THE CLCS,” United Nations Oceans and Law of the Sea, accessed October 28, 2021, [https://www.un.org/depts/los/clcs\\_new/commission\\_purpose.htm](https://www.un.org/depts/los/clcs_new/commission_purpose.htm).

166 “The Alliance,” Alliance for Multilateralism, accessed October 28, 2021, <https://multilateralism.org/the-alliance/>.

167 “Incident and Conflict Prevention in the South China Sea,” European Commission, accessed October 28, 2021, [https://icspmap.eu/pdf/?format=single&contract\\_number=418790](https://icspmap.eu/pdf/?format=single&contract_number=418790).

Europeans have sought multilateral engagement in the region to deescalate the risks inherent to the Sino-American competition.

**Table 7. European engagement with China, with the US, and with both China and the US**

|                                   | Initiative  |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| <b>with China</b>                 | Asia-Europe Meeting   |
|                                   | Asia-Europe Foundation  |
|                                   | Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (France member, China, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Spain observers)   |
|                                   | Convention on Biological Diversity  |
| <b>with the US</b>                | Coalition for Disaster Resilience Infrastructure (US, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, UK)  |
| <b>with both China and the US</b> | UNCLOS (Europe and China parties, US signatory)   |
|                                   | UNODC   |
|                                   | Interpol  |
|                                   | Indian Ocean Rim Association (France member, China, US, Germany, Italy, UK dialogue partners)   |
|                                   | Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (China, US, Norway, Denmark, Netherlands, Germany, UK) |
|                                   | Paris Agreement   |
|                                   | International Maritime Organization   |
|                                   | International Whaling Commission  |

### 3.3. Conclusion: match needs with avenues for engagement

Indo-Pacific states face numerous security challenges and European states have experience, and in some cases considerable expertise, in addressing some of these challenges. There is already considerable cooperation in the area of environment and climate security. In addition, there is scope for additional EU or European support for Indo-Pacific states in the areas of maritime security and law enforcement, as well as governance, norms, and conflict prevention.

For the states that are both highly relevant and with high affinity, which are Japan, South Korea, and Australia, the real need is located at the ensuring good governance, norms, and conflict prevention. Unfortunately, this precisely means that addressing the conflict between China and its neighbors is at the core of their concerns. UNCLOS should be the key focus of intention, also because it includes China, as well as the US. Motivating the US to look again for ratification could have real benefits here. For the states that are of high relevance and with mixed to low affinity, which are China and Vietnam, in contrast, maritime security and law enforcement, as well as engagement on the environment, and climate security are real needs. Engagement on those issues through ASEAN-EU, ASEM, ESIWA, and IMO might yield results that would signal that the European approach is inclusive, which would

be specifically beneficial in the case of China. Of course, whether China would welcome real progress on these issues is unclear, but also not in European hands. For the states that are of mixed relevance and mixed affinity, which is a more diverse group, the needs are also more diverse. States like Indonesia and Thailand have a high need for maritime security and law enforcement, and the Malaysia and the Philippines have serious needs as well. These strengthen the motive to engage through ASEAN-EU, ASEM, and ESIWA. In terms of environment and climate security, the needs are most obvious with Indonesia, India, and the Philippines, but also Thailand to an extent. Again, this calls for devoting resources to IMO (which also includes China), ASEAN, ASEM, and the Indian Ocean Rim Association. When it comes to conflict prevention, all the states in Southeast Asia have a broad need, underlining why UNCLOS is so crucial.

## 4. What could go wrong?

Europeans have avenues with which to engage in the Indo-Pacific and collaborate with regional states on comprehensive maritime security. Yet, wading into the turmoil of great power politics is rarely without costs and risks, whatever the intentions of the actors involved are.

What are the constraints within which European states operate in the Indo-Pacific, and how could events in the region escalate beyond the control of Europeans despite their best efforts to maintain openness and stability there? As noted (section 1.2.1), Europeans – and the EU – are self-consciously trying to be inclusive in their attempt to multilateralize the issues that dominate maritime security in the Indo-Pacific. But there is an inherent tension between the strategy and the dynamics in the region, particularly the pressures from regional states towards European states to contribute to the deterrence of China, and specifically from the US.

This chapter frames the constraints and potential for escalation for Europeans in three ways. First, it conceptualizes the choice for how to engage with the Indo-Pacific as one between following a broadly inclusive collective security approach, or following an exclusive collective defense approach that seeks to contain China. Second, it underlines how European and Indo-Pacific officials have tried to signal their preferences, but also how these seem to have been interpreted by Chinese officials. Third, the chapter offers a concrete scenario – a blockade – for how current policies could easily play out.

### 4.1. Collective security or collective defense

The Sino-American competition within the Indo-Pacific is driven by China's increasingly assertive foreign policy, enabled by its rapid economic and military growth. These are undermining US hegemony in the region, leading the US to push back. Regional states have long avoided choosing sides, dependent as they were and are on trade with China but simultaneously on the United States for protection against China. As the competition intensifies, those choices become unavoidable for regional states.

Europe faces similar choices to states in the Indo-Pacific region. Major states with a stake in the region, among which the US, Japan, Australia, and India, have called for greater European engagement in the region to counter Chinese ambitions. Indeed, such efforts would strengthen the efforts of those four states – referred to as the Quad – in containing China's military growth. Yet, while it is in Europe's economic and political interests to keep the Indo-Pacific free and open, it has its own dependencies on China, and limited naval capacity (see chapter 5).

The choice for Europeans, should they decide to play a greater role in the Indo-Pacific, is essentially between doing so through a *collective security* system or through a *collective defense* system. The objective of collective security (or cooperative security) is “to

Major states with a stake in the region, among which the US, Japan, Australia, and India, have called for greater European engagement in the region to counter Chinese ambitions.

provide security for all states, by the action of all states, *against* all states which might challenge the existing order by the arbitrary unleashing of their power”.<sup>168</sup> It involves the promotion of stability through diplomatic, economic and, if necessary, military means in a region through inter-state actions.<sup>169</sup> In contrast to cooperative security, collective defense refers instead to an alliance “where states agree to collaborate to ward off a threat from an identified enemy.”<sup>170</sup> Participants in a collective security system do not come together to face a specific enemy, but rather to deter *any* possible aggressions from *any* potential enemy.<sup>171</sup> The UN is an example of a collective security system.<sup>172</sup> In a collective defense system, states join forces to counter a specific threat. NATO as it existed during the Cold War is an example of a collective defense system, created specifically to counter the Soviet threat. Put differently, collective security is inclusive and inward-looking, while collective defense is exclusive and outward-oriented.<sup>173</sup>

In concrete terms, the choice for Europeans is thus whether China should explicitly be included in any arrangements they involve themselves in or not. The existing European strategies for the Indo-Pacific seem to suggest a preference for an approach to Indo-Pacific affairs that is open and includes China. Despite noting Chinese military assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific and the importance of limiting it,<sup>174</sup> the French policy document underlines the importance of cooperating with China on issues such as environmental security and pandemic management.<sup>175</sup> Similarly, the UK recognizes the “systemic challenge”<sup>176</sup> of Chinese assertiveness and aims to invest in “China-facing capabilities,”<sup>177</sup> while still seeking to “pursue a positive trade and investment relationship with China”<sup>178</sup> and “remain open to Chinese trade and investment.”<sup>179</sup> The German strategy also acknowledges the tensions raised due to the Sino-American competition and the destabilizing element of China’s assertiveness, but stresses the essential need of working with China on several issues such as trade,

168 Inis L. Claude, *Power and International Relations* (New York: Random House, 1962), 110.

169 Monika Chansoria, “Regional Cooperative Security in the Indo-Pacific: Synergizing Consultative Mechanisms across the Indian Ocean, East China Sea, South China Sea, and the Western Pacific,” *Japan Review* 1, no. 2 (2017), 14.

170 Capie and Evans, *The Asia-Pacific Security Lexicon*, 48.

171 David Capie and Paul Evans, *The Asia-Pacific Security Lexicon*, 2nd ed. (ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute, 2007), 54, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/asiapacific-security-lexicon-updated-2nd-edition/4C6299DB-5358DDBC60795C7B6A113633>; Charles A. Kupchan and Clifford A. Kupchan, “Concerts, Collective Security, and the Future of Europe,” *International Security* 16, no. 1 (1991): 118–119, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2539053>.

172 Ramesh Thakur, *The United Nations, Peace and Security: From Collective Security to the Responsibility to Protect* (Cambridge University Press, 2016).

173 Nicholas Tsagourias and Nigel D. White give an overview of historical instances of collective security and use the United Nations as a case study to illustrate the features of collective security: Nicholas Tsagourias and Nigel D. White, *Collective Security: Theory, Law and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139058506>; Alexander Orakhelashvili defines and explores the validity and feasibility of collective security. Alexander Orakhelashvili, “Essence and Definition of Collective Security,” in *Collective Security* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199579846.003.0002>; Yoram Dinstein explores the meaning of collective security and compares it with that of collective defense, highlighting the introverted character of collective security as opposed to the extroverted one of collective defense. Yoram Dinstein, *War, Aggression and Self-Defence*, 4th ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511841019>.

174 “France and Security in the Indo Pacific” (Paris: Ministère des Armées, May 2019), 4; “French Strategy In The Indo-Pacific ‘For An Inclusive Indo-Pacific’” (Paris: Ministère de l’Europe et des Affaires étrangères, June 2019), 27; “France’s Defence Strategy in the Indo-Pacific” (Paris: Ministère des Armées, 2019), 8.

175 “French Strategy In The Indo-Pacific ‘For An Inclusive Indo-Pacific.’”

176 “Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy” (HM Government, March 2021), 22, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/969402/The\\_Integrated\\_Review\\_of\\_Security\\_Defence\\_Development\\_and\\_Foreign\\_Policy.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/969402/The_Integrated_Review_of_Security_Defence_Development_and_Foreign_Policy.pdf).

177 “Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy” (HM Government, March 2021), 22, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/969402/The\\_Integrated\\_Review\\_of\\_Security\\_Defence\\_Development\\_and\\_Foreign\\_Policy.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/969402/The_Integrated_Review_of_Security_Defence_Development_and_Foreign_Policy.pdf).

178 “Global Britain in a Competitive Age,” 22.

179 “Global Britain in a Competitive Age,” 26.

environmental protection, and biodiversity.<sup>180</sup> The Netherlands' strategy is less explicit but recognizes the ongoing tensions in the region. While declaring the importance of consulting with other "like-minded countries in the region on developments in the South China Sea"<sup>181</sup> it does not close the door to cooperation with China either. The European Union's Indo-Pacific strategy is even more open and does not directly address superpower competition nor China's assertiveness.<sup>182</sup> While it speaks about the importance of maintaining maritime security, the EU declares its intention to generally furthering partnerships with Indo-Pacific states – and this includes China.<sup>183</sup> In short, the preference among European states, for now, is for an inclusive strategy that most closely matches a collective security approach.

To realize successful cooperative security, multidimensional development-linked cooperation should be at the center of issue-based partnerships and the Quad should lead the dialogue to favor the definition of common areas of interests and interventions among Indo-Pacific states.<sup>184</sup> Yet, the line dividing collective security and collective defense is thin. For example, Monika Chansoria argues that regional states view the rise of China as a source of instability. Enhanced security cooperation among the other Indo-Pacific states, and especially among India, Japan, and Australia, would help.<sup>185</sup> Confidence-building and deterrence-enhancing regional exercises as well as military and political dialogue could foster a common sense of "security based on global commons and rules."<sup>186</sup> However, what is presented as collective security is not likely to be perceived as such by China, or, indeed, other states. Enhanced security cooperation among Indo-Pacific states could also have the undesirable effect of exacerbating Sino-American tensions. Rajan Menon argues that the cooperation among Australia, India, Japan and the US is indeed likely to exacerbate the situation by further antagonizing China.<sup>187</sup> The problems highlighted by Menon might reside in the fact that the Quad actually resembles a collective defense system aimed at containing China, rather than a collective security one.

**Table 8. Collective defense and collective security systems**



|                   | Collective defense                     | Collective security                   |
|-------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| <b>Goal</b>       | Protecting against an identified enemy | Achieving peace and security globally |
| <b>Membership</b> | Partial and localized                  | Global and inclusive                  |

<sup>180</sup> "Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific" (Berlin: The Federal Government of Germany, August 2020), 2-8.

<sup>181</sup> "Indo-Pacific: Guidelines for Strengthening Dutch and EU Cooperation with Partners in Asia" (Government of the Netherlands, November 2020), 10.

<sup>182</sup> Ross Cullen, "China's a Partner and Rival to EU, Says France's Foreign Minister amid U.S. Talks," CGTN, June 26, 2021, <https://newseu.cgtn.com/news/2021-06-26/China-s-a-partner-and-rival-to-EU-says-France-s-foreign-minister-11o844TldDa/index.html>.

<sup>183</sup> "Council Conclusions on an EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific," April 16, 2021.

<sup>184</sup> Girish Luthra, "Quad, India, and the Development-Linked Cooperative Security in the Indo-Pacific," ORF, March 16, 2016, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/quad-india-development-linked-cooperative-security-indo-pacific/>.

<sup>185</sup> According to Chansoria, "the trilateral must work together to build the political, economic and military capacity of regional states to retain and exercise their autonomy, defend their interests and identify common regional security challenges that straddle a geographic space extending from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean, and incorporate risks in South, Southeast and Northeast Asia." Chansoria, "Regional Cooperative Security in the Indo-Pacific: Synergizing Consultative Mechanisms across the Indian Ocean, East China Sea, South China Sea, and the Western Pacific," 25.

<sup>186</sup> Chansoria, 25.

<sup>187</sup> Rajan Menon, "The Quad Is a Delusion," Foreign Policy (blog), June 28, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/06/28/quad-delusion-china-power-containment/>.

To illustrate the difficulty of signaling the difference between an exclusive collective defense approach and an inclusive collective security approach, we need look no further than NATO.<sup>188</sup> In the post-Cold War era, NATO arguably moved from being primarily a collective defense system organized to fend off the Soviet threat towards more of a collective security system. Of course, NATO always had that function in part: besides keeping the Soviet out, it was intended to ensure the US could prevent the reemergence of conflict between the Europeans, specifically Germany and its neighbors. Likewise, preventing the reemergence of conflict in Central and Eastern Europe in the post-Cold War environment arguably became the key motive for NATO enlargement.<sup>189</sup> During the enlargement period, NATO wanted to avoid collective defense rhetoric in order not to antagonize Russia.<sup>190</sup> Despite this intent, Russian elites largely perceived enlargement as a US attempt to further diminish its influence. Post-Cold War NATO hence never achieved the status of a collective security system, but rather positioned itself in-between collective security and collective defense.<sup>191</sup> Some scholars argue that NATO missed out on the opportunity to create a proper collective security system in the post-Cold War period when it decided to exclude Russia from its alliance.<sup>192</sup> However, it is hard to see how to thread the needle of NATO enlargement to include Russia when the new Central and Eastern European member states had sought to join NATO precisely as a security guarantee against a possible Russian resurgence.<sup>193</sup> NATO only partially succeeded in signaling inclusiveness to Russia during enlargement, as it blurred the lines between its collective defense system past and its collective security aspirations.<sup>194</sup> It underlines the difficulty of signaled intentions being understood as intended.

## 4.2. Threading the needle in the Indo-Pacific

Europeans have tried to thread the needle in the Indo-Pacific as well, providing sufficient reassurance to states in the region, partly acting in support of US objectives, partly attempting to prevent the appearance of ganging up on China. To some extent, key regional states have followed suit to avoid increasing the antagonisms between China and the rest of the region. Still, regional states hardly want to see China included, though they desire European engagement. Nor does China perceive the efforts to be inclusive. The 2021 AUKUS deal in which the US pledged to supply Australia with nuclear-powered submarines underlines how difficult it is to thread that needle: Australia preferred deeper entanglement with the US over one with France regardless of the appearance in Beijing or Paris; in turn, the US preferred solidifying the balancing effort against China over relations with China (or with France). The AUKUS affair is a harbinger for European effort in the region to come.<sup>195</sup> The 2022 Indo-Pacific strategy of

188 Stéfanie von Hlatky and Michel Fortmann, "NATO Enlargement and the Failure of the Cooperative Security Mindset," *International Politics* 57, no. 3 (June 2020): 554–72, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-020-00240-w>; D. Yost, "The New NATO and Collective Security," *Survival* 40, no. 2 (January 1998): 135–60, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.1998.10107847>; Richard Rupp, "NATO 1949 and NATO 2000: From Collective Defense toward Collective Security," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 23, no. 3 (September 2000): 154–76, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390008437804>.

189 Van Hooft, "Land Rush."

190 Yost, "The New NATO and Collective Security."

191 Rupp, "NATO 1949 and NATO 2000."

192 Tom Sauer, "The Origins of the Ukraine Crisis and the Need for Collective Security between Russia and the West," *Global Policy* 8, no. 1 (February 2017): 82–91, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.12374>.

193 von Hlatky and Fortmann, "NATO Enlargement and the Failure of the Cooperative Security Mindset."

194 von Hlatky and Fortmann; Yost, "The New NATO and Collective Security."

195 Girardi and Van Hooft, "Did AUKUS Torpedo Transatlantic Cooperation In The Indo-Pacific?"

the Biden administration unequivocally states that China's "coercion and aggression spans the globe, but it is most acute in the Indo-Pacific". Moreover, the "collective efforts over the next decade [of the US and its allies] will determine whether the PRC succeeds in transforming the rules and norms that have benefitted the Indo-Pacific and the world".<sup>196</sup> It is a different tone than that which Europeans have taken until now towards China.

## Europe towards China

Europeans have attempted to signal an inclusive approach. In his statement following the 11<sup>th</sup> EU-China Strategic dialogue in September 2021, the EU's High Representative Josep Borrell noted that "the EU and China needed to continue engaging intensively in a number of important areas" but also the EU's plans to expand the cooperation with "like-minded and important economic partner" Taiwan.<sup>197</sup> Earlier in 2021, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen defined the EU relationship with China as "ambiguous," stating that Beijing is a "systemic rival" when it comes to human rights, a "negotiating partner" on climate issues, and an "economic competitor".<sup>198</sup> President of the European Council Charles Michel remarked in September 2020 that "real differences exist ... But we are ready to engage."<sup>199</sup>

Individual European states have similar problems. Early in 2021, French President Emmanuel Macron made clear his aversion to openly balance China, when he noted that: "A situation to join all together against China, this is a scenario of the highest possible conflictuality. This one, for me, is counterproductive."<sup>200</sup> Still, during a 2018 visit to New Caledonia, Macron underlined the importance of maintaining an Indo-Pacific axis to avoid the region falling into a hegemonic system.<sup>201</sup> The French finance minister Bruno Le Maire affirmed in October 2021 that "The United States wants to confront China. The European Union wants to engage China."<sup>202</sup> Indeed, France's foreign minister Jean-Yves Le Drian defined China as a partner for issues such as climate and biodiversity and rival in the economic and technological domain,<sup>203</sup> but later condemned Chinese human rights violation with regards to the Uighur population as

196 White House, "The Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States," 5.

197 "China: High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell Holds the 11th EU-China Strategic Dialogue with State Councillor/Foreign Minister Wang Yi," Text, EEAS – European External Action Service – European Commission, September 28, 2021, [https://eeas.europa.eu/regions/africa/104789/china-high-representative-vice-president-josep-borrell-holds-11th-eu-china-strategic-dialogue\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/regions/africa/104789/china-high-representative-vice-president-josep-borrell-holds-11th-eu-china-strategic-dialogue_en).

198 "EU President von Der Leyen Says 'China Is a Systemic Rival'" (Bloomberg, January 20, 2021), <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/videos/2021-01-20/commission-president-on-eu-u-s-relations-with-china-post-investment-agreement-video>.

199 Michel: "Ready to cooperate where we can, and ready to roll up our sleeves to find concrete solutions. And on those difficult issues, we conveyed a clear and united European message: we want a relationship with China that is based on reciprocity, responsibility, and basic fairness." "Remarks by President Charles Michel after the EU-China Leaders' Meeting via Video Conference," European Council, September 14, 2020, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/09/14/remarks-by-president-charles-michel-after-the-eu-china-leaders-meeting-via-video-conference/>.

200 Rym Momtaz, "Macron: EU Shouldn't Gang up on China with US," POLITICO, February 4, 2021, <https://www.politico.eu/article/macron-eu-shouldnt-gang-up-on-china-with-u-s/>. In March 2019, Macron, together with Merkel and Juncker, invited China to open up its markets and spoke about welcoming economic cooperation with China and European unity: "We have differences. Obviously the exercise of power in human history doesn't happen without rivalry. None of us is naive," he said. "But we respect China. We are set on dialogue and co-operation and we naturally expect our main partners also to respect the unity of the EU and the values it espouses for itself and the world." Victor Mallet, "EU Leaders Urge China to Open up Domestic Market," Financial Times, March 26, 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/77314554-4fbf-11e9-9c76-bf4a0ce37d49>.

201 "Macron Wraps up New Caledonia Visit Ahead of Independence Referendum," RFI, May 5, 2018, <https://www.rfi.fr/en/20180505-macron-new-caledonia>.

202 Liz Alderman and Roger Cohen, "Clear Differences Remain Between France and U.S., French Minister Says," The New York Times, October 11, 2021, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/11/world/europe/france-us-differences-bruno-le-maire.html>.

203 Cullen, "China's a Partner and Rival to EU, Says France's Foreign Minister amid U.S. Talks."

“unacceptable.”<sup>204</sup> Regarding regional security, defense minister Florence Parly referred to Chinese claims in the South China Sea and stated that “Disputes should be resolved by legal means and negotiation, not by fait accompli, and freedom of navigation must be upheld,” yet she also added that “France is not a part of territorial disputes (in the South China Sea) and will never be.”<sup>205</sup>

The UK, the other most active European state in the Indo-Pacific, had similar difficulties. British PM Boris Johnson declared in October 2021 that he’s “no Sino-phobe, very far from it. China is a great country, a great civilization,” adding that “China is a gigantic part of our economic life.”<sup>206</sup> Earlier in 2021, Johnson had told the parliament that “those who call for a new Cold War on China ... are, I think, mistaken.”<sup>207</sup> In the wake of the AUKUS agreement in September 2021, British secretary of State Ben Wallace argued that “China is obviously engaged in a number of disputes around freedom of navigation.”<sup>208</sup> Previously, in July 2021, Wallace declared that “China will not scare us from international waters.”<sup>209</sup> Chief of Defense Staff General Sir Nick Carter stated in March 2021 that while China is a “chronic threat” it “doesn’t have to be an enemy, it doesn’t have to be a threat.” He also stated that “there will be areas where our government will want to call out their ideology, particularly on human rights. But there are also going to be areas where we are going to co-operate.”

The third of the three major European powers pursued a similar balancing act. In 2021, German Chancellor Angela Merkel stated that it is “absolutely clear” that the EU and US share “no identity” on China,<sup>210</sup> yet, while speaking to the World Economic Forum, she said that she “would very much wish to avoid the building of blocks” in a Cold War style when it comes to Sino-American relations.<sup>211</sup> These were in a sense extension of Merkel’s earlier warning that Europe should not come “under pressure between America and China,” and that “complete isolation from China cannot be the answer.”<sup>212</sup>

204 “France Says China’s Treatment of Uighurs ‘unacceptable’ and ‘a Violation of Human Rights,’” Hong Kong Free Press HKFP, July 22, 2020, <https://hongkongfp.com/2020/07/22/france-says-chinas-treatment-of-uighurs-unacceptable-and-a-violation-of-human-rights/>.

205 Charissa Yong, “France Urges Countries to Respect International Law in South China Sea,” The Straits Times, June 3, 2018, <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/france-urges-countries-to-respect-international-law-in-south-china-sea>.

206 Gavin Cordon, “Britain Musn’t ‘Pitchfork Away’ Investment from China Says Johnson,” The Independent, October 19, 2021, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/china-boris-johnson-pitchfork-b1940811.html>.

207 Stuart Lau, Cristina Gallardo, and Annabelle Dickson, “Boris Johnson Faces Both Ways on China,” POLITICO, March 16, 2021, <https://www.politico.eu/article/boris-johnsons-faces-both-ways-on-china/>. Boris Johnson affirmed in June 2020: “I’m a Sinophile and believe we should continue to work with this great and rising power.” Patrick Wintour and Patrick Wintour Diplomatic editor, “Boris Johnson Declares He Is ‘fervently Sinophile’ as UK Woos China,” The Guardian, February 21, 2021, sec. Politics, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/feb/21/boris-johnsons-warm-words-on-china-likely-to-enrage-backbenchers>.

208 Gavin Cordon, “Wallace Denies Britain Seeking New ‘Cold War’ with China,” September 16, 2021, <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/ben-wallace-china-britain-australia-scott-morrison-b955655.html>.

209 Richard Lloyd Parry, “China Will Not Scare Us out of International Waters, Says Defence Secretary Ben Wallace,” July 20, 2021, sec. news, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/china-will-not-scare-us-out-of-international-waters-says-defence-secretary-ben-wallace-q3fqdxfb5>.

210 “EU and US Similar, but Split on China, Merkel Says,” DW.COM, March 26, 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/eu-and-us-similar-but-split-on-china-merkel-says/a-57009094>.

211 Jun Mai, “Angela Merkel Backs Xi Jinping on Need to Avoid New Cold War,” South China Morning Post, January 27, 2021, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3119481/merkel-backs-xi-need-avoid-new-cold-war-presses-china-human>.

212 Dave Lawler, “Angela Merkel Warns against Demonizing China for Its Success,” Axios, January 16, 2020, <https://www.axios.com/angela-merkel-warns-demonizing-china-success-2fb61a28-8bc2-4a69-9f9d-d0a0e4a61194.html>.

## The region towards China

European engagement in the region is welcomed by Indo-Pacific regional states as an escape out of the Sino-American antagonism and thread the needle between their dependency on both the US and China. H.E. Jaishankar, Minister of External Affairs of India, stated in early 2021 that India “would like to see a strategic EU with its own strategy in the region,”<sup>213</sup> and that “the EU is one of India’s very important partners.”<sup>214</sup> Already in 2017, Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono suggested a “collaborative role” for Europe in the Indo-Pacific, while the ambassador of Japan to Australia Yamagami Shingo in 2021 asserted that Japan, as part of the Quad, “heartily welcomes” the EU’s support to a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>215</sup> Moon Chung-in, special Advisor to President Moon Jae-in for Foreign Affairs and National Security, declared in late 2021: “If there is a new Cold War between the United States and China, it will have catastrophic outcomes. Instead of taking sides, it is very important for the EU to play the role of preventing any major confrontation between the two big powers.”<sup>216</sup> Despite the crash in French-Australian relations over the AUKUS deal, Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne said in September 2021: “Australia values its relationship with France, which is an important partner and a vital contributor to stability, particularly in the Indo-Pacific. This will not change.”<sup>217</sup>

Indeed, the same preference for a strategy that does not exclude China seems apparent in the earlier policy papers of the major Indo-Pacific states (Australia, India, and Japan); however, unlike the European documents, they stress the importance of the United States as well. Australia depicts China as a destabilizing element in the Indo-Pacific, and “supports the deep engagement of the United States in the economic and security affairs of the region.”<sup>218</sup> Nonetheless, Australia hopes to bring “China and the United States together in a region-wide free trade agreement.”<sup>219</sup> The 2020 Defence Strategic Update in turn promises to deepen its alliance to the US.<sup>220</sup> Japan identifies China as a source of instability for its national security because of its attempts to “change the status quo by coercion”<sup>221</sup> and openly defines Chinese activities around the Senkaku Islands as a “grave matter of concern.”<sup>222</sup> It underlines the importance of its American partner, and while Japan seems to be colder towards China than Australia, it still leaves some room for dialogue.<sup>223</sup> The Indian Ministry of Defence is more cautious in defining China as a destabilizing element in the Indo-Pacific and it declares its

213 Stefania Benaglia, “How Can the EU Navigate the Indo-Pacific?,” CEPS (blog), January 28, 2021, <https://www.ceps.eu/how-can-the-eu-navigate-the-indo-pacific/>.

214 “Indo-Pacific a Focus for U.S. and Europe on G-20 Sidelines,” Nikkei Asia, accessed November 2, 2021, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/G-20-summit-2/Indo-Pacific-a-focus-for-U.S.-and-Europe-on-G-20-sidelines>.

215 “Japan to Propose Dialogue with US, India and Australia”; Shingo Yamagami, Stability and security in the Indo-Pacific: the future of the Quad, March 2021, <https://www.frstrategie.org/sites/default/files/documents/programmes/Programme-japon/Publications/2020-2021/202010-prog-japon.pdf>.

216 “I’ve been emphasizing that we have a lot to learn from Europe, European experience. Europe has been very, very successful in promoting multilateral security cooperation efforts. Countries in our part of the world want to learn from Europe, on how to build security, how to build peace and how to strengthen confidence building measures.” Catherine Feore, “Moon Says Korean Peninsula Can Learn from Europe on How to Build Security and Peace,” October 14, 2021, <https://www.eureporter.co/world/south-korea/2021/10/14/moon-says-korean-peninsula-can-learn-from-europe-on-how-to-build-security-and-peace/>.

217 “France to Send Ambassador Back to Australia amid Aukus Row,” BBC News, October 7, 2021, sec. Australia, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-australia-58824604>.

218 “2017 Foreign Policy White Paper” (Australian Government, 2017), 38.

219 “2017 Foreign Policy White Paper,” 39.

220 “2020 Defence Strategic Update” (Australian Government – Department of Defence, 2020).

221 “Defense of Japan 2020” (Ministry of Defense, 2020), 17.

222 “Defense of Japan 2020,” 17.

223 “Defense of Japan 2020.”

intention to keep a free and open Indo-Pacific that “includes all nations within this region.”<sup>224</sup> The Ministry of External Affairs highlights a series of Chinese provocative military maneuvers and underlines India’s close relationship with the US, but still proposes the idea of an inclusive Indo-Pacific.<sup>225</sup> In short, the Indo-Pacific states are thus caught between their security dependency on the US and their trade dependency on China.<sup>226</sup> Arguably, this would seem to leave room in both Europe and the Indo-Pacific to jointly create a collective security system. Yet, China has a say in the matter.

## China towards Europe and the region

China has not welcomed European involvement in the Indo-Pacific. The new-found maritime presence of Europeans in the region may reassure regional states; it has left Beijing decidedly antagonistic. In July 2021, after the deployment of a carrier strike group led by UK HMS Queen Elizabeth in the South China Sea as part of a freedom of navigation operations, Beijing accused the UK of “still living in its colonial days.”<sup>227</sup> Despite its careful positioning, the German ship was denied port access in Shanghai in September 2021. Chinese representatives condemned other countries’ endeavors in the region for “provoking incidents” and “creating contradictions.” Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian added that “countries outside the region should respect regional countries’ efforts to maintain peace and stability, and play a constructive role.”<sup>228</sup> Even less surprisingly, China dubbed the AUKUS agreement as “extremely irresponsible”, with Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian saying that the pact “seriously undermines regional peace and stability and intensifies the arms race.” The Chinese embassy in the US also criticized this new venue for fomenting “Cold War mentality and ideological prejudice.”<sup>229</sup> Finally, the Taiwan issue has further deepened the Sino-European rift. In September 2021, Foreign Minister Wang Yi addressed the Taiwan issue, stating that this is “political foundations on which China developed relations with the EU and its member states” and warning Europe that “a weak foundation makes for shaky relations.”<sup>230</sup> After Lithuania allowed for the installation of a ‘Taiwanese’ office in Vilnius, the UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss expressed solidarity to the Baltic country (October 2021), which was harshly criticized by Beijing.<sup>231</sup> In July 2021, Beijing Taiwan affairs office warned Lithuania not to “send the wrong signals to Taiwan independence forces” after Vilnius

224 “Annual Report 2018-2019” (Ministry of Defence – Government of India, 2019), 5.

225 “Annual Report 2020-2021” (Ministry of External Affairs, 2021).

226 Mohammad Tehseen, “Sino-US Competition: Implications for South Asia and the Asia-Pacific,” *Strategic Studies* 37, no. 4 (2017): 1-17; Bonny Lin et al., “Regional Responses to US-China Competition in the Indo-Pacific” (RAND, 2020), <https://www.rand.org/paf/projects/us-china-competition.html>.

227 A spokesman for the Chinese embassy in London argued that “The threat to freedom of navigation could only come from the one who deploys a carrier strike group to the South China Sea half a world away and flexes its naval muscles to heighten the military tension in that region.” Frank Gardner, “China Warns UK as Carrier Strike Group Approaches,” *BBC News*, July 29, 2021, sec. Asia, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-58015367>.

228 Liu Zhen, “Beijing Slams South China Sea ‘Provocation’ after Turning Away German Warship,” *South China Morning Post*, September 17, 2021, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3149046/beijing-slams-south-china-sea-provocation-after-turning-away>.

229 “Aukus: UK, US and Australia Launch Pact to Counter China,” *BBC News*, September 16, 2021, sec. World, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-58564837>.

230 John Feng, “In EU-China Talks, Beijing Warns of ‘Shaky Relations’ over Taiwan,” *Newsweek*, September 29, 2021, <https://www.newsweek.com/eu-china-talks-beijing-warns-shaky-relations-taiwan-1633771>.

231 The Chinese embassy in London stated that “China urges the U.K. to have a right understanding of the relevant issue, handle it properly, and refrain from creating new obstacles for the development of the China-UK relationship.” Stuart Lau, “China Warns UK’s Truss Not to Imperil Ties over Taiwan Spat,” *POLITICO*, October 14, 2021, <https://www.politico.eu/article/china-fires-first-shot-at-truss-over-lithuania-taiwan/>.

China has not welcomed European involvement in the Indo-Pacific.

accepted to host Taiwan's de facto embassy in Lithuania.<sup>232</sup> Both the countries proceeded to recall their ambassadors, and China temporarily suspended its trade to Lithuania.<sup>233</sup>

This section started with the question whether there is a way for Europe to have a role in the Indo-Pacific without contributing to the deteriorating dynamics, without balancing against China, but instead upholding and strengthening the region's multilateral order. Creating a collective defense alliance against China might have a further destabilizing effect and exacerbate current tensions. A collective security system with regional states that engages with Europe could instead be the way forward for Europe. But larger questions would remain to be answered. Has the opportunity for such an attempt already passed? Is China already acting as if it is being ganged up upon? Did Beijing ever expect this not to happen or to truly care? In short, the ship may have already sailed for such a balanced approach.

### 4.3. How could it go wrong?

The exact path in which Europe becomes involved in an escalation to open conflict with China is difficult to imagine for most of the European public or European officials. However, requests for assistance by the Quad or the US directly during a crisis could quickly create such a path. That request for assistance could take the form of a blockade. In the case of the Sino-American rivalry, a distant blockade represents an option to “exert leverage against one another to end a limited conventional war below the nuclear threshold.”<sup>234</sup> The United States might decide to use this strategy to leverage against China, as a more convenient option than a deep strike on Chinese mainland or a fleet-on-fleet engagement.<sup>235</sup> A close blockade in Chinese ports would be less effective because it would expose American warfighting capabilities to greater risks and pose a greater threat of nuclear escalation.<sup>236</sup> If the key to holding leverage against China is to “strangle” Beijing's economy by blocking its maritime commercial exchanges, the target would be mainly oil and natural gas imports.<sup>237</sup> To be successful, the US would need to maintain a distant blockade of the straits of Hormuz, Malacca, Sunda, and Lombok and several alternative routes (especially in the Solomon Sea) for at least six months – the estimated period after which China would run out of oil reserves but would have not been able to build alternative overland pipelines.<sup>238</sup>

232 Huo Yuzhen, special representative of China's Foreign Ministry to the 17+1 program, affirmed that “such actions by a very few countries were clearly encouraged by the US and some other Western countries.” “China Warns Lithuania after Vilnius Agrees to Host Taiwan's de Facto Embassy,” LRT.lt, July 22, 2021, <https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1455244/china-warns-lithuania-after-vilnius-agrees-to-host-taiwan-s-de-facto-embassy>.

233 Helen Davidson, “China's Trade Halt with Lithuania over Taiwan Ties Sends Warning to Europe,” *The Guardian*, August 26, 2021, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/aug/26/chinas-trade-halt-with-lithuania-over-taiwan-ties-sends-warning-to-europe>.

234 Fiona S. Cunningham, “The Maritime Rung on the Escalation Ladder: Naval Blockades in a US-China Conflict,” *Security Studies* 29, no. 4 (August 7, 2020): 731, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2020.1811462>.

235 Cunningham, “The Maritime Rung on the Escalation Ladder”; Evan Braden Montgomery, “Primacy and Punishment: US Grand Strategy, Maritime Power, and Military Options to Manage Decline,” *Security Studies* 29, no. 4 (August 7, 2020): 769–96, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2020.1811463>.

236 Cunningham, “The Maritime Rung on the Escalation Ladder,” 741–42.

237 David Axe, “To Defeat China In War, Strangle Its Economy: Expert,” *Forbes*, accessed August 13, 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidaxe/2020/08/24/to-defeat-china-in-war-strangle-its-economy/>; Sean Mirski, “Stranglehold: The Context, Conduct and Consequences of an American Naval Blockade of China,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 36, no. 3 (June 2013): 385–421, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2012.743885>.

238 Cunningham, “The Maritime Rung on the Escalation Ladder,” 752–753; Gabriel Collins, “A Maritime Oil Blockade on China: Tactically Tempting but Strategically Flawed,” U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons, 2018.

Allies and coalitions would play a particularly important role in granting a successful outcome to the blockade. A strong coalition with Japan and India is indispensable to the US. Japan's navy would give a fundamental contribution in complementing the US blockading forces, particularly in the Pacific area. While India would not have to participate militarily, its endorsement of the US embargo could pressure smaller neighboring states not to sell blockaded goods to China.<sup>239</sup> Additional cooperation from smaller states in the proximity of the straits would be beneficial by preventing China from buying the blockaded good in the neighborhood.<sup>240</sup> Even farther states such as European ones and Canada could give precious contributions to American actions. They could provide political support, ensure the availability of import and demand for export to US allies in the region, and contribute militarily to missile defense as well as to the buildup of cyber and space capabilities. European states could further help by planning to 'backfill' US deployments in Europe and adjacent regions with their own militaries.<sup>241</sup> Within those circumstances, it would be difficult to avoid a direct confrontation with China, which could threaten European states with cyber-attacks, and European military units in the Indian Ocean.

## 4.4. Conclusion: Europeans cannot ignore difficult choices

Summing up, when Europeans engage in the Indo-Pacific, they must be aware that, while they intend to follow an inclusive collective security approach, their collaboration with regional states and the US is likely to be perceived as an exclusive, balancing, collective defense approach by China. Moreover, the European naval presence and cooperation with Indo-Pacific states will entangle them during a possible escalation. However, given the interests and values at stake for Europeans, engagement in the Indo-Pacific is likely to be unavoidable. More importantly, the increasing assertiveness of Chinese behavior is not primarily driven by what Europeans do or fail to do. Within that reality, Europeans must also consider their naval capabilities, their ability to sustain a naval presence in the Indo-Pacific, and how to more effectively use those assets by pooling resources. The next chapter turns to that topic.

The European naval presence and cooperation with Indo-Pacific states will entangle them during a possible escalation.

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<sup>239</sup> Mirski, "Stranglehold," 394-395.

<sup>240</sup> Cunningham, "The Maritime Rung on the Escalation Ladder."

<sup>241</sup> Wolfgang Ischinger and Joseph S. Nye, Jr., "Mind the Gap: Priorities for Transatlantic China Policy – Report of the Distinguished Reflection Group on Transatlantic China Policy" (Munich Security Conference, July 2021), 54-55, <https://doi.org/10.47342/GXWK1490>.

# 5. What role can European navies play in the Indo-Pacific?

What role can European navies play in the Indo-Pacific? How much naval presence could they generate? This chapter reiterates the value of naval diplomacy, but also the difficulties in maintaining a presence in other regions far from home and how this often comes at the cost of readiness. The chapter summarizes some naval capacities from the key European states. Based on a deployment ratio, we offer a sketch how much meaningful naval presence Europeans could generate. The chapter then summarizes demands on these capacities, as well as existing access to the region. Finally, it suggests several solutions for ensuring the European presence in the Indo-Pacific remains sustainable. These solutions boil down to pooling existing resources, prepositioning assets, putting access agreements in place, and delineating key zones of responsibility along the maritime routes from Europe to Asia.

## 5.1. Why would Europeans need a naval presence in the Indo-Pacific ?

When European ships sailed to the Pacific in 2020 and 2021 for naval diplomacy operations, it was the clearest sign that European saw the regional Indo-Pacific dynamics as crucial to their own interests. Both the increased frequency and the inclusion of more spectacular assets like the multinational UK-led carrier group, made that point manifest. In section 1.2.3, we discussed how ships are well-suited as a tool of diplomacy to signal a state's interests. Their ability to travel far from home and to potentially maintain a presence close to a target of naval diplomacy - while still remaining in international waters - gives ships distinct advantages over other military units. A naval presence can also fulfill other roles. Simply by denying an adversary the full use of the sea,<sup>242</sup> without necessarily being able to control that area oneself, they will be forced to devote previous resources that could be put to other, more aggressive purposes elsewhere.<sup>243</sup> In short, the presence of ships can fulfill roles that can simply signal that the stake has an interest at stake, reassure, deter, or prepare for conflict.<sup>244</sup>

<sup>242</sup> Speller, *Understanding Naval Warfare*, 118. Till, *Seapower*, 190–92. Le Mièrre, *Maritime Diplomacy in the 21st Century*; Rowlands, *Naval Diplomacy in the 21st Century*.

<sup>243</sup> Till, *Seapower*, 190–92. Such a presence can be adapted into a blockade.

<sup>244</sup> It is worth noting that battles between navies are relatively rare; there was a hundred-year span between the Battle of Trafalgar (1805) and the Battle of Tsushima (1905), and it is nearing eight decades since the last battle between aircraft carriers. Speller, *Understanding Naval Warfare*, 93.

There is a real tension between what suffices for a peacetime diplomatic presence and what is needed for war-fighting and thus for credible deterrence.

Before Europeans send ships to the Indo-Pacific, they have to be clear on what precisely they intend to be the objective of their naval presence in the Indo-Pacific. Preferably, they do so before they send ships. They also have to be clear on who the target of their effort is or are. Reassurance, deterrence, support for the US, or underlining a more universal value such as open seelines of communication, are very distinct objectives. Likewise, it must be clear who the target of the signal is. In the case of the European presence in the Indo-Pacific, the different audiences include regional states that Europeans seek to reassure, the US that Europeans seek to signal their worth and commitment to, or China that Europeans seek to signal the importance of openness to as well as deter from aggression. The same naval units may very well be intended to fulfill more than one of these tasks. However, there are real tensions between the capabilities required for each task. In particular, there is a real tension between what suffices for a peacetime diplomatic presence and what is needed for war-fighting and thus for credible deterrence.<sup>245</sup>

For Europeans, concretely, this means that deploying ships that they intend to signal their interest in open and secure seelines, might be understood within the region, particularly by China, to be intended as a deterrent because of the joint operations with the US. Yet, their actual ability to fight is highly likely to be entirely insufficient should it come to a major power conflict within the region. The following sections unpack different aspects of naval presence and readiness.

### 5.1.1. Requirements for sustaining a naval presence in another region

How large a possible presence in the Indo-Pacific could Europeans actually sustain? The ships available to sustain a persistent naval presence in another region is not as straightforward as simply summing up the number of ships in a navy. It depends on a number of variables: (1) on where the ships are homeported; (2) on the transit speeds from the homeport to the region of interest; (3) on the capacity for maintenance and repairs; (4) on the need for personnel training and rotation; and (5) on the access to fuels and resources.<sup>246</sup> These create relatively hard constraints on the capacity for deployment. Every ship needs maintenance and repairs. Every crew needs rest, recovery, and training. Transit may be faster over sea than over land, but transit times are still measured in days or weeks. Ships that are forward based closer will be much more readily available for deployments to provide presence than ships that are based on the national territory.<sup>247</sup> Consequently, the number of ships available for deployment and presence far from home is merely a fraction of the number of overall ships. It can be expressed in a ratio.

As an example, we can use the trends in and trade-offs between readiness and forward presence of the US Navy, the most well-documented case. Historically, the US Navy planned for six to seven months deployments within a cycle of 24 to 32 months in total that also

245 Honorable Robert O. Work, "A Slavish Devotion to Forward Presence Has Nearly Broken the U.S. Navy," U.S. Naval Institute, December 1, 2021, <https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2021/december/slavish-devotion-forward-presence-has-nearly-broken-us-navy>; Jeff Zeberlein, "Can-Do Is Not Working," U.S. Naval Institute, December 1, 2021, <https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2021/december/can-do-not-working>.

246 Till, *Seapower*, 282.

247 "Although forces based in the Continental United States (CONUS) and those homeported overseas conduct maintenance and training between deployments, forward forces have shorter transit times and can maintain a higher operational tempo. This enables a forward-based ship to maintain the same level of operational presence as two or more CONUS-based ships." P3

European militaries face problems in terms of readiness and ability to maintain a forward presence due to shrinking fleets, difficulties in recruiting personnel, as well as insufficient defense spending and shortfalls in training.

includes maintenance and training.<sup>248</sup> These cycles are shaped by basing. Ships based in the Continental United States (CONUS) have lower operational tempos than ships that have been homeported overseas, given the latter's shorter transit times to the region of concern. In practice, this means that a ship that is forward-based in the region of interest is able to keep the same level of operational presence as two or more continental-based ships.<sup>249</sup> However, in contrast to forward-based naval forces, continental-based forces can much more easily train personnel and perform maintenance between deployments. The duration of a ship's deployment can be extended – and often is – but the delayed maintenance and repairs of the ship, and the overworked crew will increase the time, costs, and difficulties eventually needed to restore the readiness of both. Even for the US and its superior military capabilities, maintaining current levels of operational presence is not sustainable. The fact that the US navy has shrunk in size – like its European counterparts – has worsened these problems of stress and overstretch.<sup>250</sup>

What is a meaningful way to think about the fraction of ships actually available for deployment? In the example of the US Navy, analysts from the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (CSBA) estimate that a single continental-based destroyer (using 2015 numbers) “can generate an overseas presence of 0.19,” while forward based destroyers generate a higher presence of approximately 0.5.<sup>251</sup>

## 5.2. How much naval presence in the Indo-Pacific could Europeans deploy?

Can the potential for European deployments to and presence in the Indo-Pacific be expressed in a similar ratio? At present, European militaries face problems in terms of readiness and ability to maintain a forward presence due to shrinking fleets, difficulties in recruiting personnel, as well as insufficient defense spending and shortfalls in training.<sup>252</sup>

248 Work, “A Slavish Devotion to Forward Presence Has Nearly Broken the U.S. Navy,” 6.

249 Bryan Clark and Jesse Sloman, “Deploying beyond Their Means: America's Navy and Marine Corps at a Tipping Point” (CSBA, November 18, 2015), 3, [https://csbaonline.org/uploads/documents/CSBA6174\\_\(Deploying\\_Beyond\\_Their\\_Means\)Final2-web.pdf](https://csbaonline.org/uploads/documents/CSBA6174_(Deploying_Beyond_Their_Means)Final2-web.pdf).

250 The overstretch of navy's capabilities to maintain a high operational tempo “is the root cause of declining ship and aircraft conditions, maintenance delays, mishaps, and an overstressed and fatigued workforce. Zeberlein, “Can-Do Is Not Working.” Between fiscal year 2014 and fiscal year 2020, the Navy experienced 28,238 days of maintenance delays, which “equates to 77 years of delays in just seven calendar years.” Zeberlein. Clark and Sloman, “Deploying beyond Their Means: America's Navy and Marine Corps at a Tipping Point,” 10. Zeberlein, “Can-Do Is Not Working”; Clark and Sloman, “Deploying beyond Their Means: America's Navy and Marine Corps at a Tipping Point.” Like the wear and tear on the ships, deployments similarly undermine the conditions of personnel, given the intense working rhythms, manpower shortages, prolonged time at sea and lack of training opportunities. When it comes to personnel, the lowest acceptable deployment-to-dwell ratio necessary to sustain naval operations is 1:2, the ideal ratio would be 1:3. To maintain this ideal ratio, a force of 200,000 marines would be necessary. Currently, the US Marine Corps are struggling to avoid dropping lower than 180,000. Clark and Sloman, 19.

251 Clark and Sloman, 15. Concretely, this means that a constant destroyer presence of 1.0 can be generated by a) 2 forward deployed destroyers; b) 1 forward deployed destroyer and 2 continental based destroyers; c) 5 continental-based destroyers.

252 Jeremy Stöhs, “Into the Abyss?: European Naval Power in the Post–Cold War Era,” *Naval War College Review* 71, no. 3 (2018), 3. Jeremy Stöhs, *The Decline of European Naval Forces* (Naval Institute Press, 2018), 184, <https://www.amazon.com/Decline-European-Naval-Forces-Uncertainty/dp/1682473082>. Deutsche Welle ([www.dw.com](http://www.dw.com)), “Germany's Lack of Military Readiness ‘dramatic,’ Says Bundeswehr Commissioner | DW | 20.02.2018,” DW.COM, accessed January 14, 2022, <https://www.dw.com/en/germanys-lack-of-military-readiness-dramatic-says-bundeswehr-commissioner/a-42663215>.

## 5.2.1. European navies: size, offensive and defensive capabilities

European navies rapidly shrunk following the end of the Cold War.<sup>253</sup> Table 9 summarizes the numbers of ships per class available at present to European navies, as well as shipbuilding plans for the coming decade.<sup>254</sup>

**Table 9. Existing (2021) and planned ships by class for selection of European states**



|                       | Ship Type   | Classes and numbers<br>(existing 2021, to be delivered)  | Total existing ships<br>in class (2021) |
|-----------------------|---|--|---|
| France <sup>255</sup> | Aircraft carrier                                  | <i>Charles de Gaulle</i> (1)<br><i>PA-NG</i> (1) (2038)  | 1                                       |
|                       | Helicopter carrier / Landing platform dock vessel | <i>Mistral</i> (3)   | 3                                       |
|                       | Attack submarine (nuclear powered)                | <i>Rubis</i> (5) <sup>256</sup><br><i>Barracuda</i> (1) (+ 5 2022 – 2030)  | 6                                       |
|                       | Destroyer   | <i>Horizon</i> (2)<br><i>George Leygues</i> (1)  | 3                                       |
|                       | Frigate   | <i>Aquitaine</i> (6) <sup>257</sup><br><i>La Fayette</i> (5)<br><i>Floreal</i> (6)<br><i>FREMM-DA</i> (2) (2022)<br><i>FDI</i> (5) (2022-2030)   | 17                                      |
|                       | Offshore patrol vessel                            | <i>D'Entrecasteaux</i> (4)<br><i>D'Estienne d'Orves</i> <sup>258</sup> (6)<br><i>La Confiance</i> (3)<br><i>L'Audacieuse</i> <sup>259</sup> (1)<br><i>Oceanic Patrol Vessel PO</i> (10) (2025-2030)<br><i>Patrouilleur d'Outre Mer POM</i> (6) (2022-2025) | 14                                      |
|                       | Minehunter  | <i>Éridan</i> <sup>260</sup> (10)<br><i>SLAM-F</i> <sup>261</sup> (2022-2030)  | 10                                      |

<sup>253</sup> Stöhs, *The Decline of European Naval Forces*, 2018.

<sup>254</sup> For reasons of accessibility, we focus on the several key European states that look to play a role in the Indo-Pacific. However, annex C has an expanded version of this table that also includes several smaller European states.

<sup>255</sup> "Liste Des Bâtiments de Combat," Ministeres des Armees, accessed December 21, 2021, <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/marine/equipements/batiments-de-combat/liste-des-batiments-de-combat>.

<sup>256</sup> One of these being severely damaged by fire

<sup>257</sup> France classifies the *Aquitaine* as a frigate; arguably due to its tonnage it could be designated a destroyer. Indeed, other sources sometimes do.

<sup>258</sup> Soon to be replaced with PO

<sup>259</sup> To be decommissioned in 2022 and replaced with 6 POM.

<sup>260</sup> To be replaced starting in 2023 by SLAM-F

<sup>261</sup> The SLAM-F program for unmanned counter-mine warfare consists of 4 components: 8x Unmanned systems, 6x motherships for UAV/USV/UUV, 5x EOD divers support vessels, 1x Mine Warfare Data Operating System. See: Xavier Vavasseur, "France Launches SLAMF Mine Warfare Program But Many Questions Remain," Naval News (blog), November 6, 2020, <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2020/11/france-launches-slamf-mine-warfare-program-but-many-questions-remain/>.

**Table 9. Existing (2021) and planned ships by class for selection of European states**  
 (continued)


|                                     | Ship Type                                     | Classes and numbers<br>(existing 2021, to be delivered)   | Total existing ships<br>in class (2021) |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|---|
| <b>United Kingdom<sup>262</sup></b> | Aircraft carrier                              | <i>Queen Elizabeth</i> (2)  | 2                                       |
|                                     | Landing platform dock vessel                  | <i>Albion</i> (2)<br><i>Bay</i> (4)   | 6                                       |
|                                     | Attack submarine<br>(nuclear powered)         | <i>Trafalgar</i> (2)<br><i>Astute</i> (4) (+ 3 in service by 2026)                                      | 6                                       |
|                                     | Destroyer                                     | <i>Daring</i> (6)<br>Type 83 (late 2030s)   | 6                                       |
|                                     | Frigate                                       | <i>Duke</i> (12)<br>Type 26 (8) (mid 2020s)<br>Type 31 (5) (2028)<br>Type 32 (2030s)                    | 12                                      |
|                                     | Offshore patrol vessel                        | <i>River</i> (8)  | 8                                       |
|                                     | Minehunter                                    | <i>Hunt</i> (6)<br><i>Sandown</i> (5)   | 11                                      |
| <b>Italy<sup>263</sup></b>          | Fixed wing and V/STOL /<br>Helicopter carrier | <i>Cavour</i> (1)<br><i>Garibaldi</i> (1)   | 2                                       |
|                                     | Landing platform dock vessel                  | <i>Trieste</i> (1)<br><i>San Giorgio</i> (3)  | 4                                       |
|                                     | Attack submarine (diesel<br>powered)          | <i>Todaro</i> (4 + 4 2027-2031)<br><i>Sauro</i> (4)   | 8                                       |
|                                     | Destroyer                                     | <i>Ammiraglio<sup>264</sup></i> (2)<br><i>Orizzonte</i> (2)<br><i>DDX</i> (2) (2028)                    | 4                                       |
|                                     | Frigate                                       | <i>Bergamini</i> (8 + 2 to be delivered 2024)<br><i>Maestrale</i> (3)                                   | 11                                      |
|                                     | Offshore patrol vessel                        | <i>Thaon di Revel</i> (5 + 2 2022)<br><i>Comandanti</i> (4)<br><i>Sirio</i> (2)<br><i>Cassiopea</i> (4) | 15                                      |
|                                     | Minehunter                                    | <i>Lerici</i> (2)<br><i>Gaeta</i> (8)   | 10                                      |

262 "Ships," Royal Navy, accessed December 21, 2021, <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/the-equipment/ships.2021>, <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/the-equipment/ships>.

263 "La nostre navi," Marina Militare, accessed December 21, 2021, <https://www.marina.difesa.it/noi-siamo-la-marina/mezzi/forze-navali/Pagine/Homepage.aspx>.

264 To be replaced by DDX in 2028

**Table 9. Existing (2021) and planned ships by class for selection of European states**  
(continued)

|                                   | Ship Type                         | Classes and numbers<br>(existing 2021, to be delivered)   | Total existing ships<br>in class (2021) |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Germany</b> <sup>265</sup>     | Attack submarine (diesel powered) | Type 212A (6)<br>Type 212CD (2) (2032-2034)   | 6                                       |
|                                   | Destroyer                         | Baden-Württemberg (3 + 1 end of 2021)   | 3                                       |
|                                   | Frigates                          | Brandenburg (4)<br>Bremen (1)<br>Sachsen (4)<br>MKS 180 (6) (2027-2032)                                       | 9                                       |
|                                   | Corvette                          | Braunschweig (5 + 5 2023-2025)  | 5                                       |
|                                   | Minehunter                        | Frankenthal (10)  | 10                                      |
|                                   | Minesweeper                       | Ensdorf (2)   | 2                                       |
| <b>Spain</b> <sup>266</sup>       | Helicopter carrier                | Juan Carlos I (1)   | 1                                       |
|                                   | Landing platform dock vessel      | Galicia (2)   | 2                                       |
|                                   | Attack submarine (diesel powered) | Galerna (1)<br>Isaac Peral (4) (2023-2029)  | 1                                       |
|                                   | Frigate                           | Álvaro de Bazán (4)<br>Santa María (6)<br>Bonifaz (5) (2026-2031)   | 10                                      |
|                                   | Offshore patrol vessel            | Meteoro (6)   | 6                                       |
|                                   | Minehunter                        | Segura (6)  | 6                                       |
| <b>Netherlands</b> <sup>267</sup> | Attack submarine (diesel powered) | Walrus <sup>268</sup> (4)   | 4                                       |
|                                   | Frigate                           | De Zeven Provinciën (4)<br>Karel Doorman <sup>269</sup> (2)<br>Anti-Submarine Warfare Frigate (2) (2028-2029) | 6                                       |
|                                   | Offshore patrol vessel            | Holland (4)   | 4                                       |
|                                   | Minehunter                        | Alkmaar (6)   | 6                                       |
|                                   | Landing platform dock vessel      | Rotterdam <sup>270</sup> (2)  | 2                                       |

<sup>265</sup> "Marine," Deutsche Marine, accessed December 21, 2021, <https://www.bundeswehr.de/de/organisation/marine>.

<sup>266</sup> Armada, "Presentación Buques de Superficie," Armada Española, accessed December 21, 2021, <https://armada.defensa.gob.es/ArmadaPortal/page/Portal/armadaEspañola/buquessuperficie/prefLang-es/>.

<sup>267</sup> Ministerie van Defensie, "Schepen - Koninklijke Marine," webpagina, Defensie.nl (Ministerie van Defensie, April 9, 2018), <https://www.defensie.nl/organisatie/marine/materieel/schepen>.

<sup>268</sup> Walrus submarines are planned to be replaced by end of 2020s. Project and constructor have not yet been designated.

<sup>269</sup> To be replaced by end of 2020s with 2 Anti-Submarine Warfare Frigates.

<sup>270</sup> To be replaced by 2030-2031

What becomes clear from table 9 is that European navies have a highly constrained capacity for deployments due to their diminutive sizes. European navies are also weighted towards the lighter ship classes, such as frigates and patrol vessels, rather than destroyers. For example, France has seventeen frigates, but only three destroyers and one aircraft carrier. Due to - or despite - the UK's significant push back towards its historical naval identity, it only manages six destroyers and two aircraft carriers. The drop-off in numbers and heavier classes after the two major European military powers is significant. Moreover, apart from their aircraft carriers suitable for long-range, fixed-wing air strike, only the UK and France have the capabilities to deploy sea-launched long-range cruise missiles - leaving other European navies light on offensive capabilities.<sup>271</sup> European navies have also underinvested in defensive means. As a metric, Vertical Launch System (VLS) cells represent a benchmark for how many defensive (or offensive) weapons a ship carries with it. As Jeremy Stöhs notes, European navies are significantly weaker when it comes to VLS cells. While the US, Chinese, and Russian navies have respectively 12000, 5200 and 3000 Battle Force Missiles (BFM) and the US has nearly 9000 VLS cells, European navies cumulatively have approximately 2328 VLS cells.<sup>272</sup>

Europeans are aware of these limits. For example, a 2017 UK policy text notes the "need for greater volume in the destroyer and frigate force" to achieve operational flexibility and the increase in the investments for the development of submarines and surface vessels.<sup>273</sup> Similarly, French officials have noted the growing demand for an improvement of naval forces aiming at ensuring protection of France's overseas territories.<sup>274</sup>

## 5.2.2. European capacity for naval deployments

How many ships could European navies deploy to the Indo-Pacific in the coming years? Consider that for each deployed ship during peacetime, approximately three ships are in maintenance or repair and their crews are training, or resting and recovering. Using that logic from section 5.1.1, we argue that for you need four ships to deploy one. We also consider the difference between homeporting ships in Europe or another region, using a ratio of two ships to deploy one. Of course, European states are currently not actually homeporting ships in the Indo-Pacific, nor do they have plans to do so. Table 10 below uses the totals of ship by classes from the overview of European navies in table 9, and notes how many ships each European would have available using the 4:1 and 2:1 ratios. The former generates a conservative estimate and the latter a wildly optimistic one that only underlines how limited European capabilities remain. These are idealized ratios, of course, for a back-of-the-envelope estimate. However, the estimates underline the real limits in current European naval capacity. Given the readiness problems that most European navies are experiencing, in practice this capacity might be lower for these national navies. In addition, table 11 summarizes the available supply and logistic ships for these navies, using the same ratios. Taken together, the limited European capacity regarding the heavier classes and the support ships to sustain deployments is apparent.

271 Jeremy Stöhs, "How High? The Future of European Naval Power and the High-End Challenge" (Djøf Publishing, 2021), 39, [https://cms.polsci.ku.dk/publikationer/hvor-hoejt-fremtiden-for-europaeisk-maritim-militaermagt-og-udfordringen-fra-stigende-kapacitetstaerskler/CMS\\_Report\\_2021\\_1\\_-\\_How\\_High\\_-\\_The\\_Future\\_of\\_European\\_Naval\\_Power\\_updated\\_15\\_FEB\\_2021.pdf](https://cms.polsci.ku.dk/publikationer/hvor-hoejt-fremtiden-for-europaeisk-maritim-militaermagt-og-udfordringen-fra-stigende-kapacitetstaerskler/CMS_Report_2021_1_-_How_High_-_The_Future_of_European_Naval_Power_updated_15_FEB_2021.pdf).

272 Stöhs, 39.

273 "National Shipbuilding Strategy: The Future of Naval Shipbuilding in the UK" (Ministry of Defence, 2017), 9.

274 Armand Bedeau et al., "L'Industrie Navale Française: s'inscrire dans la durée" (Ecole de Guerre Economique, June 2020).

The estimates underline the real limits in current European naval capacity.

**Table 10. Ships by class available for deployments based on homeporting, for selection of European states**

|                                     | Ship Type   | Total existing ships in class (2021) | Availability, homeporting in region (2:1 ratio) <sup>275</sup> | Availability, homeporting in Europe (4:1 ratio) |
|-------------------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|--|---|
| <b>France<sup>276</sup></b>         | Aircraft carrier (fixed wing)                     | 1                                    | ½  | ¼   |
|                                     | Helicopter carrier / Landing platform dock vessel | 3                                    | 1½   | ¾   |
|                                     | Attack submarine (nuclear powered)                | 6                                    | 3  | 1½  |
|                                     | Destroyer   | 3                                    | 1½   | ¾   |
|                                     | Frigate   | 17                                   | 8½   | 4¼  |
|                                     | Offshore patrol vessel                            | 14                                   | 7  | 3½  |
|                                     | Minehunter  | 10                                   | 5  | 2   |
| <b>United Kingdom<sup>277</sup></b> | Aircraft carrier (fixed wing)                     | 2                                    | 1  | ½   |
|                                     | Landing platform dock vessel                      | 6                                    | 3  | 1½  |
|                                     | Attack submarine (nuclear powered)                | 6                                    | 3  | 1½  |
|                                     | Destroyer   | 6                                    | 3  | 1½  |
|                                     | Frigate   | 12                                   | 6  | 3   |
|                                     | Offshore patrol vessel                            | 8                                    | 4  | 2   |
|                                     | Minehunter  | 11                                   | 5½   | 2¾  |
| <b>Italy<sup>278</sup></b>          | Helicopter carrier                                | 2                                    | 1  | ½   |
|                                     | Attack submarine (diesel powered)                 | 8                                    | 4  | 2   |
|                                     | Destroyer   | 4                                    | 2  | 1   |
|                                     | Frigate   | 11                                   | 5½   | 2¾  |
|                                     | Offshore patrol vessel                            | 15                                   | 7½   | 3¾  |
|                                     | Minehunter  | 10                                   | 5  | 2½  |
| <b>Germany<sup>279</sup></b>        | Attack submarine (diesel powered)                 | 6                                    | 3  | 1½  |
|                                     | Destroyer   | 3                                    | 1½   | ¾   |
|                                     | Frigates  | 9                                    | 4½   | 2¼  |
|                                     | Corvette  | 5                                    | 2½   | 1¼  |
|                                     | Minehunter  | 10                                   | 5  | 2½  |
|                                     | Minesweeper                                       | 2                                    | 1  | ½   |
| <b>Spain<sup>280</sup></b>          | Helicopter carrier                                | 1                                    | ½  | ¼   |
|                                     | Attack submarine (diesel powered)                 | 1                                    | ½  | ¼   |
|                                     | Frigate   | 10                                   | 5  | 2½  |
|                                     | Offshore patrol vessel                            | 6                                    | 3  | 1½  |
|                                     | Minehunter  | 6                                    | 3  | 1½  |
|                                     | Landing platform dock vessel                      | 2                                    | 1  | ½   |

<sup>275</sup> Homeporting in regions outside of Europe is not in practice now, and the facilities to do so generally do not exist at present. We include it as a means to highlight the constraints, and possibly a way to ameliorate these constraints and increase the European presence in the Indo-Pacific.

<sup>276</sup> "Liste Des Bâtiments de Combat."

<sup>277</sup> "Ships."

<sup>278</sup> "La nostre navi."

<sup>279</sup> "Marine."

<sup>280</sup> "Presentación Buques de Superficie."

**Table 10. Ships by class available for deployments based on homeporting, for selection of European states (continued)**

|                                  | Ship Type                         | Total existing ships in class (2021) | Availability, homeporting in region (2:1 ratio) <sup>275</sup> | Availability, homeporting in Europe (4:1 ratio) |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|---|
| <b>Netherlands<sup>281</sup></b> | Attack submarine (diesel powered) | 4                                    | 2  | 1   |
|                                  | Frigate                           | 6                                    | 3  | 1½  |
|                                  | Offshore patrol vessel            | 4                                    | 2  | 1   |
|                                  | Minehunter                        | 6                                    | 3  | 1½  |
|                                  | Landing platform dock vessel      | 2                                    | 1  | ½   |

**Table 11. Supply ships by class available for deployments based on homeporting, for selection of European states**

|                       | Ship Type                                      | Total existing ships in class (2021) | Availability, homeporting in region (2:1 ratio) <sup>282</sup> | Availability, homeporting in Europe (4:1 ratio) |
|-----------------------|--|--------------------------------------|--|---|
| <b>France</b>         | Oil tanker ship                                | 2                                    | 1  | ½   |
|                       | Support vessel                                 | 4                                    | 2  | 1   |
|                       | Force supply ship and logistic support vessel  | N/A                                  | N/A  | N/A   |
| <b>United Kingdom</b> | Oil tanker ship                                | 6                                    | 3  | 1   |
|                       | Support vessel                                 | 1                                    | ½  | ¼   |
| <b>Italy</b>          | Oil tanker ship, command and logistics support | 4                                    | 2  | ¾   |
| <b>Germany</b>        | Oil tanker ship                                | 5                                    | 2½   | 1¼  |
|                       | Replenishment ship                             | 6                                    | 3  | 1½  |
| <b>Spain</b>          | Oil tanker ship                                | 2                                    | 1  | ½   |
| <b>Netherlands</b>    | Support vessel                                 | 1                                    | ½  | ¼   |
|                       | Logistics and amphibious support ship          | 1                                    | ½  | ¼   |

Of course, the real world does not allow for half or quarter ships to travel to the other side of the world. What these numbers underline is how limited the ability is of European navies to maintain a persistent presence in other regions through deployments, even in the hypothetical case that these ships would be homeported in these regions.

<sup>281</sup> Defensie, "Schepen - Koninklijke Marine."

<sup>282</sup> Homeporting in regions outside of Europe is not in practice now, and the facilities to do so generally do not exist at present. We include it as a means to highlight the constraints, and possibly a way to ameliorate these constraints and increase the European presence in the Indo-Pacific.

### 5.2.3. Demands on European navies

Not all demands for deployments are in the Indo-Pacific. European states must retain capabilities for tasks in the waters surrounding Europe, either for the protection of direct national interests or as part of their obligations to NATO.

The limited European capacity for deployment presented above is only half of the story; the other half is that within this limited capacity, European states have multiple competing commitments. Obviously, not all demands for deployments are in the Indo-Pacific. European states must retain capabilities for tasks in the waters surrounding Europe, either for the protection of direct national interests or as part of their obligations to NATO. Thus the limited European naval capacity is expected, beyond the oceans and seas that could be categorized as part of the Indo-Pacific, to also cover (depending on the state in question) the North and South Atlantic oceans, the Caribbean sea, the North Sea, the Baltics, the Arctic Sea, the Black Sea, and the Mediterranean. Specifically, some European states have security obligations in their overseas territories and not all of these are in the broader Indo-Pacific region. Probably not coincidentally, the most active maritime states within Europe - the UK, France, and the Netherlands - have territories and obligations in either the Caribbean or the South Atlantic. We will cover territories and bases in section 5.3.1 below. Table 12 shows the increasing number of missions in the Indo-Pacific during the 2018-2021 period. Combined with the capacity and deployment ratios summarized in the section above, it would seem apparent that the European deployments in 2021 exceed the ceiling for what is sustainable on an annual basis.

The demand on European states to increase and maintain a sustained naval presence in the Indo-Pacific is only likely to grow. As section 4.2. notes, both regional states and the US would like Europeans to play a greater role. The mismatch between European capacity and demand is risky not only due to the intensification and militarization of the Sino-American competition, but also because European navies lack the ability to defend themselves (see section 5.2.1).

**Table 12. Summary of European diplomacy operations and multinational missions in the Indian Ocean and adjacent waters, 2008-2021.**



| Country   | Year           | Location  | Type of Vessels Deployed  |
|---|----------------|---|---|
| Germany   | 2021           | Visit to Shanghai port denied by China                      | 1 frigate   |
| France<br>(Belgium and Greece in the escort)                                    | 2021           | Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean                               | 1 aircraft carrier, 4 frigates, 1 destroyer, 1 command and refueling vessel, 1 attack submarine |
| United Kingdom, Netherlands   | 2021           | Gulf of Aden, Indian Ocean, Philippine Sea, South China Sea | 1 aircraft carrier, 2 destroyers, 3 frigates, 1 refueling ship                                  |
| France  | 2021           | South China Sea   | 1 attack submarine, 1 warship   |
| Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, and Portugal | 2020 – ongoing | Persian Gulf  | N/A   |
| France  | 2019           | South China Sea   | 1 frigate   |
| United Kingdom  | 2018           | South China Sea   | 1 amphibious assault ship   |
| European Union (EUNAVFOR)   | 2008 – ongoing | Indian Ocean  | 2 frigates (currently)  |

## 5.3. How to get more naval presence out of existing European capacity?

What are ways to generate more meaningful European naval presence out of the limited number of ships that can be deployed to the region? In this section, we propose several solutions. First, we suggest more effectively sharing infrastructure and bases among European states, as well pooling existing resources and to preposition assets, including munitions. Coordinating complementary European defensive systems would be useful. Second, access agreements to European ports in the region and to port of Indo-Pacific partners are key to ensure the first solution. Third, we propose that European states delineate different the expansive Indo-Pacific region into more realistically manageable zones of responsibility.

### 5.3.1. Facilitating European access to the Indo-Pacific: bases and mutual access agreements

Key European states already have military bases and detachments in the Indo-Pacific; moreover, these offer access to strategically important maritime chokeholds in the region. The bases are established either on national territory or through bilateral agreements with the host countries. France, the UK, and Italy have their own bases, while the Netherlands, Germany, and Spain have smaller forward deployed detachments in the region. Figure 9 and table 13 shows the distribution of the bases and national territories of key European states through the region.

Within the Indo-Pacific, European states are best-positioned for access to the Western Indian Ocean. Unsurprisingly, given the relative proximity to Europe. Most of the bases are concentrated in the Persian Gulf but Djibouti is also a central hub for European presence within the region. As a legacy of their empires, France and the UK are the European states with the most access points within the Indo-Pacific. France's overseas territories are particularly helpful in facilitating its relatively prominent military presence in the region. Four out of six French military bases are located on the national territories of La Réunion, Mayotte, New Caledonia, and French Polynesia.<sup>283</sup> These facilities give France strategic access to the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, while French deployments in Djibouti and UAE allow for its presence in the Persian Gulf and Gulf of Aden.<sup>284</sup> The UK bases are similarly distributed, with British military bases in Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, UAE, and the British Indian Ocean Territory.<sup>285</sup> The UK

283 "Les Forces armées dans la zone sud de l'Océan Indien," Ministère des Armées, 2019, <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/territoire-national/forces-de-souverainete/la-reunion-mayotte/dossier/les-forces-armees-dans-la-zone-sud-de-l-ocean-indien>; "Les forces armées en Nouvelle-Calédonie," Ministère des Armées, 2021, <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/english/operations/territoire-national/forces-de-souverainete/forces-armees-de-la-nouvelle-caledonie/dossier-de-reference/les-forces-armees-en-nouvelle-caledonie>; "Les forces armées de Polynésie française," Ministère des Armées, 2020, <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/english/operations/territoire-national/forces-de-souverainete/forces-armees-en-polynesie-francaise/dossier-de-reference/les-forces-armees-de-polynesie-francaise>.

284 "Les forces françaises stationnées à Djibouti," Ministère des Armées, 2020, <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/afrique/afrique-de-l-est/djibouti/dossier/les-forces-francaises-stationnees-a-djibouti>; "FFEUAU / Alindien," Ministère des Armées, 2016, <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/monde/grand-levant/emirats-arabes-unis/dossier/ffeau-alindien>.

285 "Royal Navy Opens Base in Bahrain," The Maritime Executive, 2018, <https://www.maritime-executive.com/editorials/royal-navy-opens-base-in-bahrain>; "Al Udeid Air Force Base in Doha, Qatar," Military Bases (blog), accessed March 19, 2021, <https://militarybases.com/overseas/qatar/al-udeid/>; Jonathan Campbell-James, "Britain in Oman: Washington's Strategic Partner," The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2020, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/britain-oman-washingtons-strategic-partner>; "83 Expeditionary Air Group," Royal Air Force, accessed March 19, 2021, <https://www.raf.mod.uk/>; "Naval Support Facility Diego Garcia," Naval Technology, accessed March 18, 2021, <https://www.naval-technology.com/projects/diego-garcia/>.

Within the Indo-Pacific, European states are best-positioned for access to the Western Indian Ocean.

has detachments in Singapore and Brunei as well, which grants it direct access to two important strategic hotspots, the Strait of Malacca and the South China Sea.<sup>286</sup> Italy's presence is limited to the Gulf of Aiden and the Persian Gulf, thanks to military bases and detachments in Djibouti, UAE, and Kuwait.<sup>287</sup> The other European states present in the region are Germany, the Netherlands, and Spain. The Netherlands deploys a support element in the UAE, while German and Spanish detachments in Djibouti are accommodated at the French base.<sup>288</sup> Additional logistical support points have been in place for specific tasks.

Though limited in number, European points of access to the region are more strategically important than they appear due to their proximity to key maritime chokepoints. The French, English, Italian, and Dutch bases and detachments in the Persian Gulf are close to the Strait of Hormuz, crucial for the global flow of oil and gas.<sup>289</sup> Given their military presence in Djibouti, France, Italy, Germany, and Spain also have access to another hotspot for oil trade, the Bab El-Mandeb Strait in the Gulf of Aden. Bab El-Mandeb is the southern gateway to the Suez Canal and SUMED pipeline, and hence represents a geostrategic chokepoint for the exports of oil and natural gas from the Arab peninsula to Europe and North America's markets.<sup>290</sup> Moreover, Djibouti acts as a steppingstone that facilitates movement through the Red Sea to the Mediterranean Sea, down the coast of Africa to the Mozambique Strait, and into the Western Indian Ocean and beyond. Finally, of the European states only the UK has direct access to the ever-more important Strait of Malacca, which is the second largest chokepoint for oil trade after the Strait of Hormuz. The Strait of Malacca's relevance goes beyond the transport of resources. In fact, the strait is the shortest maritime route connecting East Asia and the Middle East, thus conveying up to 20 percent of global maritime trade flows. More importantly, 60 percent of Chinese maritime trade also flows through the Strait of Malacca, which is "the most important sea line of communication for the Chinese economy."<sup>291</sup> These points of access also make it likely that Europeans would be asked to contribute to a possible distant blockade.

286 "The British Army in Brunei," The British Army, 2020, <https://www.army.mod.uk/deployments/brunei/>; J. Vitor Tossini, "The British Defence Singapore Support Unit – Enabling the Tilt," UKDJ, August 1, 2021, <https://ukdefencejournal.org.uk/the-british-defence-singapore-support-unit-enabling-the-tilt/>.

287 David Cenciotti, "Italian Typhoons Deployed To Kuwait Celebrated 2,000 Flight Hours With A Cool 'Tetris Challenge,'" The Aviationist (blog), March 11, 2020, <https://theaviationist.com/2020/03/11/italian-typhoons-deployed-to-kuwait-celebrated-2000-flight-hours-with-a-cool-tetris-challenge/>; "Emirati Arabi Uniti," Ministero della Difesa, 2015, [http://www.aeronautica.difesa.it/missione/attivitaoperative/opr\\_ambito\\_internazionale/Pagine/EmiratiArabiUniti.aspx](http://www.aeronautica.difesa.it/missione/attivitaoperative/opr_ambito_internazionale/Pagine/EmiratiArabiUniti.aspx); "La Base Militare Nazionale Nella Repubblica Di Gibuti," Schede Di Lettura (Camera dei Deputati Servizio Studi, 2020), <http://documenti.camera.it/leg18/dossier/pdf/DI0229.pdf>.

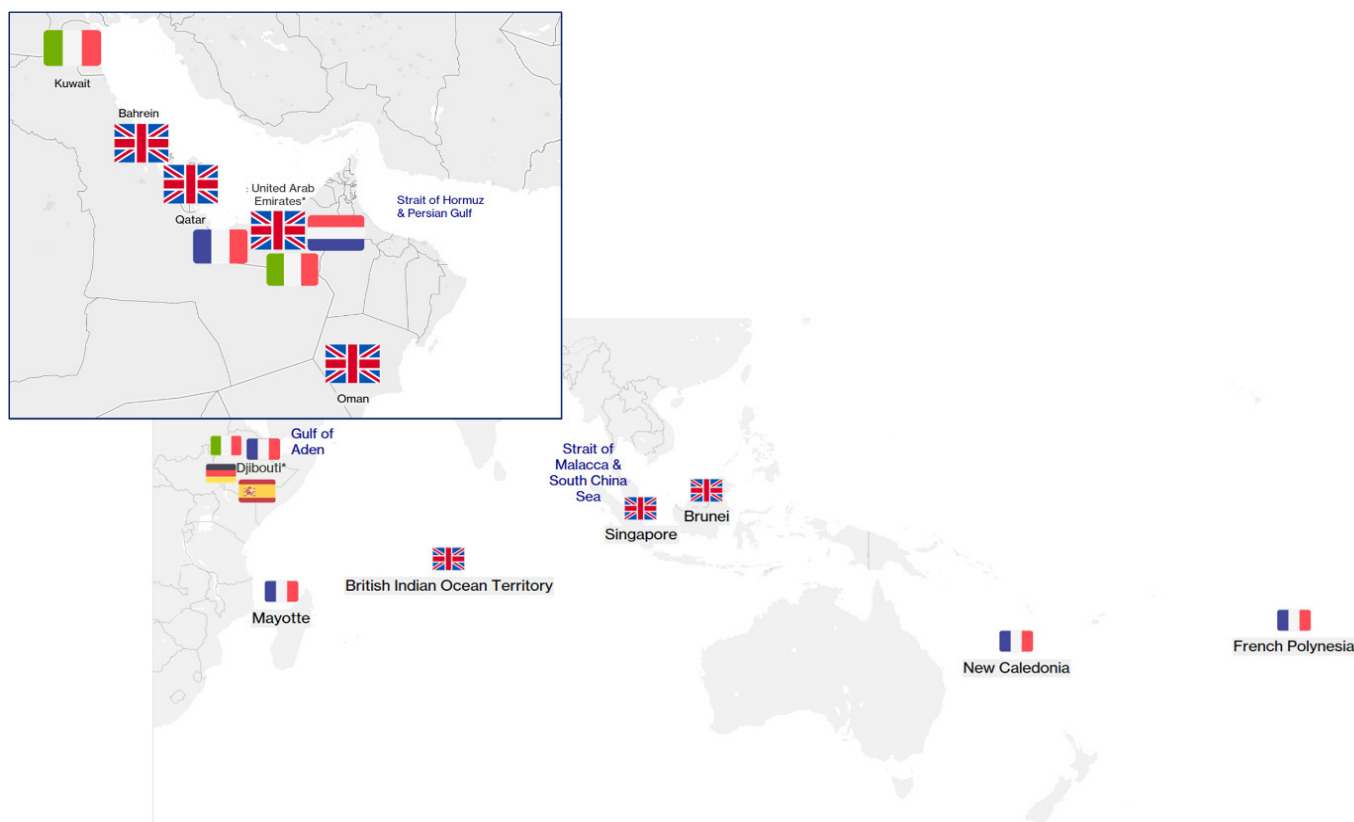
288 Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, "Regeling voorzieningen bij vredes- en humanitaire operaties (VVHO)," ministeriele-regeling, Overheid, 2021, <https://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0039789/2021-03-04>; Eva Hagström Frisell, "Germany - Linking Military Deployments in Africa to National Security" (FOI - Swedish Defence Research Institute, 2019); "Spanish Airforce in Djibouti Receive EU Counter-Piracy Medals," EUNAVFOR (blog), January 26, 2018, <https://eunavfor.eu/spanish-air-force-in-djibouti-receive-eu-counter-piracy-medals/>.

289 This strait is essential to the global oil and gas trade with one third of the world's waterborne oil passing through this shipping route. In 2020, approximately 18 million barrels per day oil as well as a quarter of the world's supply of liquified natural gas crossed the strait. Verity Ratcliffe, Julian Lee, and Javier Blas, "Why the Strait of Hormuz Is a Global Oil Flashpoint," Bloomberg, January 10, 2021, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-01-10/why-the-strait-of-hormuz-is-a-global-oil-flashpoint-quicktake>; Alexandra Ma, "How the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow stretch of water where ships carry \$1.2 billion of oil every day, is at the heart of spiraling tensions with Iran," Business Insider Nederland, January 13, 2020, <https://www.businessinsider.nl/strait-of-hormuz-explainer-oil-us-iran-tensions-2019-7/>.

290 6.2 million of barrels per day of crude oil, condensate, and refined petroleum transited through the Bab El-Mandeb strait in 2018. Ana Aguilera Raga, "The Bab El-Mandeb Strait: Geopolitical Considerations of the Strategic Chokepoint" (Istituto Espanol de Estudios Estrategicos, March 10, 2020), 3.

291 Pawel Paszak, "China and the 'Malacca Dilemma,'" Warsaw Institute (blog), February 28, 2021, <https://warsawinstitute.org/china-malacca-dilemma/>.

**Figure 9. Location of European military bases and strategic hotspots in the Indo-Pacific**



\*Djibouti has 4 bases

**Table 13. Overview of European territories and bases in the Indo-Pacific**



|        | Facility                                     | Location             | Basing Arrangement   | Proximity to Strategic Hotspot    |
|--------|--|----------------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| France | Port des Galets naval base                   | La Réunion           | National Territory   | Indian Ocean                      |
|        | Camp de la Paix                              | United Arab Emirates | Bilateral defense agreement (2008) <sup>292</sup>  | Strait of Hormuz and Persian Gulf |
|        | Les forces françaises stationnées à Djibouti | Djibouti             | Defense cooperation Treaty (2011), lease of military facilities (\$36M per year), defense of Djibouti territory, and stationing of personnel (min 1450 units) <sup>293</sup> | Gulf of Aden                      |
|        | Dzaoudzi naval base                          | Mayotte              | National Territory   | Indian Ocean                      |
|        | Fare Ute                                     | French Polynesia     | National Territory   | Pacific Ocean                     |
|        | Armed Forces in New Caledonia                | New Caledonia        | National Territory   | Pacific Ocean                     |

<sup>292</sup> "Camp de La Paix (Peace Camp)," Airforce Technology, accessed March 18, 2021, <https://www.airforce-technology.com/projects/campdelapaixpeacecam/>; "UAE Agrees to French Base by 2009," Al Arabiya News, January 16, 2008, <https://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2008%2F01%2F16%2F44277.html>.

<sup>293</sup> Neil Melvin, "The Foreign Military Presence in the Horn of Africa Region," SIPRI Background Paper (SIPRI, April 2019).

Table 13. Overview of European territories and bases in the Indo-Pacific (continued)



|                | Facility  | Location   | Basing Arrangement  | Proximity to Strategic Hotspot        |
|----------------|---|--|---|---------------------------------------|
| Italy          | Ahmad al-Jaber Air Base   | Kuwait   | Deployment in support of Operation Inherent Resolve <sup>294</sup>                          | Strait of Hormuz and Persian Gulf     |
|                | Base Militare Nazionale di Supporto 'Amedeo Guillet'                        | Djibouti   | Lease of facility (\$2.6M per year) <sup>295</sup>  | Gulf of Aden                          |
|                | Air Task Force at Al Minhad air base  | United Arab Emirates   | Diplomatic agreement  | Strait of Hormuz and Persian Gulf     |
| United Kingdom | HMS Jufair Naval Base   | Bahrain  | Bilateral defense arrangement <sup>296</sup>  | Strait of Hormuz and Persian Gulf     |
|                | RAF Al Udeid air base   | Qatar  | Multilateral agreement signed in 2018 allowing NATO members to use the base. <sup>297</sup> | Strait of Hormuz and Persian Gulf     |
|                | UK Joint Logistics Support Base   |  |   |                                       |
|                | Oman  | Bilateral arrangement followed by Joint Defense Agreement <sup>298</sup> | Strait of Hormuz and Persian Gulf   |                                       |
|                | Al Musannah air base  | Oman   | Deployment in support of operation Kipion <sup>299</sup>                                    | Strait of Hormuz and Persian Gulf     |
|                | Al Minhad air base  | United Arab Emirates   | Diplomatic agreement  | Strait of Hormuz and Persian Gulf     |
|                | British Defence Singapore Support Unit and Naval Party 1022                 | Singapore  | Retained as a consequence of the 1971 Five Power Defence Arrangements <sup>300</sup>        | Strait of Malacca and South China Sea |
|                | Naval Support Facility Diego Garcia   | British Indian Ocean Territory   | National Territory  | Indian Ocean                          |
|                | Brunei Garrison   | Brunei   | Garrison Agreement (1984, renewable every 5 years) <sup>301</sup>                           | Strait of Malacca and South China Sea |
| Netherlands    | Forward Support Element Mirage  | United Arab Emirates   | Diplomatic agreement  | Strait of Hormuz and Persian Gulf     |
| Germany        | Detachment  | Djibouti   | Accommodation through French forces <sup>302</sup>  | Gulf of Aden                          |
| Spain          | Detachment of the Spanish Air Force Maritime Patrol Reconnaissance Aircraft | Djibouti   | Accommodation through French forces <sup>303</sup>  | Gulf of Aden                          |

294 Cenciotti, "Italian Typhoons Deployed To Kuwait Celebrated 2,000 Flight Hours With A Cool 'Tetris Challenge.'"

295 Melvin, "The Foreign Military Presence in the Horn of Africa Region."

296 "UK-Bahrain Sign Landmark Defence Agreement," GOV.UK, December 5, 2014, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-bahrain-sign-landmark-defence-agreement>.

297 Fergus Kelly, "Qatar Signs Agreement Allowing NATO Use of Al-Udeid Air Base," The Defense Post, March 7, 2018, <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2018/03/07/nato-agreement-qatar-al-udeid-air-base/>.

298 "UK and Oman Sign Historic Joint Defence Agreement," GOV.UK, February 21, 2019, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-and-oman-sign-historic-joint-defence-agreement>.

299 "Operation Kipion," Royal Navy, accessed October 1, 2021, <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/operations/red-sea-and-gulf/operation-kipion>.

300 Tossini, "The British Defence Singapore Support Unit – Enabling the Tilt."

301 "PM Meeting with His Majesty the Sultan of Brunei: 4 February 2020," GOV.UK, February 4, 2020, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-meeting-with-his-majesty-the-sultan-of-brunei-4-february-2020>.

302 Yun Sun, "Djibouti: What Europe Should Understand of China's Approach to Military Expansion," www.euractiv.com, October 2, 2018, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/defence-and-security/opinion/djibouti-what-europe-should-understand-of-chinas-approach-to-military-expansion/>.

303 Sun.

Port access agreements of European states with regional states are also of extreme importance to sustain European presence in the Indo-Pacific. Table 14 summarizes existing access agreements. In March 2018, India and France signed a military logistics agreement that allows for reciprocal access to each other's naval bases and military facilities in the context of authorized port visits, joint training and exercises, disaster relief efforts, and humanitarian actions.<sup>304</sup> France also has a mutual logistics agreement with Japan.<sup>305</sup> Prior to the recent AUKUS development, Australia and France were in talks to enable French troops and warships to access Australian naval bases.<sup>306</sup> The UK and India are in the process of finalizing a military logistics agreement resembling that with France. India also has access to the British military base Diego Garcia on the ground of its military logistics agreement with the US.<sup>307</sup> The UK and Japan recently began the negotiations for a Reciprocal Access Agreement to enhance cooperation and interoperability through measures aiming at facilitating the flow of troops between the two countries.<sup>308</sup> London and Tokyo previously signed the Defence Logistics Agreement in January 2017, which allows for the sharing of equipment, facilities and services.<sup>309</sup> Finally, as a consequence of the AUKUS pact, the UK might gain access to Australian bases to carry out repairs on its nuclear submarines.<sup>310</sup> Germany and Spain have a mutual logistic agreement with South Korea.<sup>311</sup>

Besides those with European states, the main Indo-Pacific players also have agreements with one another, as well as with other states in the region. India has mutual logistics support agreements with the US, Singapore, South Korea, Australia, and Japan.<sup>312</sup> Besides India, Australia concluded a mutual logistics support agreement with the Philippines, and an Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) with the US. ACSAs are agreements designed to increase bilateral support by, for example, facilitating the exchange of food, fuel, transportation, ammunition, and equipment.<sup>313</sup> The US has ACSAs with Australia, Brunei, India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Maldives, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, and Thailand.<sup>314</sup> Japan signed the ACSA with the US, mutual

304 Huma Siddiqui, "India-France Operationalise Their Logistics Support Agreement," The Financial Express (blog), January 25, 2019, <https://www.financialexpress.com/defence/india-france-operationalise-their-logistics-support-agreement/1455043/>.

305 "日印物品協定に署名、安保協力を深化," 日本経済新聞, September 10, 2020, <https://www.nikkei.com/article/DGXMZO63687450QOA910C2PP8000/>.

306 Abhyoday Sisodia, "Australia Will Give Its Bases to French Warships to Take Care of Chinese Aggression in the Indo-Pacific," TFI Global, September 13, 2021, <https://tfiglobalnews.com/2021/09/13/australia-will-give-its-bases-to-french-warships-to-take-care-of-chinese-aggression-in-the-indo-pacific/>.

307 Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan, "India's Military Outreach: Military Logistics Agreements," The Diplomat, 09 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/09/indias-military-outreach-military-logistics-agreements/>.

308 "Japan and U.K. to Begin Talks on Access Agreement for Joint Military Exercises," The Japan Times, September 28, 2021, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2021/09/28/national/japan-uk-access-agreement-military-exercises/>.

309 "UK and Japan Strengthen Defence Ties," GOV.UK, January 26, 2017, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-and-japan-strengthen-defence-ties>.

310 Larisa Brown, "Britain's Nuclear Submarines to Use Australia as Base for Indo-Pacific Presence," The Times, September 20, 2021, sec. news, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/britains-nuclear-submarines-to-use-australia-as-base-for-indo-pacific-presence-rw6mzOp03>.

311 Jong-ho Oh, "[기획] UAE '군수지원' 체결...야3당 '국조공세' 주춤," 시사포커스, January 5, 2018, <http://www.sisafocus.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=172007>.

312 Abhijnan Rej, "India and Japan Sign Military Logistics Agreement for All to See," The Diplomat, September 12, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/09/india-and-japan-sign-military-logistics-agreement-for-all-to-see/>; Rajat Pandit, "After US, France, South Korea, Singapore & Australia, India Now Looking to Ink Military Logistics Pact with Japan," The Times of India, June 4, 2020, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/after-us-france-south-korea-singapore-australia-india-now-looking-to-ink-military-logistics-pact-with-japan/article-show/76201701.cms>.

313 "Defense Logistics Agreements" (United States Government Accountability Office, March 2020), <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-20-309.pdf>.

314 "Defense Logistics Agreements," 44.

logistics agreements with India, the UK, and France, as well as a reciprocal access agreement with Australia.<sup>315</sup> Lastly, South Korea is party to mutual logistics agreement with fifteen countries, including the United States, New Zealand, United Kingdom, Spain, and Germany.<sup>316</sup>

**Table 14. Overview of Status of Forces Agreements and Military Logistics Agreements between key European and Indo-Pacific states, and US**



|             | Australia              | Japan                  | South Korea     | India           |
|-------------|------------------------|------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| France      | SOFA under negotiation | No SOFA nor MLA        | No SOFA nor MLA | No SOFA nor MLA |
| UK          | No SOFA nor MLA        | SOFA under negotiation | No SOFA nor MLA | No SOFA nor MLA |
| Germany     | No SOFA nor MLA        | No SOFA nor MLA        | No SOFA nor MLA | No SOFA nor MLA |
| Netherlands | No SOFA nor MLA        | No SOFA nor MLA        | No SOFA nor MLA | No SOFA nor MLA |
| Spain       | No SOFA nor MLA        | No SOFA nor MLA        | No SOFA nor MLA | No SOFA nor MLA |
| Italy       | No SOFA nor MLA        | No SOFA nor MLA        | No SOFA nor MLA | No SOFA nor MLA |
| US          | SOFA                   | SOFA                   | SOFA            | No SOFA nor MLA |

■ No SOFA nor MLA   
 ■ SOFA under negotiation   
 ■ SOFA   
 ■ Military logistics agreement (MLA signed or negotiating)

These agreements will facilitate European access to the region, and sustaining a prolonged presence, going further than Host National Support agreements in place for more low-key support. There are, however, other ways to maximize European capacity.

European states can multiply their cumulative presence by pooling resources and by pooling their existing footholds in the Indo-Pacific.

### 5.3.2. Credible European presence: prepositioning, pooling, and interoperability

European states can multiply their cumulative presence by pooling resources and by pooling their existing footholds in the Indo-Pacific. Doing so is fundamental for restocking, refueling, and repairs, given the considerable distance between their European homeports and the Indo-Pacific which further weighs down the already-limited European naval capacity. Agreements are already in place between European states to preposition small stocks of material on the facilities of other European states (for special forces, for example); these should be expanded to include other materiel. Ensuring that munitions and spare parts are already within the region makes it easier to sustain a prolonged deployment and increases the credibility of deterrence and reassurance efforts by European navies during periods of heightened tension between regional states.

It is particularly relevant to address the relative limited European naval defensive capabilities – limited in quantity, if not quality (see section 5.2.1.) – as precision-guided munitions

315 Pandit, "After US, France, South Korea, Singapore & Australia, India Now Looking to Ink Military Logistics Pact with Japan"; "Defense Logistics Agreements"; "UK and Japan Strengthen Defence Ties"; Takenaka Kiyoshi and Ju-min Park, "Japan, Australia Reach Security Pact amid Fears over Disputed South China Sea," Reuters, November 17, 2020, sec. APAC, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-japan-australia-idUSKBN27X131>.

316 Oh, "[기획] UAE '군수지원' 체결...야3당 '국조공세' 주춤."

have increased the opportunities for denial strategies at sea.<sup>317</sup> Prepositioning and pooling defensive weapons could be a first step, but improved access to the ports of states that employ interoperable vertical launch systems and missiles also reduces the technical impediments related to the resupply of munitions. For example, the UK, Netherlands, Germany, and Spain's warships operate with Mk41 Vertical Launching System, which is currently compatible with Evolved Sea Sparrow Missile (ESSM), Tomahawk Cruise Missile, Standard Missile 2, Standard Missile 3, Standard Missile 6 and Vertical Launch ASROC (VLA).<sup>318</sup> Japanese, Australian, and South Korean destroyers also use the same system.<sup>319</sup> European states that have port access to these three Indo-Pacific states could hence benefit from Mk41 interoperability to restock their warships with missiles without encountering particular technical impediments. Table 15 shows which European and Asian states use interoperable systems, alongside the US. Prepositioning stocks would diminish the trade-off between presence and readiness for European navies.

**Table 15. Complementarity of major air and missile defense systems operated by key European states, Indo-Pacific partners, and the US**



|     | UK          | FR          | IT          | DE    | ES    | NL    | GR    | DK    | BE    | PT    | NO    | IND   | AUS   | JP    | SK    | US    |
|-----|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| UK  |             | Sylver A-50 | Sylver A-50 | MK-41 | MK-41 | MK-41 |       | MK-41 |       |       | MK-41 |       | MK-41 | MK-41 | MK-41 | MK-41 |
| FR  | Sylver A-50 |             | Sylver A-50 |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| IT  | Sylver A-50 | Sylver A-50 |             |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| DE  | MK-41       |             |             |       | MK-41 | MK-41 |       | MK-41 |       |       | MK-41 |       | MK-41 | MK-41 | MK-41 | MK-41 |
| ES  | MK-41       |             |             | MK-41 |       | MK-41 |       | MK-41 |       |       | MK-41 |       | MK-41 | MK-41 | MK-41 | MK-41 |
| NL  | MK-41       |             |             | MK-41 | MK-41 |       | MK-48 | MK-41 | MK-48 | MK-48 | MK-41 |       | MK-41 | MK-41 | MK-48 | MK-41 |
| GR  |             |             |             |       |       | MK-48 |       |       | MK-48 | MK-48 |       |       |       | MK-48 |       |       |
| DK  | MK-41       |             |             | MK-41 | MK-41 | MK-41 |       |       |       |       | MK-41 |       | MK-41 | MK-41 | MK-41 | MK-41 |
| BE  |             |             |             |       |       | MK-48 | MK-48 |       |       | MK-48 |       |       |       | MK-48 |       |       |
| PT  |             |             |             |       |       | MK-48 | MK-48 |       | MK-48 |       |       |       |       | MK-48 |       |       |
| NO  | MK-41       |             |             | MK-41 | MK-41 | MK-41 |       | MK-41 |       |       |       |       | MK-41 | MK-41 | MK-41 | MK-41 |
| IND |             |             |             |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| AUS | MK-41       |             |             | MK-41 | MK-41 | MK-41 |       | MK-41 |       |       | MK-41 |       |       | MK-41 | MK-41 | MK-41 |
| JP  | MK-41       |             |             | MK-41 | MK-41 | MK-41 | MK-48 | MK-48 | MK-41 | MK-48 | MK-48 | MK-41 | MK-41 |       | MK-41 | MK-41 |
| SK  | MK-41       |             |             | MK-41 | MK-41 | MK-41 |       | MK-41 |       |       | MK-41 |       | MK-41 | MK-41 |       | MK-41 |
| US  | MK-41       |             |             | MK-41 | MK-41 | MK-41 |       | MK-41 |       |       | MK-41 |       | MK-41 | MK-41 | MK-41 |       |

317 Jonathan D. Caverley and Peter Dombrowski, "Cruising for a Bruising: Maritime Competition in an Anti-Access Age," *Security Studies* 29, no. 4 (August 7, 2020): 671–700, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2020.1811460>.

318 "MK41 Vertical Launching System," Lockheed Martin, 2019, <https://www.lockheedmartin.com/content/dam/lockheed-martin/rms/documents/naval-launchers-and-munitions/MK41-VLS-product-card.pdf>.

319 Users support arrangements and agencies are in place that facilitate some of this.

### 5.3.3. Sustainable European presence: rotational deployments and zones of responsibility

The more persistent and sustained the presence of European states in the Indo-Pacific is, the more it is a visible sign of the interests at stake for the Europeans. But the obvious limits in European capacity discussed above make a sustained presence difficult. One can consequently question the wisdom of proceeding as such, even if the suggestions listed above – prepositioning and pooling munitions and parts, and ensuring access to ports – should all strengthen the European ability to stay in the region.

If Europeans wish to proceed and boost their sustained naval presence in the region, despite the risks involved, another step forward would be to coordinate the rotational deployment of multinational European contingents in the Indo-Pacific. European states could expand on the EU's Coordinated Maritime Presence concept and experience that is already in use in the Gulf of Guinea.<sup>320</sup> European ships can rotate in and out of the region to a schedule, ensuring that a credible multinational force remains in place. It would leave a visible and persistent presence that signals a shared European interest in the stability and openness of the region to partners in the Indo-Pacific. While the EU concept would act as a model, any arrangement must include the UK. Given the limited overall European capacity, it would be foolhardy for both the UK and the EU states to not coordinate their efforts.

Limited European capacity can be used more effectively by compartmentalizing the sealines of communications between the key European ports and those in East Asia into distinct zones of responsibility. The zones can be grouped around key maritime chokepoints where European navies already have a presence. Such a multinational European approach to the Indo-Pacific would result in seven zones of responsibility: (1) the North Sea to Mediterranean; (2) the Red Sea; (3) the eastern coast of Africa; (4) Persian Gulf; (5) the Western Indian Ocean; (6) the Eastern Indian Ocean; and (7) the Western Pacific.

As the key European naval powers France and the UK are best-positioned to take the lead; given the distribution of their territories and bases, France would be well-positioned to take the lead in the Western Indian Ocean and the eastern coast of Africa, while the UK could take the lead in the Persian Gulf and the Eastern Indian Ocean. But French ships would operate in the British zone like British ships would operate in the French one, as would the ships of other European navies. Mixing ships, while taking complimentary national capabilities into account, would ensure it would be difficult to pursue divisive policies against the Europeans; analogous to NATO's multinational enhanced forward presence in Eastern Europe. If the UK and France could successfully coordinate their efforts, it would even be possible to sustain one multinational European carrier strike group in the Indian Ocean on a permanent basis. This would signal a serious joint European commitment to stability and openness in the region.

The strength of the European commitment would be further strengthened if these multinational arrangements would include ships from key Indo-Pacific partners like Japan, South Korea, Australia, and India.<sup>321</sup> The risk of European entanglement through joint deployments into potential risk-taking behavior by Indo-Pacific partners would be ameliorated by the

<sup>320</sup> "The EU Launches Its Coordinated Maritime Presences Concept in the Gulf of Guinea," Text, EEAS - European External Action Service - European Commission, accessed January 5, 2022, [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/91970/eu-launches-its-coordinated-maritime-presences-concept-gulf-guinea\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/91970/eu-launches-its-coordinated-maritime-presences-concept-gulf-guinea_en).

<sup>321</sup> We take into account the mixed affinity of European states and India, but still include it due to its size, centrality, and role in the Quad.

The more persistent and sustained the presence of European states in the Indo-Pacific is, the more it is a visible sign of the interests at stake for the Europeans.

shared value affinity with these key states that are both strategically relevant and with shared affinity (see section 2.3.). It would also meet the demand from within the region (see section 4.2.) for a great European presence.

The real question is whether joint European-Indo-Pacific multinational naval deployments would be better served by explicitly not including the US; would this avoid the appearance of encirclement in Beijing's eyes? It is quite likely that this bridge has already been burned. In that case, there would still be benefits from creating multiple centers of decision-making that would complicate the calculus of Chinese policymakers.

A caveat is required: coordinating a multinational European naval presence will be easier than the more demanding requirements of coordinating activities. What is needed is what Geoffrey Till calls an "interoperability of the mind" that can overcome cultural and political differences, pertaining to readiness to accept command from foreign officers, and the willingness of national capitals to delegate authority. The fact that the US and Europeans have found such coordination challenging within NATO, despite over seven decades of experience, suggests that multinational arrangements would be difficult to simply replicate elsewhere.<sup>322</sup>

## 5.4. Conclusion: begin matching ends to means

The chapter summarized European naval capacity and estimated how many prolonged deployments various navies could feasibly manage. It then suggested several ways to more effectively make use of that limited capacity, namely by improving mutual access, pooling resources, ensuring more interoperability, and dividing the Indo-Pacific into zones of responsibility. Within those zones, analogous to EU's Coordinated Maritime Presence concept that is already in use in the Gulf of Guinea, a rotational deployment scheme would ensure a persistent and sustained European naval presence. This would send a clear signal to partner states and to revisionist states that Europeans believe they have strong interests at stake in ensuring the security and openness of the Indo-Pacific maritime commons.

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<sup>322</sup> Till, *Seapower*, 302.

# 6. Conclusions:

## How to guard the commons?

The values and interests at stake in the Indo-Pacific make it difficult to avoid European engagement of some kind in the region altogether. Europe cannot ignore the importance of the openness of the maritime commons and the stability of East Asia, Southeast Asia, and South Asia. Moreover, certain forms of European engagement could, under certain conditions, contribute to bringing stability and dampen the pressures pushing the region towards escalation. Now is the time to start matching ends to means, either by lessening Europe's ambitions or by increasing capacity. Europeans have options to act within the region though. The report offers a series of solutions that can be summarized in six recommendations.

- **Pick strategically relevant states, as well as those with which you share ideological affinity, but be ready accept some trade-offs with affinity**

To uphold a stable, open, and multilateral order in the Indo-Pacific, Europeans need strong and dependable partners within the region. As the policy statements have put it, Europeans need "likeminded" partners. What that means in practice is not always clear. Clearly some states are strategically important, while others are close to Europe in terms of democratic and other values. Both are preferable, but it is unavoidable that the two dimensions will not perfectly overlap. Based on our multi-criteria method in chapter 2, we identify several groupings of states in the Indo-Pacific: (1) high strategic relevance and high value affinity; (2) high strategic relevance and low strategic affinity; (3) mixed strategic relevance and affinity; (4) low relevance and affinity. European policymakers can use the framework to identify partners across important dimensions related to European values and interests. How states score on these dimensions can vary over time and over issues, making them more or less attractive to European states to partner with at various moments.

Using the assessment of Europe's peers and partners in the Indo-Pacific offers a complex picture that highlights the unavoidable trade-offs. To be sure, there are states in the first category, such as Australia, Japan, and South Korea, which are not only important to Europe because of their economic, political, and security weight, but also because their outlook and values overlap with those of most Europeans. Taiwan also belongs in this category. Yet, the second category covers states like Vietnam. More crucially, China is also in that category. The third, however, is the most difficult to interpret category, including states such as India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. The fourth category is the largest, formed largely by insular and smaller states such as Bhutan, Brunei, Cambodia, Fiji, Laos, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, and Timor Leste whose affinity to Europe is mixed and with very low strategic relevance. Arguably, they should not be the first priority of European diplomatic efforts.

Now is the time to start matching ends to means, either by lessening Europe's ambitions or by increasing capacity.

Within the region, the presence of strategically relevant Indo-Pacific states that do not fully share the same values as European states, could push the latter towards uncomfortable decisions. Building a broad coalition of states that share an interest in stabilizing maritime security in the Indo-Pacific will probably require working with states that do not share values. Alienating these countries would be counterproductive and could end up pushing them further away from Europe. A diplomatic balancing act could avoid the possibility of antagonizing these strategically relevant states.

- **Increase and coordinate European presence in maritime security organizations**

Indo-Pacific states face numerous security challenges and European states have experience, and in some cases considerable expertise, in addressing some of these challenges. There is already considerable cooperation in the area of environment and climate security. In addition, there is scope for additional EU or European support for Indo-Pacific states in the areas of maritime security and law enforcement, as well as governance, norms, and conflict prevention.

For Japan, South Korea, and Australia, states that are both highly relevant and with high affinity, the needs is largely for conflict prevention. Unfortunately, this precisely means addressing the conflict between China and its neighbors. UNCLOS should be the key focus of intention, also because it includes China, as well as the US. Motivating the US to look again for ratification could have real benefits here. For the states that are of high relevance and with mixed to low affinity, which are China and Vietnam, in contrast, maritime security and law enforcement, as well as engagement on the environment, and climate security are real needs. Engagement on those issues through ASEAN-EU, ASEM, ESIWA, and IMO might yield results that would signal that the European approach is inclusive, which would be specifically beneficial in the case of China. Of course, whether China would welcome real progress on these issues is unclear, but also not in European hands. For the states that are of mixed relevance and mixed affinity, which is a more diverse group, the needs are also more diverse. States like Indonesia and Thailand have a high need for maritime security and law enforcement, and the Malaysia and the Philippines have serious needs as well. These strengthen the motive to engage through ASEAN-EU, ASEM, and ESIWA. In terms of environment and climate security, the needs are most obvious with Indonesia, India, and the Philippines, but also Thailand to an extent. Again, this calls for devoting resources to IMO (which also includes China), ASEAN, ASEM, and the Indian Ocean Rim Association. When it comes to conflict prevention, all the states in Southeast Asia have a broad need, underlining why UNCLOS is so crucial.

- **Engage with China, but accept limits of inclusiveness**

If Europeans decide to play a greater role in the Indo-Pacific, they essentially face the choice between doing so by participating in a *collective security* system or in a *collective defense* system. In the former, China would be included to ensure security and stability within the region as a whole. In the latter, Europeans would partner with states within the region, as well as the US, to constrain China from upsetting regional security and stability. The existing European policy documents that focus on the Indo-Pacific suggest a preference for an inclusive approach. The thinking is that excluding and further isolating China could risk accelerating the downward spiral within the Indo-Pacific. Europeans have tried to thread the needle in the Indo-Pacific by reassuring states in the region, but simultaneously avoiding the appearing of ganging up on China. Engaging in regional organizations and agreements that include China – like ASEAN-EU, IMO, and other – could deliver the kind of systemic outcomes Europeans are looking for.

Yet, Europeans must face the fact that China has been decidedly antagonistic towards the European naval presence and their engagement on the behalf of Hong Kong, of Taiwan, and of the Uighur minorities in China. With regards to living up to European values and interests while including China, that ship may have sailed. The 2021 AUKUS deal in which the US and the UK pledged nuclear-powered submarines to Australia shows how difficult that balancing act already is. The multinational UK-led carrier strike group that included both a Dutch and an American ship, also underlines that real reassurance of regional partners and allies will likely come at a cost in Sino-European relations. European collective security and collective defense approaches in the Indo-Pacific are not likely to be compatible with each other.

- **Prepare for worst-case scenarios**

Should Europeans engage with the Indo-Pacific, and the Sino-American competition escalate into open warfare, they must accept that they will become politically and militarily involved. A European role might not involve direct participation in hostilities in the Western Pacific, but Europeans should prepare to backfill US responsibilities for maritime security in the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean, in the Red Sea and the Gulf. Moreover, they could be asked to play a role in maintaining open sealines of communication for allies in the (Western) Indian Ocean, and even asked to help close the transport of oil and gas, and other goods, to China. A participation in blockade activities would make Europe a target of Chinese reprisals – whether military within the region, or economic or information-warfare within Europe. While a highly unwelcome set of scenarios that current European engagement is seeking to prevent, European agency in shaping events in the region is limited. They thus must prepare for the worst-case scenarios as well.

At present, European navies are highly limited, both in size and in their capacity to defend themselves, let alone deliver offensive weaponry. They are weighted towards lighter ship classes, rather than the heavier ones. Their capacity to deliver a visible signal of European interests at stake in the Indo-Pacific through their presence, is further limited due to demands for maintenance and repairs of ships, as well as rest and recover, and training for navy personnel. The number of ships that Europeans can actually deploy is closer to a quarter or even a fifth of the size of their navies. That number must then be further divided between commitments in other regions.

Simply put, the European role in the Indo-Pacific could quickly escalate, and European navies are not well prepared for such an escalation. Investing in European naval capacity sooner rather than later is thus essential.

- **Coordinate European presence in the region with regional partners, ensure access agreements, agree on zones of responsibility**

Despite the risks mentioned, a European naval presence would send an important signal that Europeans believe they have real interests at stake in the Indo-Pacific. Whomever has sea control and/or the ability to deny the use of the waters in the Indo-Pacific shapes the future of the region, and thus of global affairs. A European naval presence could underline to China that open and secure maritime commons in the Pacific and beyond are an issue valued by more states than only the US, Japan, and other regional states that China is involved in rivalries with.

Coordinating a European naval presence with key Indo-Pacific states would ensure a more persistent and sustained presence, which underlines to a greater extent the issues at stake than incidental passages through the region by a few ships. Europeans already have access

Europeans must face the fact that China has been decidedly antagonistic towards the European naval presence and their engagement on the behalf of Hong Kong, of Taiwan, and of the Uighur minorities in China.

points in the region through military bases and detachments that are located close to key chokepoints. These access points are either on national territories or through bilateral agreements with host states. France, the UK, and Italy are the key states in this context, especially the former two. But the Netherlands, Germany, and Spain, also have assets within the region. Expanding this footprint within the region through port access agreements is therefore highly important.

The European presence in the region would be further strengthened through coordinate rotational deployment of multinational European contingents in the Indo-Pacific. Such an approach could build on the model of the EU's Coordinated Maritime Presence concept that has already been applied in the Gulf of Guinea – but preferably including the UK. European ships can rotate in and out of the region, thereby ensuring a sustained presence that signals the European stake in the stability and openness of the region.

Compartmentalizing the sealines of communication between the key European ports and those in East Asia as distinct zones of responsibility around the key maritime chokepoints would further sustain a persistent and predictable European naval presence. Such a multinational European approach to the Indo-Pacific would result in seven zones of responsibility: (1) the North Sea to Mediterranean; (2) the Red Sea; (3) the eastern coast of Africa; (4) Persian Gulf; (5) the Western Indian Ocean; (6) the Eastern Indian Ocean; and (7) the Western Pacific. France and the UK are the best-positioned European states to take the lead in such an arrangement: France in the Western Indian Ocean and the eastern coast of Africa; the UK in the Persian Gulf and the Eastern Indian Ocean. But their ships, and those of other European states would rotate in and out of those zones. Finally, these multinational European patrols would send an even stronger signal if they included key Indo-Pacific partners such as Japan, South Korea, Australia, and India.

- **Preposition and pool resources**

Strengthening the credibility of European naval forces in the Indo-Pacific would be aided by pooling their resources and their access points in the Indo-Pacific. Given that European forces would operate at some remove from their homeports in Europe, prepositioning and pooling resources would help with restocking, refueling, and repairs. This would facilitate sustaining a presence through prolonged deployments far from home. Some of such agreements already exist between European states, but these could be expanded to include essential munitions and spare parts. Specifically with regards to defensive means, where European navies are already weak, such efforts would go a long way towards boosting credibility.

Simply put, a persistent and sustained European naval presence in the Indo-Pacific would act as a visible sign of European interests at stake in the region – but the credibility of this presence would require preparations and investments as soon as possible. A credible presence would reassure partners and allies in the region, and could possibly act as a brake on revisionist behavior by other states. Together with engagement with regional states on the other dimensions of maritime security in multilateral forums and agreements, European interest in secure, stable, and open maritime commons would be clear. In doing so, they may contribute to dampening the risks of further escalation in the Indo-Pacific, and Europeans will take early but substantial steps towards guarding the maritime commons.

The European presence in the region would be further strengthened through coordinate rotational deployment of multinational European contingents in the Indo-Pacific. Such an approach could build on the model of the EU's Coordinated Maritime Presence concept.



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