



The EU approach to cooperation in the Indo-Pacific from Strategy to Practice

Perception and involvement of
significant actors in the EU's
Indo-Pacific strategy

**THE EU APPROACH TO COOPERATION
IN THE INDO-PACIFIC:
FROM STRATEGY TO PRACTICE**
**Perception and Involvement of Significant
Actors in the EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy**

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INTRODUCTION

This publication presents academic articles written within the framework of the project *The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific* funded by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Vietnam.

The strategy was announced to a wider audience by Commission President Ursula von der Leyen on 15 September 2021 in her State of the Union Address. The document, which had gone through a process of deliberation and adoption by the Council of the European Union, was made public one day later by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

In a *first phase of work* in 2021, we asked about the geopolitical strategies of individual European states (Germany, France, the Netherlands) on the one hand, and of the European Union as a whole on the other, and also looked at the reactions to these strategies in Vietnam and its immediate environment. Here now, in a *second phase of work*, which covers the year 2022, we are dealing with more far-reaching questions that resulted from Phase I. However, these were formulated before Russia's attack on Ukraine – an event that changed the international system considerably. We will begin by presenting our original question horizon and then, building on this, take a further step to ask about those changes that the Ukraine war has brought about.

The questions for our research in 2022 originally focused on how European initiatives in the context of the Indo-Pacific problem are perceived by actors such as the USA, Japan, South Korea, China, India, ASEAN, Indonesia, Thailand and Australia. For fundamentally, it was to be noted at that time: European geopolitics or *The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific* entered new territory in many ways. For the EU had not previously attempted to distinguish itself as a truly independent actor with its own profile on this issue. The European Union's strategy for the Indo-Pacific was thus to be understood as a genuine innovation with which the EU tried to react to the changed international system on the one hand to the loss of importance of the USA and on the other hand to an active expansion policy of China, which is linked to the *Belt and Road Initiative*. The EU

Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific was thus a genuine foreign policy innovation. Our original questions were the following:

- How is the European initiative perceived by the major players, especially other actual or potential major powers such as China, the US, and India, or multinational organisations such as ASEAN or other major regional players, such as Japan, Indonesia, Thailand and Australia?
- Is there a real need for greater European engagement in the Indo-Pacific region, and on what assumptions is this based? What are the expectations for European initiatives in the region? In which areas of cooperation, classical diplomacy, military, economy and information or in which combinations do the stakeholders expect the best results of cooperation with Europe and its member states?
- To what extent do the European initiatives coincide with the respective national or ASEAN initiatives on the Indo-Pacific? Who is trying to make use of the European initiatives and how? Where are there synergies, where are conflicts to be identified?

These kinds of questions, which dated back to the conceptualisation of our project in 2020 and 2021, were justified at that time by the fact that the international system in the future would consist of a complex network of more or less important actors with quite divergent interests. In the context of geopolitics for the Indo-Pacific region, this meant that there could be various coalitions and conflicts of interest between the European side and other global players. Put simply, before February 2022, it still looked as if

- China might have the greatest interest in stronger independent European geopolitics,
- Russia was rather ambivalent about this, as increased European strategic autonomy could also be directed against itself, and
- The USA, already traditionally, would not look very favourably on a stronger European engagement outside the classical NATO area.

Reality, however, has overtaken our analyses. For Russia's invasion of Ukraine has led to a significantly changed international situation: Not since the 1980s has the international system been so polarised, and at present it almost seems as if two superpowers, China and the USA, are facing each other with their respective junior partners, Russia and the European Union, respectively. From this perspective, the

validity of which would still have to be tested, the Ukraine war, which is characterised by a strong indirect of EU middle and direct involvement of Russia, would be a conflict that would have been called a *proxy war* in the Cold War. It remains to be seen, however, whether such a pointed thesis will turn out to be accurate at all.

Such an oversimplifying idea is countered by fundamental findings in the contributions gathered here and many other results of the excellent case studies we have collected. Here, therefore, is a short list of our authors and their topics:

- Prashanth Parameswaran (USA)
- Go Ito (Japan)
- Le Thi Thu Giang (South Korea)
- Nguyen Thuy Chi (China)
- Vo Xuan Vinh (India)
- Alan Chong (ASEAN)
- Muhadi Sugiono (Indonesia)
- Nguyen Thi Thuy Trang (Thailand)
- Bui Hai Thiem (Australia)

How do the research results of these individual studies add up? In our view, three points are particularly noteworthy.

First, the most important finding of all: the international system is in considerable flux with the end of the short American century, which obviously lasted little more than 30 years between the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Ukraine war. But where these developments will lead is as yet little more than speculation. Possible forecasts depend on far too many factors of uncertainty: Future election results in the USA, questions about cohesion in the European Union, effects of the embargo against Russia on Russia or the embargo countries themselves, or the future role of China. Also, to be mentioned are unforeseeable irrationalities that would correspond to the Brexit in Great Britain or even clearly dwarf it in its dimension. Hardly anyone dares to make a prognosis about future developments at the moment, and the authors gathered here do the same.

Secondly, most of the contributions show how little the Indo-Pacific littoral states themselves want a polarisation of the international system along the lines of the Cold War. Countries like India (for all its tensions with China) or Indonesia and Thailand or the ASEAN community and even states like Japan and South Korea see

the desired future of international relations more in attempts to build multilateral security systems. This has decidedly been the strategy of the main European states or the EU as a whole over the last three decades. Even Australia, perhaps the most loyal ally of the USA in the Indo-Pacific region, faces the difficult dilemma of having to balance its security and economic goals (here the USA, there China) against each other, hoping for a closer partnership with Europe. And above all: neither India nor Thailand nor Indonesia or ASEAN to be pulled to one side in the conflict between the USA and China!

Thirdly, the US seems to have a renewed interest in cooperation with European states after the four years of the erratic Trump administration. Focusing on the Indo-Pacific, Washington is apparently trying to revitalise transatlantic cooperation and integrate European initiatives for the Indo-Pacific into this alliance. There should be no doubt, however, that until the collapse of the Eastern bloc, the transatlantic alliance, for all its vicissitudes, was always far from an equal partnership between the US on one side of the Atlantic and the Europeans on the other. China, which took a long time to find a response to the European Indo-Pacific initiative, views closer cooperation between the USA and Europe in the aforementioned region with great scepticism for precisely this reason. If necessary, it is likely to react more harshly than it has so far to the progress of an expansion of the transatlantic defence community into a global Atlantic, Indian and Pacific alliance vis-à-vis Europe.

But as already written above, the world situation is in motion as it has not been for a long time. Therefore, the only hope that remains is that multilateralism might not turn back into a bipolar order or disruption of the world community with unimagined terrible consequences. One glimmer of hope – despite all the justified indignation over Russia's attack on Ukraine – is that important actors in the Indo-Pacific region are trying to avoid this polarisation. But the future is more uncertain than it has been for a long time. What remains is our cautious attempt, documented here, to subject these changes to an initial analysis with a view to the Indo-Pacific region and its rapidly changing framework conditions for a European strategy.

Minding the Transatlantic Gaps: US Perceptions of EU Indo-Pacific Cooperation Strategy

Prashanth Parameswaran





This paper examines the evolving perceptions in the United States with respect to Europe’s strategic approach to cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. In particular, it focuses on the European Union (EU) strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, which saw conclusions adopted in April 2021 and a joint communication presented in September of that year, just ahead of the adoption of the new U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy which was issued in February 2022 by the administration of U.S. President Joe Biden¹. Though transatlantic cooperation itself in Asia is far from a new development, the EU’s strategy comes at a time when both the United States and Europe are attempting to increase their prioritization of the Indo-Pacific in their respective outlooks amid a confluence of developments including the region’s growing strategic weight, the challenges posed by increased great power competition and years of a global democratic rollback.

¹ Council of the European Union, EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific – Council Conclusions, April 16, 2021: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7914-2021-INIT/en/pdf>; European Commission, Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council: The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, September 16, 2021: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/jointcommunication_2021_24_1_en.pdf

The paper makes three arguments, drawing largely on the analysis of official documents, speeches by policymakers as well as conversations with U.S. and European officials.

- First, the EU's Indo-Pacific policy is a significant inflection point in terms of U.S. perception of Europe's approach in this domain because of its political, strategic and operational utility for Washington in connecting the Indo-Pacific and Atlantic theatres and institutionalizing and implementing strategic policy coordination across shared and overlapping sectoral priorities.
- Second, Europe's policy has revealed a mix of opportunities and challenges for transatlantic cooperation in the Indo-Pacific domain, with convergences in areas like prosperity, governance, and the dual digital and energy transitions existing alongside difficulties in some domains like maritime security and China.
- Third and finally, while prospects for seizing opportunities and navigating challenges may appear quite bright, that will hinge on the management by both sides of five considerations, including clarity, concreteness, consistency, comprehensiveness and calibration.

The paper will proceed in five parts. The first section will examine evolving U.S. perceptions of Europe and Indo-Pacific policy, looking at the broad sweep of U.S. history but with a focus on the twentieth century which gave rise to the contemporary contours of cooperation. The second section will then move to consider the significance of the EU's strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific adopted in 2021 within this broader U.S. policy perspective, noting some of the strategic convergences with Washington's thinking. The third section reflects on a few areas of opportunities and challenges based on the thrust of the EU Indo-Pacific strategy and related interactions between both Europe and the United States as they concern the region, to assess how both sides may be able to turn strategy into more concrete collaboration in select areas. The fourth section then looks at the future prospects of transatlantic cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, examining some of the key considerations that both sides will need to keep in mind moving forward. The paper ends with a concluding section briefly summing up the key findings.

1. US EVOLVING PERCEPTIONS OF EU AND INDO-PACIFIC POLICY

The question of transatlantic convergence in the Indo-Pacific is a recent one. For most of American history, it was Europe rather than Asia that remained the region of greatest importance to American elites. This prioritization can be traced through the arc of U.S. foreign policy, from the decades of uncertainty which followed the republic's independence from Britain and subsequent expansion in the nineteenth century, to America's rise to global prominence in the first half of the twentieth century and its late entry into two multifront World Wars, to the waging of the Cold War when Europe was the central front against Soviet expansionism even as most of the fighting against communist forces occurred in the Far East². These periods were not short on transatlantic disagreements on various fronts: indeed, in the twentieth century alone, they ranged from the transition to a post-colonial order for Asian states following World War II to shifting approaches to dealing with the Soviet Union to the operationalization of the collective security approach to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in Europe³.

While the end of the Cold War could have shifted traditional U.S. Eurocentric foreign policy towards the Indo-Pacific given the demise of the Soviet Union, Washington initially struggled to make this transition, while transatlantic ties were themselves subject to new post-Cold War tensions amid a rare moment of U.S. unipolarity. The administration of U.S. President Bill Clinton developed some aspects of U.S. Asia policy such as on China and multilateralism, but this was not rooted in an overall, consistent, and comprehensive strategy prioritizing the region itself. Meanwhile, though some transatlantic structures were developed, there were disagreements over issues such as the Balkans and differing approaches to matters like global warming, tackling rogue states and the International Criminal Court⁴. The George W. Bush administration developed a

² For an elaboration of this point, see: Michael J. Green, *By More Than Providence: Grand Strategy and American Power in the Asia-Pacific Since 1783* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

³ See, for example: Andrew Moravcsik, U.S.-EU Relations: Putting the Bush Years in Perspective, in Federiga Bindi (ed), *The Foreign Policy of the European Union: Assessing Europe's Role in the World* (Washington, D.C., Brookings Institution Press, 2010).

⁴ For an example of accounts from this period, see: Ivo Daalder, Europe: Rebalancing the U.S.-European Relationship, Brookings Institution, September 1, 2020: <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/europe-rebalancing-the-u-s-european-relationship/>; Fraser Cameron, The Future of Transatlantic Relations – Restoring Trust and Building a New Partnership, European Policy Center, June 18, 2003: <https://www.epc.eu/en/Publications/The-Future-of-Transatlantic-Relations-Restoring-Trust-and-Building-a-234d1c>.

more strategic orientation for U.S. Asia policy around what was termed a “balance of power in favour of freedom,” but the September 11 terrorist attacks did distract policymakers from a more Asia-first orientation and also produced some unilateral actions that undermined U.S. relations with certain key European states⁵.

It was not until the second decade of the twenty-first century that we saw U.S. policymakers direct a focus on the Indo-Pacific region. The Obama administration’s *pivot* or *rebalance* to Asia was an attempt to strategically focus U.S. efforts on the Indo-Pacific in general and key subregions in particular such as Southeast Asia, in recognition of the region’s immense potential, China’s rising capabilities as well as limited U.S. resourcing made evident in wars in Afghanistan and Iraq⁶. But Obama’s pivot led to the perception among some in Europe that Washington’s Indo-Pacific focus may detract from its emphasis on Europe, or that, as Kurt Campbell, one of the architects of the pivot put it, that it was “a pivot to Asia with Europe, not a pivot to Asia from Europe.”⁷ Both sides tried to seek greater alignment on aspects of Asia policy recognizing shared contemporary objectives in the Indo-Pacific despite differences in areas like strategic logic and execution, including maintaining the rules-based order, keeping open sea lines of communications including in the South China Sea as well as combating transnational challenges ranging from climate change to cybersecurity⁸.

The trend of increasing U.S. focus on the Indo-Pacific has continued since, even as the state of transatlantic relations has differed between administrations. Transatlantic divisions widened under U.S. President Donald Trump, and Trump’s brash approach to managing relations exposed divisions between the two sides on areas like the importance of hard power, the relevance of free trade and institutions, and threat perceptions regarding both Russia and China. That said, the U.S. foreign policy bureaucracy continued to advance an Asia-first approach and recognized Europe’s important role within that, and, importantly, it was during the Trump administration that Washington finally embraced the Indo-

⁵ Stanley Hoffman, US-European Relations: Past and Future, *International Affairs*, Volume 79, Issue 5 (2003), p. 1029–1036.

⁶ See: Hillary Clinton, America’s Pacific Century, *Foreign Policy*, October 11, 2011; Prashanth Parameswaran, *Elusive Balances: Shaping US Southeast Asia Strategy* (Palgrave Macmillan, January 2022).

⁷ Kurt Campbell, *The Pivot: The Future of American Statecraft in Asia* (New York: Twelve Books, 2016).

⁸ For an elaboration of this point, see: Phillip C. Saunders (2013) The Strategic Logic of the U.S. Rebalance to Asia and a Potential European Role, in *Transatlantic Security Cooperation in Asia after the U.S. Pivot*, Working Session, 18–19 April 2013 (Paris, The German Marshall Fund of the United States, June 2013), http://www.gmfus.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/TSTF_Series3_May13_complete_web.pdf.

Pacific terminology consistently across its strategic documents⁹. Key policy documents during the Trump administration, such as the Indo-Pacific Strategy Report, noted that U.S. allies like Britain and France play a critical role in maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific¹⁰. More broadly, there was also a growing recognition within the U.S. foreign policy establishment – beyond the executive branch – that the China challenge warranted greater strategic U.S.-Europe Indo-Pacific collaboration that extended beyond discrete pieces of cooperation, including diplomatic messaging coordination, policy dialogues, regional institution participation and complementary but separate actions on regional challenges¹¹.

The administration of U.S. President Joe Biden saw an attempt to both further develop U.S. Indo-Pacific policy while also deepening cooperation with Europe. Biden's early reaffirming of his commitment to NATO and US-Europe ties, cast as being an important part of a combined response to "an inflection point" in history, was a welcome boost to transatlantic cooperation relative to Trump's prickly posture, with early manifestations including his attendance in G-7, NATO, and EU-US summit meetings¹². Yet transatlantic relations were not without their challenges, be it U.S. concerns about Europe's finalization of an investment agreement with China ahead of Biden's inauguration, or concerns among some European states regarding the Biden team's early foreign policy moves such as the withdrawal from Afghanistan and the signing of the Australia-UK-US trilateral security arrangement. These occurred amid ongoing changes in elite and popular perceptions within Europe on several fronts, including lingering doubts on U.S. reliability and staying power¹³. These early signs have underlined the necessity of greater strategic transatlantic cooperation beyond post-Trump rapprochement.

⁹ U.S. Department of State, A Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision, November 4, 2019: <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Free-and-Open-Indo-Pacific-4Nov2019.pdf>.

¹⁰ The Department of Defense, Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships and Promoting a Networked Region, June 1, 2019: <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jul/01/2002152311/-1/-1/1/DEPARTMENT-OF-DEFENSE-INDO-PACIFIC-STRATEGY-REPORT-2019.PDF>.

¹¹ See, for instance: United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, The United States and Europe: A Concrete Agenda for Transatlantic Cooperation on China, November 2020: https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/SFRC_Majority_China_Europe_Report_FINAL_P_and_G.pdf; The White House, Fact Sheet: U.S.-E.U. Cooperation, March 26, 2014: <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/03/26/fact-sheet-us-eu-cooperation>.

¹² White House, Remarks by President Biden at the 2021 Virtual Munich Security Conference, February 19, 2021: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/02/19/remarks-by-president-biden-at-the-2021-virtual-munich-security-conference/>.

¹³ See for example: Ivan Krastev and Mark Leonard, The Crisis of American Power: How Europeans See Biden's America, European Council on Foreign Relations, January 19, 2021: <https://ecfr.eu/publication/the-crisis-of-american-power-how-europeans-see-bidens-america/>.

2. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE EU INDO PACIFIC STRATEGY IN PERSPECTIVE

If the early signs during the Biden administration underlined the necessity of greater strategic transatlantic cooperation beyond post-Trump rapprochement, then the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy provided a welcome source of alignment for the Biden team as it developed its own approach to the Indo-Pacific and sought greater coordination with allies and partners including Europe. Seen from this U.S. policy perspective, the EU's release of its Indo-Pacific strategy is important for political, strategic, and operational reasons.

First, politically, the EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy provides an opening for U.S. officials to emphasize the connectivity of the Indo-Pacific and Atlantic theatres. The EU's strategy fits with the U.S. efforts to collaborate more with Europe in the Indo-Pacific to move past Obama era perceptions of a pivot to Asia away from Europe and to cement Washington's own adoption of the Indo-Pacific terminology, which only concretized under the Trump administration¹⁴. In that sense, the EU's adoption of the *Indo-Pacific* terminology, which it had not done previously and came after the adoption of national strategies by France, Germany, and the Netherlands, provided a sense of convergence in strategic outlook in Washington's eyes. Russia's invasion of Ukraine only strengthened the importance of this point. Following the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, U.S. officials repeatedly trying to combat the narrative that Washington may pivot away from Asia to Europe by instead suggesting that the crisis provides an opportunity to both further deepen EU-US cooperation in the Indo-Pacific and also intensifying interest among U.S. Indo-Pacific allies, partners and friends in traditionally "out of area" European issues that extend beyond Asia but nonetheless impact the region¹⁵.

U.S. statements and official documents attest to this. In a lecture delivered to an Australian think tank in November 2021, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan directly mentioned the EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy and said it was representative of the fact that "a robust, strong, dynamic, vibrant trans-Atlantic relationship, which we feel passionately invested in, will also translate into greater common purpose with our friends in Europe, in dealing with the whole range of challenges that

¹⁴ Author conversation with European official, Washington, D.C., October 2022.

¹⁵ The German Marshall Fund, US-Europe Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, February 28, 2022: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ol_ujg6ZZQ4.

present themselves in the Indo-Pacific region.”¹⁶ The Biden administration’s Indo-Pacific Strategy, released in February 2022, also emphasized this point. “Allies and partners outside of the region are increasingly committing new attention to the Indo-Pacific, particularly the EU and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization,” the Strategy notes¹⁷. “We will harness this opportunity to align our approaches and will implement our initiatives in coordination to multiply our effectiveness.” It goes on to state that the Biden administration “will build bridges between the Indo-Pacific and the Euro-Atlantic, and, increasingly, with other regions, by leading on shared agendas that drive collective action.”¹⁸ The Biden team’s National Security Strategy, released in October 2022, is more specific, noting that “U.S. interests are best served when our European allies and partners play an active role in the Indo-Pacific, including in supporting freedom of navigation and maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait.”¹⁹

Second, strategically, the EU’s articulation of its own Indo-Pacific strategy has helped intensify the momentum to construct the foundation for both sides to build a denser network of interactions between them to institutionalize policy coordination on the Indo-Pacific. In 2021 alone, there were several developments on this front, including the establishment of the new U.S.-E.U. Trade and Technology and Council (TTC) which was established at the June 2021 U.S.-EU summit, as well as the holding of the first-ever U.S.-EU high-level consultations on the Indo-Pacific, which were kicked off in December 2021. While there were still doubts about the extent to which these institutions would produce progress and could be sustained by both sides amid changes in political leadership, the proliferation of these new strategic mechanisms addressed the need identified during the early years of the post-Cold War period of adapting and reinforcing existing U.S.-Europe institutions for the widening range of challenges in the 21st century.

Noting the link between U.S.-Europe Indo-Pacific strategic convergence and the increasing density of interactions, Kurt Campbell, deputy assistant to the president and Indo-Pacific coordinator under the Biden administration,

¹⁶ Jake Sullivan, 2021 Lowy Lecture, Lowy Institute, November 11, 2021: <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/2021-lowy-lecture-jake-sullivan>.

¹⁷ The White House, Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States, February 2022: chrome-extension://efaid-nbmnnnibpcajpcglcfindmkaj/<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/U.S.-Indo-Pacific-Strategy.pdf>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ The White House, National Security Strategy, October 2022: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>.

characterized the density of dialogue during keynote remarks at a transatlantic dialogue on the Indo-Pacific held in May 2022 as “an explosion,” referencing the “almost unprecedented” level of engagement on Indo-Pacific issues²⁰. “I spend more of my time engaging with European partners around various initiatives in the Indo-Pacific almost than I do with Indo-Pacific partners,” Campbell noted during the conversation²¹. He added that more progress had been made on specific issues as well as broad strategic priorities than had been imagined when the administration initially came into office, admitting that the initial notion of Indo-Pacific partnership had applied mostly to countries within the region.

Third, operationally, the EU’s strategy provides an opening to work on shared and overlapping sectoral priorities of importance to each side. The EU’s Indo-Pacific strategy, like the Biden administration’s Indo-Pacific strategy, goes beyond general priorities like rule of law or economic and delves into more specific sectoral areas that reflect increasingly granular regional needs. Most of the seven priority areas listed in the EU strategy focus on specific sectors in addition to general areas like sustainable and inclusive prosperity and security, including green transition, ocean governance, digital governance and partnerships and connectivity²². Similarly, the some of the ten core lines of effort in Biden’s Indo-Pacific Strategy’s action plan that the administration meant to pursue over 12–24 months include sectoral areas like digital, climate and maritime security, some of which also relate to the administration’s own domestic priorities²³. This alignment has in turn provided an opening for both sides to discuss shared priorities within their respective evolving Indo-Pacific strategies, both on an ongoing basis and via more regularized fora. The 2022 National Security Strategy notes that Washington will “place a premium on growing the connective tissue” in sectoral areas like trade, technology and security between democratic allies and partners in the

²⁰ Kurt Campbell, Remarks to Center for Security Diplomacy and Strategy-Center for Strategic and International Studies Transatlantic Dialogue on the Indo-Pacific, CSIS, May 9, 2022: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vR7Pee2Vqx4>.

²¹ Ibid.

²² European Commission, Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council: The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, September 16, 2021: chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcaj-pcglclefindmkaj/https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/jointcommunication_2021_24_1_en.pdf.

²³ The White House, Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States, February 2022: chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcaj-pcglclefindmkaj/<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/U.S.-Indo-Pacific-Strategy.pdf>.

Indo-Pacific and Europe “because we recognize that they are mutually reinforcing and the fates of the two regions are intertwined.”²⁴

U.S. policymakers have pointed to this directly, and it has already begun to take shape. For example, when asked where the clearest areas of US-Europe alignment were regarding Indo-Pacific cooperation following the release of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy in February 2022, Mira Rapp-Hooper, the director for Indo-Pacific strategy at the National Security Council, mentioned three specific sectors: maritime, which she said was “leading the charge,”; infrastructure and connectivity with an emphasis on digital; and climate change and resilience²⁵. Of these, infrastructure in particular was a sectoral area where direct linkages were made early on in 2021 between the EU strategy and U.S. sectoral priorities. The Biden administration was particularly keen to connect its domestic agenda on infrastructure, most clearly evident in the passage of the one trillion US dollar Bipartisan Infrastructure Law in November 2021, to international cooperation with already ongoing efforts by actors including the EU to promote infrastructure through initiatives like the Global Gateway. This played out in fora like the Group of Seven (G-7) in 2021, with indications of international partnership in June 2021 and a leaders’ statement on a partnership for infrastructure and investment in December 2021²⁶. Commenting on the leader’s statement in December 2021, Sullivan noted EU-US coordination on infrastructure, mentioning that “the G7 statement today comes after the European Commission’s recent Global Gateway launch and in advance of the United States’ Build Back Better World formal launch early next year.”²⁷

²⁴ The White House, National Security Strategy, October 2022: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>.

²⁵ The German Marshall Fund, US-Europe Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, February 28, 2022: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ol_ujg6ZZQ4.

²⁶ Prime Minister’s Office, G7 Leaders Statement Partnership For Infrastructure And Investment, December 3, 2021: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/g7-leaders-statement-partnership-for-infrastructure-and-investment>; White House, Fact Sheet: President Biden and G7 Leaders Launch Build Back Better World (B3W) Partnership, June 12, 2021: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/06/12/fact-sheet-president-biden-and-g7-leaders-launch-build-back-better-world-b3w-partnership/>.

²⁷ Jake Sullivan, Statement by National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan on G7 Collaboration and Build Back Better World, The White House, December 3, 2021: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/12/03/statement-by-national-security-advisor-jake-sullivan-on-g7-collaboration-and-build-back-better-world/>.

3. OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES IN US-EU INDO PACIFIC COOPERATION

Beyond the general significance of the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy for U.S. policy, the strategy also reinforced for the United States where there may be more specific areas for US-EU cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region based on Washington's own priorities. The strategy itself specifies seven designated priority areas that Europe will pursue, which are around sustainable and inclusive prosperity; green transition; ocean governance; digital governance and partnerships; connectivity; security and defence; and human security. These areas create a mix of opportunities and challenges in this regard.

On the opportunities side of the ledger, one is promoting sustainable and inclusive prosperity, particularly given the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine have tested the resilience of societies, economies and supply chains²⁸. The EU strategy clearly places importance on this: it is listed as the first of seven priority areas in the document and includes a range of key dimensions including reinforcing resilient and diversified value chains, addressing work deficits and labour rights violations and promoting open, sustainable and rules-based trade²⁹. This dovetails with U.S. strategic priorities in the Indo-Pacific region. Beyond the U.S. withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership back in 2017, both the Democratic and Republican Parties have been recalibrating their approach to free trade to address perceived concerns about the lack of benefits for U.S. citizens at home and the propagation of unfair trade practices by competitors and partners abroad, with a particular emphasis on China. U.S. policymakers have also noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has also accelerated already rising concerns about the need for supply chain diversification away from China, particularly in areas like semiconductors³⁰.

The opportunities on this front have begun playing out. A case in point is some of the ongoing interactions at the EU-US Trade and Technology Council (TTC) since it was first stood up in 2021. Within just the third working group alone, which

²⁸ For a deeper dive into the economic dynamics of EU-US ties, see, for instance: US Chamber of Commerce, Transatlantic Economy 2022, March 22, 2022: <https://www.uschamber.com/international/trade-agreements/the-transatlantic-economy-2022>.

²⁹ European Commission, Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council: The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, September 16, 2021: chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/jointcommunication_2021_24_1_en.pdf.

³⁰ See, for example: U.S. Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo, Keynote Remarks on Supply Chain Challenges at Next STEP Global Conference, November 1, 2021: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n8RppiNZQO8>.

focuses on secure supply chains, the EU and US have already been identifying key areas for supply chain diversification and standard promotion away from China in areas like solar as well as rare earths³¹. The TTC and other mechanisms have also spotlighted related U.S. initiatives where coordination has been it play in areas like combating forced labour and diversifying semiconductor supply chains. These include the Uyghur Forced Labour Prevention Act that prohibits certain goods from the Xinjiang Autonomous Region from entering the United States signed into law in December 2021, and the Creating Helpful Incentives to Produce Semiconductors and Science Act (CHIPS and Science Act) to catalyse investments in domestic semiconductor manufacturing capacity signed into law in August 2022³².

A second area is navigating dual digital and energy transitions. The EU strategy has these dual transitions as two of its seven priorities, with a focus on addressing environmental degradation while moving towards a more circular economy as well as enhancing digital partnerships across a range of areas including emerging technologies, data governance, e-commerce, resilient technology supply chains, values-based innovation and business opportunities for start-ups and small and medium enterprises³³. The emphasis on these dual transitions is also a shared priority for the Biden administration as it seeks to promote greater sectoral cooperation across the Indo-Pacific region. Apart from engaging with individual countries and in key subregions such as Southeast Asia and the Pacific, there is also a focus on these twin transitions in engagement with multilateral institutions such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) or through unilateral initiatives, be it through the working groups of the expanded Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (*Quad*), which could grow to include interactions with other

³¹ See: EU-U.S. Joint Statement of the Trade and Technology Council, Paris-Saclay France, May 16, 2022: where China accounts for the majority of total rare earth mining production and nearly all of the total rare earth separation capacity, total metal refining capacity, and global-sintered neodymium-iron-boron magnet manufacturing

³² Govinfo, Public Law 117 - 78 - An act to ensure that goods made with forced labor in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China do not enter the United States market, and for other purposes, December 23, 2021: <https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/PLAW-117publ78>; Govinfo, "CHIPS Act of 2022," August 9, 2022: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PLAW-117publ167/pdf/PLAW-117publ167.pdf>.

³³ European Commission, Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council: The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, September 16, 2021: chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcaj-pcglclefindmkaj/https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/jointcommunication_2021_24_1_en.pdf.

partners, or within the four pillars of the evolving U.S.-led Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) which as of the end of 2022 had grouped fourteen countries³⁴.

There have been some indications of this area of opportunity playing out between the two sides. A case in point is ongoing EU-US collaboration on sectoral investments through the Group of Seven (G7), including the U.S.-led Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII) launched at the G7 Leaders' Summit in Schloss Elmau in June 2022, building off of the Build Back Better World initiative. PGII intends to mobilize hundreds of billions of US dollars to deliver quality, sustainable infrastructure in four key pillars globally including in the Indo-Pacific: tackling the climate crisis and boosting energy security; expanding and deploying secure information and communications technology networks and infrastructure; developing and upgrading the infrastructure of health systems; and advancing gender equality and equity³⁵. Thus far, listed projects have included some from the Indo-Pacific region, including investments in Southeast Asia's Smart Power Program to decarbonize and strengthen the region's power system and mobilizing investment capital for internet service providers and financial technology companies in Asia that use secure network equipment and advance competition and choice in emerging markets³⁶. At PGII's launch, EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen noted that Europe would be mobilizing 300 billion euros until 2027 to add to the 200 billion US dollar announced by the United States under the EU Global Gateway, which would mean that the two actors would together make up the lion's share of the topline commitment by G7 leaders committed to mobilize 600 billion US dollar by 2027³⁷. Noting the synergy of EU-US efforts on addressing the current global gap in sectoral investments, she framed the Global Gateway as being "under the roof" of the PGII³⁸.

A third area of opportunity is promoting better governance. The EU strategy has this area at its core: the rules-based international order appears in the third

³⁴ IPEF membership is still an evolving process, and, since it is not a traditional trade agreement that requires approval by the U.S. Congress, this could change over time over the next few years or under a different administration. The countries as currently constituted include Australia, Brunei, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, United States and Vietnam.

³⁵ White House, President Biden and G7 Leaders Formally Launch the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment, June 26, 2022: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/06/26/fact-sheet-president-biden-and-g7-leaders-formally-launch-the-partnership-for-global-infrastructure-and-investment/>

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ European Commission, Statement by President von der Leyen on the occasion of the launch of the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment at the G7 Leaders' Summit, Elmau, June 26, 2022: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_22_4122

³⁸ Ibid.

sentence of the introduction of the entire strategy, and “solidify and defend the rules-based international order” appears as the first of seven listed principles for “principled and long-term engagement” with the Indo-Pacific region, which includes a commitment to respecting democracy, human rights, and the rule of law³⁹. Similarly, U.S. strategic thinking on the Indo-Pacific also has this as a core goal across administrations, even if there may be differences with respect to emphasis and implementation and questions about the state of American democracy at home and commitment to it in practice abroad. In particular, strategic documents have emphasized championing good governance; strengthening democratic institutions and rule of law; preventing the establishment of new, illiberal spheres of influence; and demonstrating to the rest of the world that democracy is the best system to deliver for the people in order to fend off governance challenges from more authoritarian regimes⁴⁰. U.S. officials familiar with drafting of the February 2022 Indo-Pacific strategy also point out that in the paragraph which refers convergences with Indo-Pacific strategies of individual U.S. partners, the sentence on the European Union acknowledges that “much like the approach the EU has announced in its Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, American strategy will be principled, long-term, and anchored in democratic resilience.”⁴¹ There have been some indications of convergences in this area of opportunity shaping up. Biden himself personally made a link between this opportunity and U.S.-Europe ties with an op-ed in June 2021 emphasizing that his trip to Europe was about rallying the world’s democracies. In the op-ed, Biden noted:

“This is a defining question of our time: Can democracies come together to deliver real results for our people in a rapidly changing world? Will the democratic alliances and institutions that shaped so much of the last

³⁹ European Commission, Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council: The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, September 16, 2021: chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcaj-pcglclefindmkaj/https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/jointcommunication_2021_24_1_en.pdf.

⁴⁰ For examples, see: U.S. Department of State, A Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision, November 4, 2019: <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Free-and-Open-Indo-Pacific-4Nov2019.pdf>; Trump White House, U.S. Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific, 2021: <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/IPS-Final-Declass.pdf>; The White House, Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States, February 2022: chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcaj-pcglclefindmkaj/<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/U.S.-Indo-Pacific-Strategy.pdf>.

⁴¹ The White House, Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States, February 2022: chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcaj-pcglclefindmkaj/<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/U.S.-Indo-Pacific-Strategy.pdf>.

century prove their capacity against modern-day threats and adversaries?”⁴²

The op-ed went on to note “I believe the answer is yes. And this week in Europe, we have the chance to prove it.” A tangible demonstration in this area of opportunity thereafter was EU participation in the U.S.-hosted Summit for Democracy, which was held in December 2021, itself a powerful demonstration of convergence in this area. At the meeting, von der Leyen, while chairing the Leader’s Session, noted that though democracy may be diverse in nature and at times imperfect in design, the challenge is reinforcing it to ensure that it is the “fairest way to deliver the greatest benefits” to people around the world, with a shared commitment to nurturing it in the face of opponents using new tools⁴³. She also further spotlighted Europe’s role as the biggest global donor for democracy support by announcing a new Global Europe Human Rights and Democracy Program worth 1.5 billion euros focused on five areas: protecting and empowering individuals; building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies; promoting a global system for human rights and democracy; safeguarding fundamental freedoms including in digital and new technologies; and delivering while working together⁴⁴.

Turning to challenges, one is unity of effort with respect to China. While the EU strategy does acknowledge differences with China which may require pushback, including in the South China Sea and human rights where “fundamental disagreements exist,” it also notes the need for “multifaceted engagement with China” with suggestions of cooperation in areas like trade, maritime and environment⁴⁵. This is a more benign outlook relative to the U.S. approach to China, which was defined as competition under the Trump administration and has crystallized under the Biden administration under the three-pillared conception of investing in U.S. strengths; aligning with allies and partners; and competing with

⁴² Joe Biden, My Trip to Europe is About America Rallying the World’s Democracies, The Washington Post, June 5, 2021: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/06/05/joe-biden-europe-trip-agenda/>.

⁴³ European Commission, President Von Der Leyen at the Summit for Democracy: EU Will Work with Partners to Strengthen our Democracies, Brussels, December 9, 2021: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/AC_21_6748

⁴⁴ European Commission, Strengthening Human Rights and Democracy in the World: EU Launches a 1.5 Billion Euro Plan to Promote Universal Values, Brussels, December 9, 2021: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_6695.

⁴⁵ European Commission, Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council: The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, September 16, 2021: chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcaj-pcglclefindmkaj/https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/jointcommunication_2021_24_1_en.pdf.

Beijing⁴⁶. More fundamentally, it reflects the reality that while the United States and Europe may share similar overall assessments of China, Europe may lack some of the clarity that Washington would ideally like from its allies because of realities such as differences in economic exposure, security commitments, diversity of perspectives within the European Union and the greater weight some of its members attach to the promise of a relationship with Beijing relative to the perils. This lack of clarity is best characterized by the EU's China trinity which emerged back in 2019, where it views Beijing simultaneously as a partner for cooperation, an economic competitor, and a systemic rival⁴⁷. It is also reflected in some data on regional perceptions, which suggests that a near-majority of EU states view the Indo-Pacific concept as a field of opportunity to pursue economic interests rather than a way to deal with China in any meaningful way⁴⁸.

This challenge has already been manifesting itself in ways that are clear in the relationship⁴⁹. As mentioned earlier, the reference to the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) in the EU strategy, on which negotiations were rushed to be concluded with China in December 2020 ahead of Biden's inauguration with the support of key European countries like France and Germany, highlights a point of initial EU-US friction, even though this was subsequently derailed by escalatory sanctions by Beijing in 2021. This also is not something that is entirely limited only to the elite or leader level. For example, polling documented in the Munich Security Report 2021 revealed that while publics on both sides of the Atlantic see China as one of the world's most significant risks, Europeans are more reluctant than North Americans about

⁴⁶ Antony J. Blinken, The Administration's Approach to the People's Republic of China, The George Washington University, Washington, D.C., May 26, 2022: <https://www.state.gov/the-administrations-approach-to-the-peoples-republic-of-china/>

⁴⁷ European Union External Action Service, EU-China Relations Factsheet, January 4, 2022: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-china-relations-fact-sheet_en#:~:text=For%20the%20EU%2C%20China%20is,on%20our%20values%20and%20interests.

⁴⁸ See, for example: Frederic Grare and Manisha Reuter, Moving Closer: European Views of the Indo-Pacific, European Council on Foreign Relations, September 13, 2021: <https://ecfr.eu/special/moving-closer-european-views-of-the-indo-pacific/>.

⁴⁹ While this section looks at individual examples of challenges, there are also more quantitative indicators. To take an example, one quantitative attempt to rank the extent of transatlantic cooperation by issue found that China accounted for one of the greatest gaps between the urgency of the challenge and quality of cooperation, followed by climate, technology and issues related to the Middle East and North Africa region. See: Cornelius Adebahr et al, "How the Transatlantic Relationship Has Evolved, One Year into the Biden Administration," Carnegie Europe, January 20, 2022: <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2022/01/20/how-transatlantic-relationship-has-evolved-one-year-into-biden-administration-pub-86213>.

confronting China, especially in the economic realm⁵⁰. U.S. policymakers also recognize that the EU-US gap in intensity and urgency with respect to perceptions of the China challenge could also be further complicated by the Russia-Ukraine crisis, which will consume even more of the limited bandwidth of some European states⁵¹.

Another challenge is resourcing in the area of defence. The EU strategy suggests that it will seek to play an important role across various security-related areas, including in aspects of ocean governance like countering illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing; maritime-security capacity-building to address threats such as human trafficking and illicit financing; and more engagements including joint exercises and port calls to fight piracy and protect freedom of navigation⁵². This converges with U.S. efforts to work more with allies and partners on security issues in the Indo-Pacific, including on maritime security. Indeed, in the February 2022 Indo-Pacific Strategy, the maritime realm appears in five out of the ten core lines of effort in the Indo-Pacific Action Plan, with priorities including expanding maritime security assistance; building maritime domain awareness; and deterring military aggression against allies and partners. The paragraph which notes the EU's increasing attention to the Indo-Pacific notes that Washington will work with like-minded partners to build regional connectivity "to uphold international law, particularly in the maritime space."⁵³

At the same time, the EU strategy does itself indicate some of the ongoing constraints that the EU faces as an entity in terms of resourcing these efforts with hard power. The strategy notes that even what U.S. policymakers might characterize as lower-hanging fruit, such as enhanced naval deployments, are still in the process of consideration, let alone more ambitious initiatives such as involvement to support freedom of navigation operations, or an expanded, sustained role for key European countries like France and Germany in providing military and law enforcement capabilities to Indo-Pacific states so they can deter

⁵⁰ See: Munich Security Conference, Mind the Gap: Priorities for Transatlantic China Policy: Report of the Distinguished Reflection Group on Transatlantic China Policy, July 2021: https://securityconference.org/assets/02_Dokumente/01_Publikationen/2021/Report_of_the_China_Reflection_Group/MindTheGap_PrioritiesForATransatlanticChinaPolicy.pdf.

⁵¹ Author conversation with U.S. official, Washington, D.C., September 2022.

⁵² European Commission, Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council: The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, September 16, 2021: chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcgiclfndmkaj/https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/jointcommunication_2021_24_1_en.pdf.

⁵³ The White House, Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States, February 2022: chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcgiclfndmkaj/<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/U.S.-Indo-Pacific-Strategy.pdf>.

unilateral attempts to change the status quo⁵⁴. This speaks to the larger challenge of the fact that most European countries – save a few like France or Britain – still lack significant military capabilities in the region, as most countries have long underinvested in defence spending. Some of the other initiatives that have been previously mooted, such as broadening the geographical scope of Operation Atalanta, expanding the geographical reach of the CRIMARIO maritime capacity building program, constructing an European aircraft carrier to play a role in Asian security, combined maritime deployments with shared participation, or expanding the coordinated maritime presences concept by establishing more maritime areas of interests, are still under consideration or have witnessed only incremental progress⁵⁵.

A third challenge is alignment on sector-specific economic domains. The EU strategy references several of these, including developing technological standards and regulations; expanding the network of digital partnerships with Indo-Pacific partners, strengthening cooperation on research and innovation; finalizing ongoing trade negotiations; developing cooperation in strategic sectors like semiconductors; and protecting international trade against unfair practices⁵⁶. Some of these areas do overlap with those mentioned in the February 2022 U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy, including critical and emerging technologies, cyber, digital and telecommunications⁵⁷. At the same time, this can also obscure lingering differences between the United States and Europe on some areas, be it remaining tariffs leftover from the Trump administration or differing approaches to aspects of the digital domain such as cloud governance or artificial intelligence.

Some of these challenges have been playing out, be it the lack of coordination on restrictions regarding China semiconductor exports or EU concerns about discriminatory domestic content requirements in breach of international rules in the form of clean energy tax credits in the Biden administration's Inflation Reduction Act. "For all its embrace of allies and partners, President Joe Biden's administration hasn't done nearly enough to restore a sense of balance in its

⁵⁴ Author conversation with U.S. official, Washington, D.C., September 2022.

⁵⁵ See, for example: Mathieu Duchatel and Roderick Kefferputz, "Balancing China in the Indo-Pacific: The Role of France and Germany," MERICS, February 22, 2022.

⁵⁶ European Commission, Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council: The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, September 16, 2021: [chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcgclefindmkaj/https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/jointcommunication_2021_24_1_en.pdf](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/jointcommunication_2021_24_1_en.pdf).

⁵⁷ The White House, Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States, February 2022: [chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcgclefindmkaj/https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/U.S.-Indo-Pacific-Strategy.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/U.S.-Indo-Pacific-Strategy.pdf).

economic relations with allies in Europe and Asia,” Ivo Daalder, the former U.S. ambassador to NATO, wrote in November 2022⁵⁸. “Recent U.S. actions now point to a return to the unilateralism and protectionism characteristic of the previous administration of former President Donald Trump,” he added⁵⁹. U.S. policymakers, for their part, are themselves aware of the challenge posed by differences in these economic domains. For example, when asked to identify differences between the approaches of the United States and Europe, Mira Rapp-Hooper, the director for Indo-Pacific strategy at the National Security Council, mentioned the reality that the “tools that we’re offering up in both the trade and economic spaces are a little bit different.”⁶⁰ She subsequently added that the gaps in these economic areas can be further reinforced as they play out across a wide range of bilateral, minilateral and multilateral fora, which will necessitate efforts aimed at minimizing duplication and reducing lingering differences, with a case in point being conversations around technology that are occurring across institutions like the TTC and the Quad⁶¹.

4. FUTURE PROSPECTS

The EU strategy also suggests that future prospects for deeper EU-US cooperation in the Indo-Pacific will rest on the ability of both sides to both seize opportunities and manage challenges in order to actually make progress on a broad agenda. As they do so, from a U.S. policy perspective, they should keep in mind five considerations best characterized as the 5Cs – clarity, concreteness, consistency, comprehensiveness and calibration.

The first consideration is clarity. Though the EU strategy suggests that there is alignment with the United States on general Indo-Pacific priorities, there are still differences in views among the U.S. strategic community about how both sides will actually balance their focus on the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific theatres amid evolving developments, including the 2021 U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, the AUKUS pact, and the growing China challenge. Though this is framed in different ways – be it a division of labour by theatre or a question of balance of functions or balance of risk – the essential question is one of how both

⁵⁸ See, for example, Ivo Daalder, Europe’s US Anxiety, Politico, November 7, 2022: <https://www.politico.eu/article/europe-us-anxiety-trade-economic-policy/>; Congressional Research Service, US-EU Trade and Economic Relations, December 21, 2021: <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF10931>.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ The German Marshall Fund, US-Europe Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, February 28, 2022: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ol_ujg6ZZQ4.

⁶¹ Ibid.

sides should clarify their responsibilities⁶². Sorting through this would also then enable both sides to progress on to more granular issues, including where it makes sense to work together and where it in fact may be more productive to work separately but in nonetheless complementary – or at the very least non-damaging – ways.

The second consideration is concreteness. While the EU strategy has indeed further catalyzed ongoing efforts by both sides to strengthen the density of networks and dialogues between them on Indo-Pacific cooperation, this increased density also comes with increased pressure to deliver specific results, lest the proliferation of meetings leads to mere talk without yielding any substantive cooperation over time. Indeed, some newer institutions like the TTC, with their multiple working groups across agencies, have already come under criticism from some for being at the risk of becoming talk shops not producing the commensurate deliverables that are aligned with the cadence of their meetings⁶³. Irrespective of the validity of these concerns, perception often is reality, particularly in Washington where the pressure for so-called deliverables is ever present. Both sides should work to find concrete areas of cooperation to drive things forward.

The third consideration is consistency. While the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy makes clear that Europe has a strong basis for a mutually beneficial relationship with the region which includes partnering with like-minded allies and partners, uncertainties about the future of commitment of both the United States and Europe are still in question in parts of the region, albeit from different perspectives and to different degrees. For the United States, the hangover from the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump still exists in part of Europe and the Indo-Pacific, and there are lingering fears over whether either Trump himself or his ideology of *Trumpism* may return after the 2024 elections and disrupt a sustained U.S. Indo-Pacific focus. For Europe, there are doubts within parts of the Indo-Pacific about its staying power, especially with the string of crises it has faced including Eurozone crisis, Brexit and the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

⁶² For one angle on this, see: Hans Binnendijk, Daniel S. Hamilton, and Alexander Vershbow, Strategic Responsibility: Rebalancing European and Trans-Atlantic Defense, Brookings Institution, June 24, 2022: <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/strategic-responsibility-rebalancing-european-and-trans-atlantic-defense/>.

⁶³ See, for example: Claude Barfield, The US-EU Trade and Technology Council is Still in Search of a Role, American Enterprise Institute, October 2022; Inside U.S. Trade, Report: EU Commission Document Points to Possible TTC Outcomes, October 4, 2022: <https://insidetrade.com/daily-news/report-eu-commission-document-points-possible-ttc-outcomes>.

Getting past these concerns will require a level of consistency that will all but put them to rest.

The fourth consideration is comprehensiveness. While EU strategy itself hits on a wide range of areas of collaboration across economics, values and security, for Washington, a key question is whether Europe's approach to the Indo-Pacific and transatlantic collaboration on this will be more heavily weighted towards the first two areas while not really making tangible progress on the third. This is in keeping with the traditional American scepticism of Europe's ability to invest in and utilize hard power capabilities to act as a security contributor in areas like maritime security, and the reality that only a few EU countries, like Britain and France, have the actual ability to project power for these purposes. While these realities may be difficult to change overnight, there may be ways to shore up the security side of the agenda by focusing on some of the other areas mentioned in the EU strategy, including ocean governance and human security.

The fifth consideration is calibration. The United States and Europe need to ensure that even as they pursue greater cooperation between themselves, they also balance that with the degree of convergence that they have with connectedness to a diverse array of Indo-Pacific countries, some of which are part of the Global South. Indeed, both sides have already been managing challenges in this respect regarding mobilizing support against Russia's invasion of Ukraine. To take just one example of this, in recognition of the need for broader-based unity around the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the US and EU countries helped forge consensus at the G7 meeting hosted by Germany in Schloss Elmau June 26–28 on democratic resilience, which also featured large Asian democracies India and Indonesia as invited participants⁶⁴. Officials involved in the drafting of the statement noted that it reflected a shared US and European recognition of the need to pair reference to the Russia-Ukraine conflict with other shared priorities, including promoting inclusion, pluralism anti-corruption and equality⁶⁵.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper has sought to examine evolving U.S. perceptions with respect to Europe's approach to cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, with a focus on the EU

⁶⁴ G7 Germany 2022, 2022 Resilient Democracies Statement, Elmau, June 27, 2022: chrome-extension://efaid-nbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/57543/2022-06-27-g7-resilient-democracies-statement-data.pdf>

⁶⁵ See, for example: Center for Strategic and International Studies, Assessing the 2022 G7 Summit: The Sherpa Perspective, July 21, 2022: <https://www.csis.org/events/assessing-2022-g7-summit-sherpa-perspective>

strategy for cooperation in the region which saw a joint communication presented in September 2021. In exploring this question, it has argued that the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy has political, strategic and operational utility for Washington and has a mix of opportunities and challenges. with convergences in areas like prosperity, governance, and the dual digital and energy transitions existing alongside difficulties in some domains like maritime security and China. The extent to which both the United States and Europe can capitalize on this convergence, seize opportunities and manage challenges will be dependent upon several considerations, including clarity, concreteness, consistency, comprehensiveness and calibration.

That said, there are any number of uncertainties that could further complicate this trajectory for U.S.-Europe cooperation on the Indo-Pacific, as the surprises of the past decade such as Trump's election, Brexit and Russia's invasion of Ukraine have reminded us. A dampening of the global economic outlook, which is increasingly likely prospect in 2023 with intensifying recession fears, could increase the focus by both the United States and Europe on their own domestic situations and perhaps even exacerbate some economic differences. Shifts in China's behaviour, including a periodic ebb in Beijing's assertiveness which has helped drive the two sides together, could undermine European unity and complicate realities in Indo-Pacific capitals. Crises in other parts of the world, be it in the form of an overthrow of the Iranian government following ongoing protests which have been ongoing since September, or a major terrorist attack that hits the United States, could also disrupt the joint strategic clarity of the Indo-Pacific as being the priority theatre.

Irrespective of what events may take shape, both the United States and Europe should continue to recognize the strategic logic that underpins transatlantic cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, which rests on the more enduring realities of the growing importance of the Indo-Pacific as a theatre; the shared history and general alignment of U.S. and European interests; and what the large combined capabilities of both actors can do to influence the balance of power in an atmosphere of intensified great power competition. All told, it is that shared notion of partnership, rather than narrower notions of *America First* or more extreme variations of European strategic autonomy, that holds the better prospect for ultimately proving a more sustainable path for navigating the shifting geopolitical landscape for all sides.

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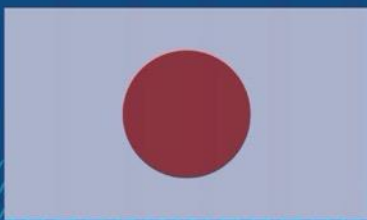
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The Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI): How Do the Two Ideas Contest or Compliment?

Go Ito





While China contends the *Belt and Road Initiative*, Japan's slogan on its provision of official development assistance has been named the *Quality Infrastructure Investment*. In search of a free and open regional order based on the rule of law in the Indo-Pacific, Japan's policy seeks to enhance the economic integration and narrow the development gap of the region as a whole.

Based on the declaration of the May 2016 summit conducted in Japan, the *Quality Infrastructure Investment* seeks

- to tackle natural disaster, terrorism and cyber-attack risks for the realization of effective governance, reliable operation and economic efficiency,
- to ensure job creation, capacity building and transfer of expertise and know-how for local communities,
- to address social and environmental impact,
- to ensure alignment with economic and development strategies including aspect of climate change and environment at the national and regional levels, and
- to enhance effective resource mobilization including through the public-private-partnership.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's statements have come to differ slightly as time goes on. In the past, he stated that Japan will not cooperate with China's BRI since the latter does not sustain the ideas of fairness or transparency. Last year, however, he mentioned Japan's readiness to look for cooperation with the BRI provided that China would maintain fairness and transparency. My lecture will assess the seemingly alterations in Abe's wordings and will examine the similarities and differences in his past and present statements.

This paper will also touch on various examples of Japan's infrastructure initiatives,

- (1) airports and seaports in Sri Lanka,
- (2) the East-West corridor and the takeover from Thailand of Dawei's development in Myanmar,
- (3) the urban planning in Chabahar, Iran, and so forth, and will also examine Japan's policy goals of these infrastructure investments.

It will conclude with the argument that Japan will maintain a certain distance from China's BRI, despite the fact that the global *trade war* between the United States and China has provided the other countries with incentives to cooperate with China and other Asian countries.

1. NORMATIVE CONCERNS AND THE SHADOW OF GEOPOLITICAL CENSORSHIP

The scholarship often argued that territorial projects are often accompanied by biases in these powers' communication policies and technologies. In studying the ancient Greek civilizational empire for instance, some argue that despite the odd example of Sparta, most of the factionalized Greek city states never approximated the absolutist empires of Asia at the time. In this sense, "the powerful oral tradition of the Greeks and the flexibility of the alphabet enabled them to resist the tendencies of empire in the East towards absolute monarchism and theocracy." (Innis, 2007, p. 104) Likewise, when one scrutinizes the enunciation of the OBOR in relation to the governing conditions within the People's Republic of China, one quickly realizes that Beijing is controlling the discourse of promoting the OBOR very tightly. The Xi government has announced that critical attitudes towards China articulated under the influence of liberal openness or from western sources are collectively a national security threat. (Buckley, 2013; Myers & Cheng, 68 things you can't say, 2017) This extends likewise to discussions of the OBOR.

On the other hand, Beijing sees no contradiction between restricting critical thought and promoting pro-China propaganda through Chinese language courses, Confucius Institutes and even online adult education courses. The entire climate of corporate and journalism-driven financial news reporting has come under a cloud of censorship. (Hernandez, 2015; Tsang, 2015) Beijing makes no apologies for sanitizing the Internet of content deemed inimical to China's national security. (Myers & Wee, China feels vindicated in its control over Internet, 2017)

More disturbingly, the idea of academic and civil society freedom to improve government by supplying constructive criticism has retreated significantly since the era of reforms initiated by Deng Xiaoping. In the latest study on the subject of Chinese civil society, a China-born sociologist argued that when dramatic social calamities such as the 2008 Sichuan earthquake occurred, spontaneous social *self-help* efforts mounted by citizens was approved *post facto* by the government under labels such as *nationalism* and acts of *citizenship*. (Xu, 2017, pp. 8-28) The Chinese authorities were in fact slow to respond on the ground, prompting local citizens to take matters into their own hands since they were equipped with "prior experience of providing social services" such as purchasing, delivering and distributing food and water; updating rescue information and donation notices online, cooking for survivors; babysitting and so on. (Xu, 2017, p. 43) In a clear sign of defensiveness, the official *People's Daily* published an editorial two days after the earthquake that compared the relief operations to a "great battle" that ought to occupy the attention of all levels of the Chinese Communist Party. The editorial stressed that disaster relief was "first and foremost a political task." (Xu, 2017, p. 44) Once this call to mobilization was explained, saving people's lives became top priority and the government could be seen to be compassionate to earthquake victims and survivors alike. This is obviously symptomatic of an insecure great power.

In March 2017, a report issued jointly by the Centre for International Media Assistance and the National Endowment for Democracy argued that China has transcended a defensive position associated with its censorship of all domestic media and the formidable Great Internet Firewall. The report noted that "without much fanfare, it [China] has turned its focus outward, seeking to take its influence over the information environment global. Through a combination of market-oriented mechanisms, propaganda pressure tactics, and action in international arenas, China is attempting to harness the global information ecosystem in

unprecedented ways.” (Kalathil, 2017, p. 1) The report highlighted three prongs of this new information manipulation strategy. Firstly, influencing foreign media reporting through press releases, briefings, and other cultivation; secondly, articulating the need for Internet sovereignty at the UN and other world forums; and thirdly, influencing *global culture* into becoming more pro-China through funding and shaping cultural festivals, sports events and engaging Hollywood’s film narratives through instruments of financing, market access and personal influence with film makers. (Kalathil, 2017, pp. 3, 32) True to expectations, the widely respected journal *China Quarterly*, published by Cambridge University Press was initially forced in August 2017 by China to excise 315 published papers from its online database hosted in the country. A massive outcry by academics worldwide forced Cambridge University Press to stage a U-turn within days of complying with Beijing’s demands. The Press decided that it was more palatable to defy Chinese censorship than to sacrifice the spirit of academic inquiry. Less successful in resisting Chinese pressure is the Australian publisher Allen and Unwin whose author, Professor Clive Hamilton, alleged in a book ominously titled *Silent Invasion* that China’s proxies had sought to influence Australia’s democratically elected parliament and political parties through OBORbes and other illicit measures. (Westcott, 2017) This volume studying the OBOR echoes the concerns of media theorists, civil society quarters and academic publishers caught up in the daunting campaign of censorship and silence surrounding Chinese foreign policy ventures abroad.

On the contrary, the ancient Silk Road was a mostly ungoverned and spontaneous transmission belt of knowledge in both eastward and westward directions. (Elisseef, 2000) Whenever war in eastern Europe and the Mediterranean sought to close off trade with Asian centres between the 1000s and 1200s, itinerant Europeans like the Polo brothers, pilgrims like Ibn Battuta, numerous adventurous Arab merchants pioneered their own pathways to the East. Historian Peter Frankopan noted that until the era of Marco Polo’s sojourn in Mongol-controlled China, the latter’s knowledge of the outside world had been “distinctly sketchy and limited”. (Frankopan, 2015, p. 185) Subsequently, the famed naval expeditions of the early 1400s led by Admiral Zheng He and his compatriots during the Ming Dynasty represented a high point of ancient Chinese attempts to actively reach out to the rest of the world. Thereafter, it was a return by Chinese dynasties to the comfort of passivity and relative isolation vis-à-vis foreign contact. Therefore, a critical study of OBOR ought to probe at the geopolitical, economic

and ideological significance of what the ancient Silk Road meant. In fact, as Frankopan and others have trenchantly argued, there were many Silk Roads on land and via the sea. (Frankopan, 2015, pp. 1-26)

Scholars have addressed the of plurality in ideas, governance, economic intercourse, social adaptation and toleration as characteristics of the original Silk. More interesting, the more reflective inquire into how travellers on the ancient Silk Roads found answers to the eternal question of cohabiting with human differences in beliefs and customs. It is good to ask if intra-Asian international frictions could be overcome through the paradigmatic change offered by the creative pathways embedded in the OBOR. Trade, infrastructure and twinning civilizations all go together in restoring intra-Asian amity in the spirit of the pre-sovereign, ancient Silk Roads. Both the metaphor and reality of the ancient Roads still challenge us today. If the ancient Persian & Greek alike viewed the roads as pathways to empire, others perceived the Roads as civilization builders. Non-state pilgrims also generated their own paradigm for the religious Roads in seeking Providence through revelation. (Dawson, 1966) These were then proverbial and literal roads to faith. Can these not be reprised today given the rich repositories of Islamic, Buddhist, Zoroastrian and Christian artefacts preserved all along today's asphalt, rail, and waterborne Roads?

2. CRITICAL GEOPOLITICS

Another significant theme that arises from scanning President Xi's remarks on the OBOR is that of the geopolitics of political reputation, national identity, and the nature of the development process itself. This is evident in the two quotes earlier from Xi containing conflated references to state-driven development, people-to-people connectivity, and the desire to connect development processes that were designed through the lenses of national sovereignties. One is tempted to simply dismiss Xi's elaboration of the OBOR as stock Chinese propaganda about development. Instead, the prospect of reviving the ancient Silk Road connects directly with the popular field of study known as critical geopolitics. As John Agnew and Stuart Corbridge, two of the foremost proponents of this perspective, put it, the reading of geopolitics "must not be confined to a reading of a world ordered geographically into a more or less fixed hierarchy of states, cores and peripheries, spheres of influence, flashpoints, buffer zones and strategic relations." (Agnew & Corbridge, 1995, p. 5) Agnew and Corbridge go on to argue that the dominance of the Westphalian territorial state is "not a trans-historical given", and therefore that

economic transactions across sovereign borders cannot be assumed to be linear, inexorable and unchanging once implementation has commenced. (Agnew & Corbridge, 1995, pp. 5-6) The interactions between politics and economics are diachronic rather than synchronic in nature.

Agnew and Corbridge argue that critical geopolitics liberate political economy from confinement to physical parts of the globe. They boldly posit that 'success or failure' of different localities in the world capitalist economy "is due to their historical accumulation of assets and liabilities and their ability to adapt to changing circumstances, and not the result of *natural*" resource endowments. (Agnew & Corbridge, 1995, p. 6) In this regard, international political economy today is as much concerned with flows of labour, goods and services, as with spaces of representation of those flows. Critical geopolitics therefore refers "not only to the material spatial practices through which the international political economy is constituted, but also to the ways in which it is represented and contested." (Agnew & Corbridge, 1995, p. 7)

3. THE REST OF ASIA: SATELLITES, FREE RIDERS, OR EQUAL PARTNERS?

On the political economy front, scrutiny of the OBOR necessarily takes on a policy-oriented direction. These are critical perspectives in the sense that in every bilateral or multilateral partnership the questions of equality of status and empathy towards the respective national interests arise. Although Xi's statements articulate the desire for the OBOR to accommodate assorted national development plans, the existing scholarship on Chinese aid and investment policies towards the Global South and Asia do not provide adequate reassurance for the participants in the OBOR.

Firstly, some scholars have floated the idea that Chinese development imperatives overseas are little more than the substitution of the familiar western policy template of neo-imperialism and *development of underdevelopment*. A case study of Chinese investment in Angola since the early 2000s has argued that they have mostly propped up an authoritarian nationalist regime by delivering mass-produced housing and infrastructure in the name of a vaguely understood notion of inclusive progress. (De Morais, 2011) Not only have Chinese construction proven shoddy and delayed, the Chinese companies appear to have only minimally engaged local Angolan labourers. Worse, Chinese government-to-

government agreements with the government in Luanda have merely opened the way for Chinese private and state-owned corporations to dominate the contracts in Angola at the expense of local labourers and companies. Additionally, the government in Luanda has been accused of turning a blind eye to criminal resource expropriation rackets run by the expatriate Chinese community in the country. Incidents of anti-Chinese vigilantism by Angolan citizens angry and fearful of Chinese economic penetration have become quite common as a result. (De Morais, 2011, pp. 73-74) Echoes of such lessons can be found in the on-going Sino-Japanese geo-economic competition for high-speed rail projects across Southeast Asia and South Asia. China is often perceived to be outbidding Japan because of the collusion between Chinese foreign policy goals and the ability to compel Chinese rail firms to competitively offer price and political “discounts” to seal the deal. (Kesavan, 2017)

Secondly, another theme can be identified in recent scholarship: the statist, top-down implementation characteristic of Chinese aid and investment. This is both good and bad. It is positive in the sense that unlike democratic great power donors where aid packages have to be often debated and ratified in their domestic political arenas following government-to-government signature, China can guarantee that whatever is promised at the negotiating table and sealed with bilateral signatures will be delivered. This is Beijing’s advantage as a one-party state that controls civil society and other forms of domestic dissent. But this also opens the way for a tremendous amount of bureaucratic politics between China’s Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Commerce, Health, Science and Technology, Communications, Education and Agriculture, as well as the assorted state-owned enterprises and banks that actually deliver the aid on the ground. (Breslin, 2013) According to Shaun Breslin, most analyses of China’s aid and investment to the Global South will encounter trends of incoherence. More importantly, Breslin finds that “the balance between challenge and opportunity largely depends on the existing political economy of the partner country.” (Breslin, 2013, p. 1287) This clearly implies that the OBOR remains in a *plasticine* stage. It is wide open to country-specific negotiation as to what suits the government of the day in the local partner territory. (Bozzato, 2017) Yet, others lament that Chinese aid and investments may suffer implementation difficulties simply because Beijing is not learning from the earlier difficulties of the World Bank and Asian Development Bank in consulting local civil society and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) about the social, economic and environmental impacts of large scale

infrastructure projects. This has happened with China's African ventures, and it is repeating itself in Beijing's partnerships in Indochina. (Alden & Hughes, 2009; Dosch & Hensengerth, 2005; Hensengerth, 2015)

The blind spot of a top-down approach to aid and investment lies in the neglect of the displacement effects of large-scale ground-breaking projects on people and their livelihoods, as well as on the ecological environment. Additionally, some political economists have pointed out that Chinese aid and investment guidelines enjoy wide political latitude that cannot be mapped in any sense to standards set by the OECD, World Bank or G7 donor policies. (Bräutigam, 2011) China does not have a dedicated Ministry of Official Development Assistance, or its equivalent, and does not appear to have drawn up a standard, transparent suite of developmental loan policies. Hence it can price the interest rate on loans below prevailing market rates and supplement them with *add on* concessionary grants or loans to sweeten a bilateral aid package, as has happened in the early 2000s with "special state loans' to Angola and the modernization plan for Nigerian railways". (Bräutigam, 2011, pp. 757-759) A converse reading of Beijing's wide political latitude to making loans is however also possible. Beijing's aid is exceptionally attractive to many Global South states simply because it is willing to be flexible and accommodative to local needs. The invocation of *friendship* considerations, the presumed ideological solidarity of countries on the modern Silk Road focused on development, and the avoidance of loan conditionality upon prevailing market rates and human rights standards, all act to enhance the appeal of China's OBOR vision.

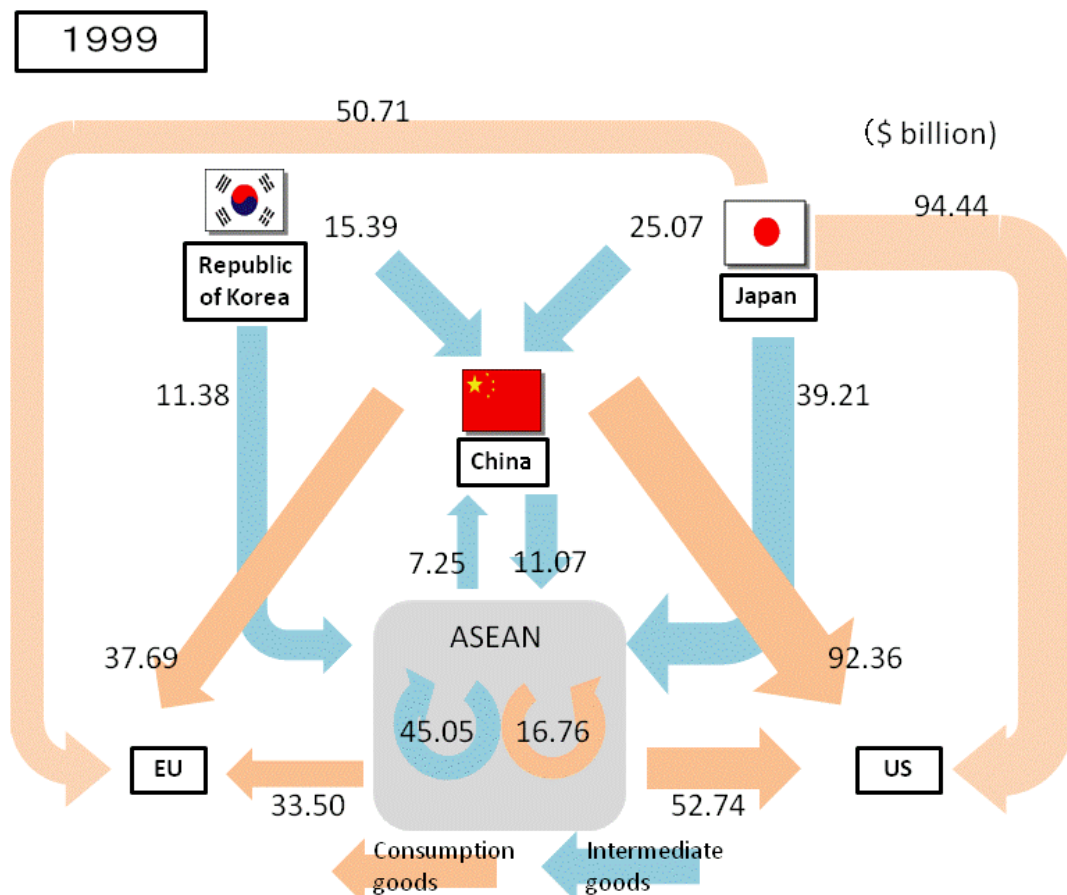
Indeed, some have praised the attraction of China's blandishments regarding the OBOR as being helpful for *South-South Cooperation* as opposed to the conditionality and political strictures set by the G7 states. At the same time, China's OBOR aid potentially marginalizes existing international law and extends China's economic reach towards possible political domination in partner countries' domestic politics. I have also contributed to debate by raising the prospect that China may well be aspiring to displace the US' benevolent hegemony in international political economy through the OBOR. This in turn may trigger negative counter-reactions by Japan, as a stakeholder in the US-led post-1945 liberal economic order, as well as other states benefitting from current Bretton Woods-descended international economic institutions.

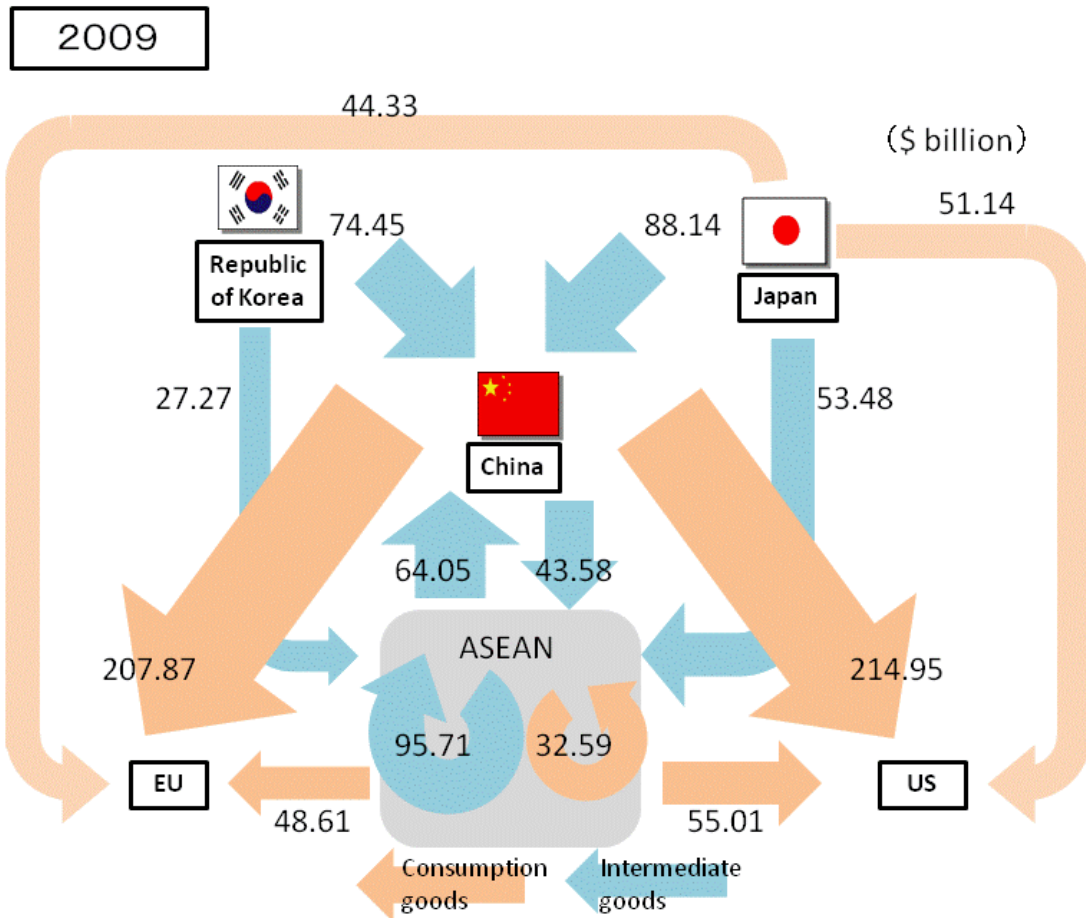
4. DE FACTO INTERDEPENDENCE IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC

Today, China's GDP has become three times as large as Japan's. Also, the first decade in the 21st century marked China's growth of export to the United States. Within China there are both large numbers of supporters for the government along with a tremendous number of protests against the government. In the 21st century, the production connectivity in the Asia-Pacific region has altered into the following way. The above figure is a bit outdated, but it clearly indicates the changing characteristics.

First, ever since the year 1999, a production network could be realized within East Asia. Intermediate goods were exported from Japan to China/ASEAN and China/ASEAN exported final products to the U.S. and EU. Meanwhile, Japan's exports of final products to U.S. and EU were larger than those of China/ASEAN's export of final products to the U.S. and EU. In the first 10 years of the 21st century, however, the production network for intermediate goods have expanded within the East Asia region. ASEAN expands intermediate exports to China, and the trace between the ASEAN and Japan has become larger than between the United States and Japan.

Diagram 1: Economic interdependence in the Asia Pacific 1999 and 2009





Regional integration and narrowing the development gap are intertwined. Much has been achieved in both regional (e.g., the Initiative for ASEAN Integration) and country-level initiatives in regional economic integration and narrowing the development gap, which have resulted in notable progress in economic and social development over the past years.

One key initiative to promote regional integration and narrowing the development gap in ASEAN is the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI). The IAI has been assisting the CLMV countries in meeting ASEAN-wide targets and commitments towards realizing the goals of the ASEAN Community. Guided by the IAI Work Plan III (2016–2020), the current five strategic areas of the IAI are Food and Agriculture; Trade Facilitation; MSMEs; Education; and Health and Well-Being.

While there are not APT projects assisting IAI, individually, China, Japan, and ROK, have demonstrated strong support to the CLMV through the IAI Work Plan III; sub-regional mechanisms (e.g., Lancang-Mekong cooperation, Mekong-Japan cooperation, and Mekong-ROK Cooperation); the ASEAN-China, ASEAN-Japan and ASEAN-ROK Centres; and bilateral cooperation. The session noted that there is room for greater synergy among these ongoing areas of cooperation.

To effectively support narrowing the development gap in the region in the years ahead, there is a need to develop a comprehensive approach towards the full and effective implementation of the IAI Work Plan III through developing tools and mechanisms to carry out regular monitoring and evaluation of the progress of regional integration and narrowing the development gap. Besides, to ensure effective implementation of the IAI as well as other development cooperation projects, there is a need to explore innovative ways of resource mobilization by tapping existing and other potential sources, including in the form of public-private-partnership. The Session also noted that the plus three countries could explore the possibility of committing more resources to support common areas of interest, particularly in the less developed ASEAN Member States, such as in connectivity, education, MSME development, digital economy, and trade facilitation (making use of existing FTAs).

China, Korea, and Japan have performed relevant strategies and policies, such as the Belt and Road Initiative of China, ROK's New Southern Policy, and the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy of Japan. Also, various national programs implemented in APT countries, including the *4P concept* (public-private-people partnership) through which major corporates are encouraged to engage in promoting local community and society through development projects in such areas as SMEs development, agriculture productivity, upgrading rural community and promoting community tourism.

Success in regional economic integration and narrowing the development gap is driven by several factors: enhanced connectivity (institutional and physical – such as road and railways), synergy among regional and sub-regional initiatives as well as with global initiatives (e.g. SDGs), technical cooperation/assistance that is demand-driven and has greater ownership by beneficiaries, human capital development, TVET, training of trainers, workforce reskilling, healthcare, human resources development, implementing attachment programs, and readiness to face current concerns on rising protectionism, among others. Cooperation efforts should pay stronger attention to these drivers of success. It is also important to promote SME development and competitiveness through providing entrepreneurial and financial education and training aimed at improving financial skills, increasing access to finance, enhancing market access, increased economic opportunities through technology, innovation and industrialization as well as developing policies and regulations conducive for SME development, and bridging language barrier within this region. The Session also noted that APT countries,

particularly the plus three countries, should continue to provide assistance in implementing the recommendations of the EAVG II, including working towards EAEC by 2020.

In view of rising protectionism, it is important for APT countries to continue promoting open and free trading system, including expediting the conclusion of RCEP negotiations and utilizing existing free trade agreements.

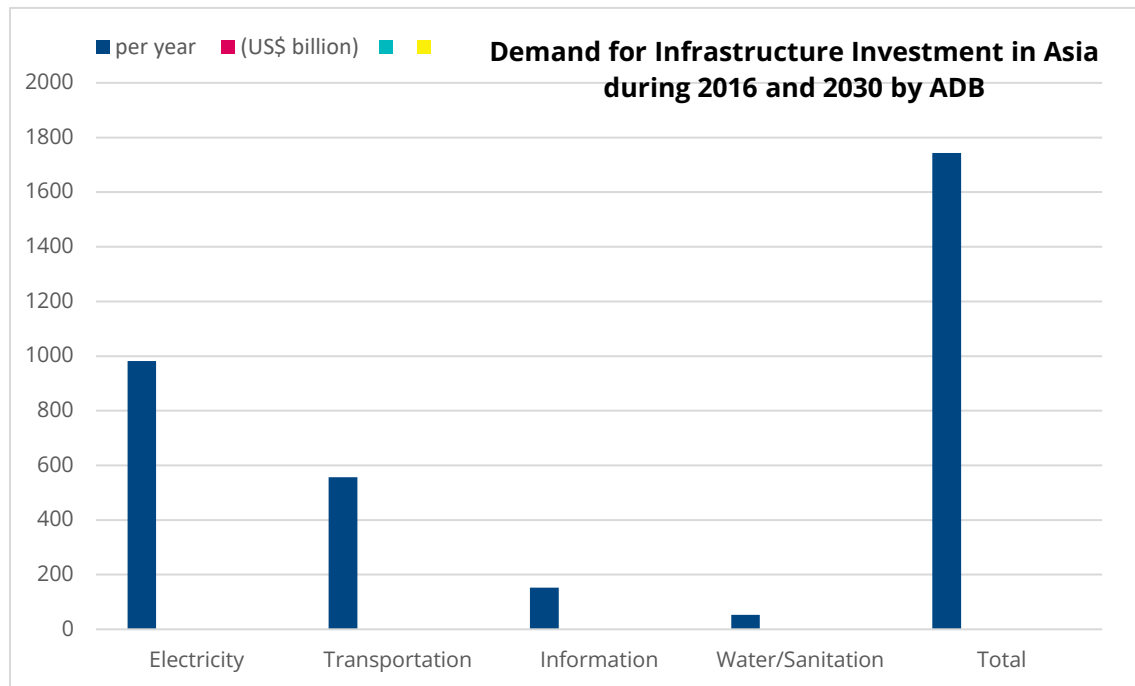
5. CHANGES IN THE SUPPLY CHAIN

Protectionism of the United States strengthens expanding the application of the trade law, strengthening the monitoring of foreign investment by the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS), expanding trade friction with China, EU, Canada, Turkey etc. That is, the United States aims at containment to China on both sides of trade and investment.

The US trade strategy sought to agree with the new NAFTA (USMCA) (agreed between US and Mexico in the end of August 2018, between the US and Canada at the end of September), the withdrawal from TPP (instructing a study to consider returning in April 2018), searching of a bilateral FTA with Kenya, the Philippines and Mauritius, etc., the USTR notified Congress of intention to commence trade negotiations between Japan (TAG = goods trade agreement) and the EU and the UK in the middle of October, and Vice President Pence announced that Japan and the United States will cooperate to implement infrastructure support of up to 70 billion US dollar in the Indian Pacific region in November 2018.

Promotion of the BRI initiative in China amounts to one trillion infrastructure investment, port development, and industrial support have advanced with China's initiative. Given that, it is essential for Japanese companies and other Asian companies to build optimal global supply chains utilizing TPP 11, Japan EU · EPA, New NAFTA, GSP (General Preference Tariff), RCEP, CJKFTA and others.

Diagram 2: Demand for Infrastructure Investment in Asia 2016 and 2030



6. JAPAN'S QUALITY INFRASTRUCTURE INITIATIVE

Japan's provision of infrastructure should be high-quality. The supply side of infrastructure is being diversified with some of the emerging economies becoming donors. The international community should share standards of quality infrastructure.

Several principles:

- The first is Safety, Reliability, Resilience, Economic efficiency in view of life-cycle cost. Quality infrastructure ensures safety, reliable operation and resilience against natural disasters. These factors make quality infrastructure economically efficient in the long term.
- The second is Social and Environmental consideration. Infrastructure development without social and environmental consideration would cause negative impact on economic growth of recipients rather than promote it.
- The third is the local job creation and transfer of expertise and know-how to recipients. In order to contribute to sustainable growth of recipients' economies, infrastructure investment should seek local job creation and transfer of expertise and know-how to recipients.

- The fourth is alignment with economic and development strategies of recipients Consideration for financial situations of recipients.
- The fifth is that the supply side of infrastructure is being diversified with some of the emerging economies becoming donors. The international community should share standards of quality infrastructure. In the background, appropriate terms and conditions of loans should be set in accordance with OECD rules taking into account repayment abilities of recipients.

7. THE CASE OF TRINCOMALEE: CHINA'S OBOR AND JAPAN'S QUALITY INFRASTRUCTURE

The usage of the Trincomalee Bay should be considered in context of China's grand strategy called *One Belt, One Road* (OBOR). Its vision of invoking the ancient Silk Road to frame its inter-regional OBOR opens up intellectual and political spaces for debating twenty first century international order in Asia. However, what has emerged from President Xi Jinping's most elaborate articulation of the OBOR is a top-down process and one that envisions a distinct position for Chinese strategic leadership.

Yet in the preamble of this speech, Xi honoured the memory of ancient Silk Road travellers such as Du Huan of China, Marco Polo of Italy, and Ibn Battuta of Morocco. He neglected to note that these were independent individuals, and in many cases, spiritually motivated ones. Moreover, sovereign states had not existed at that time. Xi then lauded the ancient Silk Road as manifesting the virtues of peace and cooperation, mutual learning, openness and inclusiveness and other win-win outcomes. This is a certainly positive note and a nod to "history [as] our best teacher" (Xi Jinping, 2017). In this context, people to people relations should ideally be unforced and even spontaneous. But the state – specifically the Chinese state – must count the quality of social interactions in terms of the volume of scholarships, numbers of exchanges, tourism events, *culture year* and art festivals and so forth. In short, this is bureaucratic framing of the twenty-first century Silk Road that detracts from the latter's historical precedent.

Understandably, the discourse of the OBOR today needs to accommodate significant aspects of modernity thriving amongst the states and societies partaking in the OBOR. Modern and modernizing states tend to be jealous of preserving their own sovereign powers and institutionalizing the domestic rule of

law. Many Asian states have also yet to fully build nations that are inclusive of all ethnicities and accepting of a social contract between the ruler and the ruled. Additionally, many Asian states, including democratic ones, officially practice a national ideology that guides development and national stability. This is an inevitable offshoot of modernization. But this road to modernization is fraught with uneven accomplishments and reversals. (Apter, 1965; Diamond, Lipset, & Linz, 1987) State-society relations may occasionally be tense over matters such as economic distress, the gap between rich and poor, environmental disasters and ethnic representation in government. Connecting all these conditions along the geographical expanse of the OBOR will prove extremely challenging.

Hence, this chapter has contributed to scholarship on China's OBOR by examining the many possibilities that the OBOR is about adjusting paradigms and frameworks of cooperation between peoples, economies and states, as well as occasionally philosophizing about what connectivity can holistically mean in the twenty-first century. I am not that critical of China's OBOR as an agent of possible displacement and initiator of a new Asian international order from an ideological standpoint. As President Xi's remarks have rightly alluded, the OBOR is an unprecedented strategic vision, but it also needs to be examined in terms of which obstacles it might encounter. Additionally, the OBOR has upped the ante at a moment of intellectual efflorescence in the study of international relations: the inquiry into forms of non-western international relations that posit fluidity, plurality and harmony between peoples as much as states. (Ling, 2014; Chong, 2012). First of all, inland connectivity will be the utmost important for the industrial accumulation in the Eastern part of Sri Lanka. When the size of population becomes bigger, there will emerge various types of demand and the price will also become higher. The efficient transportation system will contribute the entire development of all regions within Sri Lanka. Moreover, the maritime research centre will be needed for the global research regarding the usage of Trincomalee, but it does need to involve as many people as possible. Otherwise, the centre will only a group of experts not backed by finance.

Therefore, there will be different perspectives needed for the entire development of Trincomalee. First, the issue is not just on Sri Lanka, but rather for the entire region of the Bengal Bay. When individual countries of the Bengal area become more prosperous, the Trincomalee seaport will become more essential for the connectivity of the regional economy. Thus, the issue is not just on the global connectivity, but rather on the regional dynamics of economy within the Bengal

Gulf. In this sense, Sri Lanka will need to cultivate ties with India, Bangladesh, and Myanmar.

Second, we will have to alter our perspectives from global connectivity to regional connectivity. The regional development plus Sri Lanka's inland connectivity, if both realized, will contribute to the upgrade of Trincomalee's usefulness. Thus, issues are not Sri Lanka-Japan bilateral agenda, but rather regional and multilateral matters.

8. POTENTIAL FOR JAPANESE COMPANIES TO PARTICIPATE IN THE ONE BELT ONE ROAD INITIATIVE

Japanese companies are considering exporting agricultural products, processed foods, machinery, etc. to the US, Malaysia and Vietnam using TPP 11. However, concrete promising fields in the one belt one road initiative and China-Japan-Korea economic cooperation have not yet been determined.

In the one belt one road initiative, we are able to consider the possibility of Japan-China collaboration in China and third country. For example, it is conceivable that China will receive orders from high-speed rail cars from overseas and Japan will provide its parts.

As for as the economic cooperation between Japan and China concerned, we can consider several areas such as energy and environment, industrial advances · financial support (IoT, health care etc.), utilization of logistics linking Asia and Europe, solar and wind power generation, high efficiency gas and coal-fired power generation, and so on.

Japan and China jointly develop smart cities and industrial parks in connection with the *Eastern Economic Corridor* (ECC), an economic special zone connecting the eastern part of Thailand to the north and south.

Partnership between Japan and China engineering enterprises in the fields of incubation, petrochemical, AI and others, Cooperation between Japan and China joint human resources development, Partnership with health care and food problems centring on medicine and medical care.

China is able to participate in the African development project implemented by Japan, including the West African Growth Ring Plan that connects the main roads of West Africa, and the renovation project of roads and bridges in Kenya and Rwanda.

9. CONCLUSION

On October 26, 2018, former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe outlined the following principles on recent Japan's relations with China. First, the Sino-Japan Cooperation is mainly based on enterprises. Second, there will be a demand for infrastructure amounting to 1.7 trillion US dollar every year until the year 2030. Third, based on such international standards as openness, transparency, and economic viability, both countries should pursue the *win-win-win* projects, which must be sustainable and profitable for the third countries as well as Japan and China.

Japan's investment must be on a pure commercial basis under the principle of economic rationality, whether an investor is private or state-owned. The secrecy of business/technology must be strictly protected based on a contract.

Regional economic integration and narrowing the development gaps should not only focus on accelerating growth but should also look at ensuring that this growth is sustainable and aimed at bringing tangible benefit to the people. To this end, the meeting noted ongoing efforts in ASEAN to seek complementarities between ASEAN and the UN SDGs, as well as related initiatives at the national level, such as Thailand's proposal to set up an ASEAN Centre for Sustainable Development Studies Dialogue and the importance of considering sustainable development in APT's cooperation efforts.

The EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy in the Context of China-US Competition and South Korea's Perception

Le Thi Thu Giang





The world order is moving with many uncertain factors in the geostrategic competition of the three great powers: the US-China-Russia. The China-US competition is prevailing in the Asia-Pacific region. In recent years, the power vacuum in Asia and subsequent conflicts due to the expansion of geostrategic space by China and the US have made the regional situation even more unpredictable. The rise of China and, most recently, the Belt and Road Initiative have alarmed the US about its ambitions for international hegemony. This is also the context and motivation for the EU to launch its Indo-Pacific Strategy.

For the EU, the open and free Indo-Pacific policy centred on the US, India, Japan and Australia is a policy that directly serves the US strategic interests but has not properly reflected the interests of the bloc. Therefore, in recent years, many European countries have also announced their own Indo-Pacific strategies to pursue their own interests. Like the free and open Indo-Pacific strategy of the US, that of European countries have placed Korea ahead of new opportunities and challenges that require the country to make appropriate adjustments. The article will briefly analyse the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy in relation to the US Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy as a new circumstance affecting Korea. Later, the paper will examine Korea's stance and moves in this volatile situation.

1. SINO-US COMPETITION AND THE CHANGE OF POWER STRUCTURE IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

It can be said that the power competition in the Asia-Pacific region stems from the rise of China and the reaction of countries in the region and the world to this issue. The forecast of the rise of China was mentioned by the British geographer Sir Halford Mackinder at the beginning of the twentieth century in his famous article named *The Geographical Pivot of History*. He emphasized the *yellow threat to the freedom of the world* as China expands its power beyond its borders (Kaplan 2010). In 1996, at a roundtable discussion within the framework of the Forum on International Policy in California, in the face of questions about China's strength and future actions, Shanghai mayor Xu Kuangdi emphasized that "China's current central goal is economic development" (Ho Quang Loi 2013). China has also always claimed that China's rise is a peaceful rise rather than a threat. But this does not comfort the West. In fact, along with national development theories, after three decades of development with an average economic growth rate of about 10 per cent continuously for 30 years, there is no denying that no country in the world has achieved a great breakthrough in economic development like China. Continuously growing economy that doubles every 10 years allows China to increase the defence spending and modernize its military. In addition, China's flexible foreign policies have led many to believe that the balance of power is shifting in China's favour and that "the decisions China makes will impact the world". Along with this process, many observers have repeatedly noted China's influence in "reshaping the rules and institutions of the international system" to serve its national interest as China becomes more powerful and other countries in the system see China as a growing security threat (Ikenberry 2008). The US strategy of rebalancing power in Asia in the face of concerns about the risk of being named China has made the regional situation mainly revolve around the Sino-US competition.

The expansion of China's concept of national interest has played an important role in shaping the space for US-China geo-political competition. Unlike the US-Russia competition, which mainly focuses on the military and competes for influence in the *hot spots* in the world, the US-China competition is fiercer in the economic and geopolitical spheres. As two great powers with significant influence in the world, both sides are cautious to expand similarities and reduce negativity to maintain competition but not turn disagreements into conflicts.

It can be seen that the level, nature and space of Sino-American competition have different changes depending on China's diplomatic style and the US perception of China's threat to its strategic interests. During the administration of President Bill Clinton (1993 to 2001), China was considered a *strategic cooperation partner*. Although the George W. Bush administration (2001–2009) recognized China's rise in Asia, "the 9/11 disaster diverted America's attention from this central geopolitical challenge" (Campbell 2017) and China was still considered a "responsible stakeholder" when standing shoulder to shoulder with the US and the world in the fight against terrorism. Despite tougher policies under Barack Obama's administration, the US still considered China a "win-win cooperation partner". Although China's actions have taken place in the Asia-Pacific since 2007 in changing the status quo of disputes in the South China Sea, claiming sovereignty over more than 80 per cent of the East Sea, building artificial islands, announced the establishment of an Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) in the East China Sea provoke a backlash from countries in the region, the US still avoids creating hostility towards China and only makes diplomatic statements. The US rebalancing policy in the Asia-Pacific itself is also analysed as focusing on "strengthening relations with Asia" reminding China of the US's steadfastness in this region, not containing China (Campbell 2017).

It was not until the time of the administration of President Donald Trump, in the US *National Security Strategy* signed and promulgated in December 2017, that China was publicly identified as the "number one competitor" and "the most serious and enduring challenge" to US security and interests on a global scale. In the US stance, China is a "revisionist to the rules-based international order" (정경영 2019; 장호진 2022). Under President Donald Trump, the US-China conflict took place strongly and openly in many aspects, from trade to technology, politics, security, etc. In the same vein, the administration of President Joseph Biden also identified China as "the most serious competitor" and "the most consequential geopolitical challenge of the 21st century". The Biden administration has also made the handling of relations with China one of eight priorities in US foreign policy in the near future. The US also shows signs that it will not be soft and ready to become an opponent of China when forced (Ho Quang Loi 2022).

One of the reasons why the US has reacted drastically in the competition with China and also a premise for the birth of the free and open Indo-Pacific strategy is the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) launched by President Xi Jinping in 2013. This initiative will help China connect with economic hubs around the world. Is is

estimated that the BRI covers around 40 per cent of GDP and 60 per cent of the world's population. This network of links that all roads lead to Beijing emphasizes China's role not only as a part of the international community but also as a conduit, "leading to advance cooperation interests" (Frankopan 2021). The Chinese side has always shown that the BRI is built first to protect China's interests rather than strengthen its position and to ensure long-term interests in the supply chain for the Chinese economy and the region rather than to demonstrate its capabilities. However, it is undeniable that the BRI is a grand multi-purpose plan that showcases China's ambitions for global leadership.

The administration of President Donald Trump expanded and perfected the strategy of rebalancing in the Asia-Pacific established under the Obama administration and pioneered its implementation into a free and open Indo-Pacific strategy with the core being the *Diamond Quartet* including the US, Japan, India, and Australia. In Donald Trump's speech at the APEC Summit held in Da Nang, Vietnam in November 2017, the free and open Indo-Pacific Strategy was launched with the goals of maintaining US leadership regionally and globally; promoting free, equal, and reciprocal trade; maintaining open space in the area; effectively dealing with security challenges in the region; and ensuring the rule of law and individual rights are respected (Duy Hoang 2020). Building a free and open Indo-Pacific strategy, the US wants to move towards a region that occupies 52 per cent of the world's area, 41 per cent of the population, 61 per cent of GDP, 47 per cent of total international trade and 48 per cent of the world's foreign direct investment capital, the Indo-Pacific region has 65 per cent of the world's raw materials and is the intersection of many important sea routes (Le Minh Quang 2011). At the same time, this is also the concentration of 3 world power centres, 7/8 of the world's fastest growing markets, 7/10 of the largest global military force and many influential regional organizations. Controlling this region, the US expects to create an effective counterweight to China's BRI while ensuring a role for the US in responding to threats to free trade flows, regional freedom, stability, and security, and extending the liberal values that the US wants to spread while avoiding creating a sense of direct confrontation with China.

Commenting on this competition, Professor Graham Allison in his book *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides' Trap?* (Fate of War: Can the United States and China escape the Thucydides Trap?) considers it one of the inevitable conflicts in history, an uncompromising rivalry between an emerging centre of power. with the old centre of power and much of the result of these

conflicts was war. That shows the strategic stature, severity and impact of China-US competition on the region and the world. In terms of interests or precedents, it is clear that the world is facing many risks of instability that require countries to develop their own response measures. In fact, many great powers have come up with their Indo-Pacific strategies. Including the EU and the Western powers. For countries in the region, the free and open Indo-Pacific strategy helps connect and effectively synergize each country's own policies, such as India's *Act East* policy, Japan's *Free and Open Pacific* plan, Australia's Indo-Pacific plan, and South Korea's *New Southern Policy* as well as strengthen and expand strategic alliances in the region.

2. THE EU'S INDO-PACIFIC STRATEGY

Immediately after the US announced the free and open Indo-Pacific Strategy, other countries such as Australia, India, Japan, France, and Germany through different documents also spoke on their Indo-Pacific strategies. In May 2018, after French President Emmanuel Macron mentioned the need for an Indo-Pacific strategy, France issued three strategic documents related to the Indo-Pacific including: *France and security in the Indo-Pacific and France's defence strategy in the Indo-Pacific* issued by the Ministry of Armed Forces in May 2019, and *French strategy in the Indo-Pacific for an inclusive Indo-Pacific* issued by the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs in August 2019. In June 2019, at the Bangkok Summit, ASEAN also discussed a joint document called *ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific*. In September 2020, Germany also announced the Indo-Pacific Strategy entitled *Germany-Europe-Asia: Shaping the 2^{1st} Century Together: Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific*. In November of the same year, the Netherlands also launched the country's Indo-Pacific strategy with the document *Indo-Pacific: Guidelines for strengthening Dutch and EU cooperation with partners in Asia*. However, during the meeting of EU foreign ministers, France, Germany, and the Netherlands proposed to develop an Indo-Pacific strategy at the EU level in parallel with the strategies of other member states. This shows that while each member state of the EU has different interests in relation to the Indo-Pacific region, there are still common motivations and goals among them that regulate the unification towards their involvement in this area.

On September 16, 2021, the EU launched the *EU's Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific* along with an affirmation of the region's geopolitical and geo-economic importance. The EU's publication of the Indo-Pacific strategy

demonstrates the alliance's new perspective on the position and role of this region in shaping the world order in the 21st century. High Representative of the EU, Mr. Josep Borrell, pointed out that the driving force for the EU to make commitments to the Indo-Pacific region comes from the bloc's important interests here:

"The EU is the leading investor and supplier of development assistance to the Indo-Pacific, and one of the region's largest trading partners" (Borrell 2021)."

In fact, the EU has shown interests in Asia since the publication of the new Asia Strategy in 1994. Among 11 countries and regions that have strategic partnerships with the EU, 5 actors are from Asia, including China, Japan, India, Korea and ASEAN. Nevertheless, the Asia is currently in a state of "insecurity and growing tensions that threaten the order and balance of the region" while its economic growth is "depending on the openness, stable and shared rules, as well as common security" (Borrell 2021). Therefore, the EU advocates the need to participate more actively in the region as an important partner and a factor with global influence to build the Indo-Pacific into a free and open region to all countries; and at the same time, establish long-term and sustainable partnerships and cooperation with regional to promote effective rules-based multilateralism, an open and fair environment for trade and investment. This means that the EU is seeking a close solidarity with like-minded countries in the region in the direction of conflict reduction and coexistence, not with the goal of containing or preventing or creating opponents. In particular, ASEAN is identified as the centre of the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy.

The EU pointed out 7 priority areas including: common prosperity and sustainable development; green transition; ocean governance; digital economic management; regional connectivity; security, national defence; and human security. In December 2021, the EU launched the *Global Gateway* as a support for the realization of the Indo-Pacific strategy as it emphasizes the promotion of green, modern, and resilient investment for sustainable connectivity on many fields. On that basis, the EU has proposed many valuable and diverse cooperation plans and initiatives, such as Green Alliance for the Pacific initiative towards a low-carbon future world by 2050; European and ASEAN green initiatives to deal with climate change, pollution, and biodiversity reduction; European initiative for sustainable connectivity in ASEAN to develop cooperation projects with Southeast Asian partners; and Digital Hub 4 Development initiative to build digital partnerships. The EU has also conducted bilateral cooperation with individual countries such as

with Japan in digital technology and concluded negotiations on Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Thailand. Regarding regional security, the EU expressed its support for peaceful dialogue solutions and dispute settlement based on international law. The EU is also committed to working with member countries and other regional countries to protect freedom of navigation, trade, and build a region of stability and development. France also participated in joint military exercises with US naval forces along with Britain and Japan. Thereby, it can be seen that the EU's efforts towards the region are reflected in three aspects:

- ensuring regional stability and peace for economic cooperation.
- strengthening defence and security cooperation with relevant countries,
- promoting Asia-Europe links in diverse fields.

One of the advantages of the EU when implementing the Indo-Pacific strategy is that the EU does not have a direct and important security interest in dispute in this region. Moreover, the organization does not take a hegemonic stance while it still acts as one of the world's major economic centres. This ensures that the EU's important position in the region is maintained while at the same time reducing the vigilance of countries towards EU policy. Undoubtedly, the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy has a completely different colour from the aggressive foreign policy of the US or the wolf warrior diplomacy of China. The institution shows a standard, constructive and trustworthy image while still ensuring the direction of maximizing benefits. However, the sustainability and capabilities to follow the roadmap of this strategy are in doubt. The reason is that the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy is showing a neutral stance in the Sino-American conflict, which means no hostile policy towards China while ensuring the principles of separation of economic from political power. This makes it impossible for the EU to clearly show its options if the Sino-American conflict falls into an extreme state. In other words, people wonder whether the EU's cooperative foreign policy with the US and Japan can be sustainable while ensuring it does not provoke China (김시홍 2021).

Another concern that has also been raised recently is how the EU will ensure its commitments to its long-term strategy in the Indo-Pacific as the Russia-Ukraine war erupted in August 2022. The Russia-Ukraine war is considered to have broken the European security structure, directly threatens European security, and at the same time causes countries in the region to fall into an energy crisis when oil and gas prices soar. Additionally, disagreements over the approval of a support package for Ukraine are also causing the EU to split. In November 2021, the EU officially announced a security strategy called *Strategic Compass* with the biggest

goal of building a hard power in defence in order to be able to be autonomous in security and protect Europe's strategic interests without having to rely entirely on the US and NATO. Starting from the preparation for the rifts between Europe and the US in many aspects¹, but the war between Russia and Ukraine was the factor that made the EU accelerate the deployment speed as well as change the primary objective of the *Strategic Compass*. However, despite declaring an autonomous security strategy, in reality, the EU's own military power is still very limited that the bloc cannot be self-sufficient in security if there is a conflict with Russia. Meanwhile, the Russia-Ukraine war is once again elevating NATO's role in European security, which makes the EU well aware that it continues to have to be closely tied to the US. Considering this aspect, although it is yet to confirm the implementation of the EU's long-term commitments to the Indo-Pacific region, it can partly clarify the EU's position in the China-US competition if the conflict escalates.

The EU's stance of strategic autonomy and multipolarization is opening a new approach to countries in the region, and also an attraction when the bipolar order is revealing its limitations. Not only is the EU a power with proper foreign policy, today, the EU is exhibiting a shift towards smart diplomacy that combines value diplomacy with power diplomacy. Nonetheless, the current pragmatic diplomacy with a focus on Europe's interests will certainly create contradictions in the multilateral order if the EU does not have flexibility in each cooperation field. In particular, the EU must anticipate the effects of China's economic use as a diplomatic tool since the economic interests of EU member states in relations with China are different.

3. SOUTH KOREA'S PERCEPTION

For many years, as a middle power, Korea has always maintained a balanced foreign policy towards the United States, China, Russia and Japan. In particular, South Korea is a close ally of the US and always needs US support due to outstanding problems on the Korean peninsula. As an ally in an asymmetrical relationship with the US, South Korea cannot help but support and participate in US policies towards the region and the world. Meanwhile, China is the largest economic partner, and is a country with a favourable geographical position with

¹ The tension between the EU and the US has many manifestations: the launch of the Australia-UK-US security alliance (AUKUS) is seen by the EU as a rejection of Europe's security interests in the India-Pacific; the withdrawal from Afghanistan when the US does not take into account the sacrifices and interests of its European allies; the settlement of the refugee crisis in the Polish-Belarusian border; America dominance in NATO, etc.

Korea for trade. Besides, China is also an important factor influencing inter-Korean relations. The Korean government itself over the years has also shown a high regard for relations with China. Therefore, since the China-US becomes increasingly intense, having to determine which side to take is causing Korea to fall into a dilemma. As an ally in an asymmetrical relationship with the US, Korea cannot help but support and participate in US policies towards the region and the world. Although Korea has been a member of the OECD, its position in the international area has been enhanced, and national prestige has also increased, Korea always needs security assistance from the US for many reasons. Meanwhile, China is the largest economic partner and a country with a favourable geographical position with Korea for trade. The Korean government itself over the years has shown great appreciation for its relationship with China². In relations with China, Korea has always maintained efforts to strengthen friendship and trade partnerships. While the US ensures security and political interests, China brings economic benefits to South Korea. In terms of interests, while the Indo-Pacific strategy only emphasizes the four pillars that make up the 'diamond quartet', Korea, ASEAN, and African countries have not been involved in the total strategy.

Strategically, Korea has always determined the necessity of "making a more active contribution to the security of the Indo-Pacific region to safeguard national interests in shaping a regional order in the future" (전혜원 2020). Connecting the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy with President Moon Jae-in's New Southern Policy towards the Indian and Southeast Asian markets is also a direction that Korea has taken into account. Yet, the ROK government remains hesitant on the participation in the Indo-Pacific strategy since it has to take China's response into account, while maintaining its stance of respecting international laws and ensuring a free environment. In addition, China's challenge to expanding maritime dominance and aggressive US responses have narrowed the options for countries like South Korea. As a result, the announcement of European and EU countries' deeper involvement in the region on the basis of multipolarity and multilateralism; security capacity enhancement rather than creating opponents; and promoting regional cooperation and reducing conflict are generating

² President Roh Moo-hyun's administration with the policy *Peace and prosperity for Northeast Asia* shifted its focus to relations with China. Although the conservative government of Lee Myung-bak attached great importance to the alliance with the US, it also signed a strategic cooperation partnership agreement with China in 2008. During the deployment of THAAD, President Moon Jae-in could not ignore the consideration of China's position even though this consideration was the result of backlash from China.

opportunities for Korea. At the same time, this is also an option for Korea to avoid an extreme choice.

The EU's declaration of policy towards the Indo-Pacific region helps alleviate South Korea's pressure to choose between the US and China and opens up more opportunities for Korea to see how for the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy as well as that of the US. While some researchers believe that Korea must clarify its position if Sino-US competition becomes intense. At that time, if we consider the balance between the US and China, it can be seen that the US still has the upper hand in Korea's choice. Many researchers are inclined to choose to stand next to the US and assert that it is hard for Korea not to support the US Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy (박휘락 2020; 정경영 2019). In fact, when the impasse in inter-Korean relations remains unresolved, the free and open Indo-Pacific strategy will become a powerful catalyst for fluctuations in the balance of forces on the Korean peninsula. The relationship of lack of trust and excess of deterrence between the United States and North Korea has led to military activities with a show of force taking place continuously. Most recently, North Korea fired missiles continuously before the joint military exercises of the US, Japan and South Korea in the South China Sea. For both South Korea and the United States, North Korea is the most unpredictable variable in the balance of forces in the region. In the situation that the Korea-US alliance relationship is having many negative changes, many people are also concerned that if South Korea does not support this strategy, the US's confidence in South Korea may collapse. If North Korea continues to maintain and develop nuclear weapons, South Korea must also think about the situation where the US will withdraw its troops from South Korea when the alliance relationship collapses due to South Korea's turn away from the US.

On the other hand, there is also an opinion that emphasizes that Korea needs to avoid being mistaken in the Sino-American conflict spiral. Like Japan, Korea also needs to avoid being dragged into the US-China conflict spiral. Therefore, Korea needs to find many diplomatic channels. For example, diversifying cooperation partners for medium and long-term diplomatic strategies is a useful direction, especially for a middle power like South Korea. President Moon Jae-in, when he came to power in 2017, declared that South Korea needed to diversify its diplomacy because it was too dominated by relations with four major powers: the US, Japan, China and Russia. Korea has formulated a New Southern Policy with the aim of upgrading Southeast Asia to become an important partner equivalent to traditional diplomatic partners. Participating in the EU's strategy is also in line

with Korea's ambition to enhance its international status. In particular, together with the EU, it is a way for Korea to step by step be able to act independently in its relations with the US and China.

In terms of interests, while the US Indo-Pacific strategy only emphasizes the four pillars that make up the 'diamond quartet', South Korea as well as ASEAN and African countries have not been taken into account. In this overall strategy, when cooperating with the EU – who is eager to cooperate with like-minded countries in the region, Korea will have many advantages. This is illustrated in many ways. First, South Korea is currently the only country in the region that has signed all three basic economic, political and security agreements with the EU, which opens up a huge range of cooperation between Korea and the EU (전혜원 2020). Second, Korea and the EU share the same orientation to develop policies with the Southeast Asia and ASEAN as the focal actors. Korea's New Southern Policy aims to cooperate with Southeast Asian countries on three main goals: building a community for people; constructing a peaceful region; and forming a community of coexistence and prosperity. These goals are also very close to the direction declared by the EU. Third, Korea shares the values that the EU is pursuing such as freedom of navigation and international law, free trade, and multilateralism. Fourth, like Japan, Korea has sufficient conditions in terms of facilities, infrastructure and forces to participate in dialogue and action with the EU, especially in the field of maritime security. Although EU member states, such as Germany and France, acknowledge they still need the cooperation of developed countries in terms of economy, diplomacy, and institutional similarities like Korea. Korea has signed a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the EU. If this goal is done, Korea will gain many benefits. Korea also focuses on connecting with EU member states such as Germany and France. Taking advantage of the wariness of being too dependent on China for economic relations and the desire to find worthy partners in the technology industry, Korea is expecting to be a suitable cooperation partner of Germany and France in the region.

Regarding security issues, Korea and the EU are in tandem on principles of resolving disputes through diplomatic efforts and peaceful means, which are effective for middle powers such as Korea that lack military capabilities to address traditional security challenges. Working with the EU to maintain a peaceful and stable Indo-Pacific region, South Korea hopes to involve the EU in resolving the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula as an active member, thereby increasing the scope of the EU's participation and breaking the existing bipolarity through

negotiations. Moreover, under the circumstances that countries inside and outside the region are announcing their strategies in turn, the question that whether Korea needs to build its own strategy for the Indo-Pacific has been raised (전혜원 2020). In fact, on 11/11/2023, in his speech at the Korea-ASEAN Summit held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, President Yun Seok-yeol announced the key contents of the Strategy. South Korea's Indo-Pacific. The principles for implementing this strategy are set forth by the Republic of Korea with three contents: tolerance, trust, and reciprocity on the basis of three visions of freedom, peace and prosperity. The content of Korea's Indo-Pacific Strategy is announced in the form of a new regional foreign policy strategy of Korea consisting of five elements:

- Korea pursues a comprehensive strategy towards with the Indo-Pacific region on the basis of strengthening solidarity with major countries in the region and ASEAN.
- The main objective of the ROK's strategy is to strengthen the order based on universal rules and values on the principle of conflict prevention through dialogue and peace, opposing unilateral change of the status quo by violence.
- Promote foreign economic policies to strengthen supply chain resilience, achieve shared prosperity by creating a cooperative and inclusive economic and technological ecosystem with countries with common interests to establish an open and equitable economic order in the region.
- Carrying out responsible diplomatic activities to the regional and international community as a democratic and advanced country in the region.
- Supporting ASEAN's central role and considering ASEAN as an important cooperative partner in promoting Korea's people-to-people diplomacy strategy.

Although no concrete roadmap has been given, the new regional diplomacy strategy of the Yun Seok-yeol administration shows that Korea is moving towards a reconciliation between the Indo-Pacific Strategy of the US and the EU. In particular, Korea is moving towards the expansion of cooperation partners and fields of cooperation in order to increase its participation in the region. This is necessary to ensure the sustainable development of the Korean economy. In addition, by affirming to strive to strengthen universal values and to establish a rules-based international order consistent with its own interests, values, and

identity, the Yun Seok government – Yeol is said to have abandoned the principle of balanced diplomacy to “maintain the balance between the US and China as a standard for foreign policy” practiced by the previous administrations (최원기 2022) to leaning towards the US.

But it can also be seen that Korea is also focusing on reducing the "color of excluding China" in the process of developing a specific plan (정진우 2022). In particular, the new regional diplomacy strategy of the Yun Seok-yeol administration has inherited the previous government's New Southbound policy in strengthening relations with ASEAN. But while the previous Moon Jae-in administration pursued economic and diplomatic diversification, considering ASEAN primarily an economic and trade partner, with the *Korea-ASEAN Solidarity Initiative*, the current government The present is said to intend to strengthen its partnership with ASEAN as a strategic partner, not only an economic partner, but also wants to strengthen cooperation in the fields of security and political diplomacy, which is lacking in Korea's policy towards ASEAN.

4. CONCLUSION

The Sino-American competition is having profound effects on the whole world in different aspects, scopes and levels. Moves in the Indo-Pacific region are considered to be sharply increasing geopolitical competition, creating security and economic tensions. The EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy is providing a diversification of opportunities for small and middle powers in the region. As a middle power located in a geopolitical area with stiff and unresolved competition between the US and China, Korea is facing difficult decisions when it has to reconcile national interests to the fluctuations of the regional and world situation. It is not easy for Korea to make up its mind. The EU's involvement in the region through the Indo-Pacific strategy has provided Korea with a new option that is neutral, safe and in line with its interests. South Korea's statement on the Indo-Pacific Strategy as an independent diplomatic strategy shows that Korea is moving towards a strategic autonomy and expanding diplomatic reach. Although not emphasizing the exclusion or inclination to a specific object, with the mentioned contents, Korea has partly seen its position on the situation in the region. This strategy also shows that Korea is trying to find ways to be more present and participate more deeply in the regional order in the direction of ensuring the interests of the nation and people. However, the realization of this strategy may face many difficulties due to

Korea's position as well as internal conflicts and overlaps in the region and the world.

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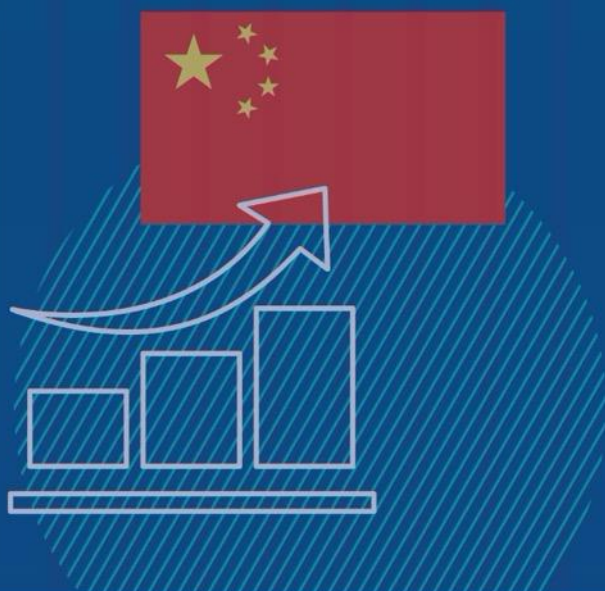
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EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy and China's Response

Nguyen Thuy Chi



4



The Indo-Pacific is a vast region connecting the world's two largest oceans and has many fast-growing economies in the 21st century. Its status is becoming increasingly critical in the strategic thinking of the major powers. *Indo-Pacific Strategy* is becoming a viral keyword in international relations research recently, especially during the tenure of US President Donald Trump. The major powers and the world's leading actors are participating in a strategic race in this large area, and the European Union (EU) is no exception. In September 2021, the EU officially launched its own version of the Indo-Pacific Strategy, immediately attracting the world's attention. As one of the main targets in the Indo-Pacific strategy, China's point of view is of great interest to researchers, but currently, there does not seem to be an article describing it in a general way. How will this strategy affect China and its attitudes? In this article, I want to answer the following questions: How did the formation of the Indo-Pacific Strategy in general and the EU, in particular, take place? What are the main implications of this strategy, and what is its impact on the region? How does China react to the EU's strategy?

1. THE BIRTH OF THE CONCEPT OF INDO-PACIFIC

Indo-Pacific was the earliest used in Oceanography, for a long time considered as a specific biogeographic research area in this field.¹ From the 1960s–70s, the term was primarily used in anthropological and ethnographic studies. For example, the word *Indo-Pacific islands* is also a way to only Indonesia and surrounding areas.² In 1938, German geopolitician Karl Ernst Haushofer in his work *Geopolitics of the Pacific region* used the word *Indo-Pacific* (indopazifischen) with a spatial meaning (space/Raum). In the 50s of the 20th century, a few scholars began to gradually describe the term Indo-Pacific such as Indo-Pacific system, and Indo-Pacific era. However, this term is still in a frozen state, not many people know about it. By the 60s of the 20th century, Australian scholars began to use the word Indo-Pacific in some research on regional security.³

However, in contemporary geopolitics, the term Indo-Pacific really started to gain attention after the speech of the late Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to the Indian Parliament in August 2007.⁴ After that, Australian scholars Rory Medcalf, and Michael Wesley, American scholars Michael Auslin and Walter Lohman, Indian scholars Gurpreet S. Khurana, Shyam Saran, and C. Raja Mohan respectively in their research use the concept of Indo-Pacific. Especially after 2010, along with the rise of countries surrounding the Indian and Pacific oceans, the strategic and operational competition of the major powers in these two great oceans is increasing. The word Indo-Pacific is used more and more widely, not just limited to academia. This concept has repeatedly appeared in speeches, press releases, scientific conferences, and think tank reports. We also often see this concept in the statements of Australian, Japanese, and Indian government officials and documents.

¹ E. Rödiger, Wissenschaftlicher Jahresbericht über die Jahre 1851 und 1852, Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft, Vol. 8, No. 4 (1854), p. 637–719, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3014099>; Review: Results of Deep Sea Dredging between Cuba and Florida, The American Naturalist, Feb., 1870, Vol. 3, No. 12 (Feb., 1870), p. 662–666, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2446677>

² Richard Cull, Sketch of the Recent Progress of Ethnology, Journal of the Ethnological Society of London (1848–1856), 1856, Vol. 4 (1856), p. 115; James Richardson Logan, Ethnology of the Indo-Pacific Islands, Journal of the Indian Archipelago and Eastern Asia, 1851–1855.

³ R. J. Cooksey, Foreign Policy Review, November 1966–September 1967, The Australian Quarterly, Dec. 1967, Vol. 39, No. 4 (Dec. 1967), p. 92–109; R. J. Cooksey Foreign Policy Review, The Australian Quarterly, Vol. 40, No. 2 (Jun., 1968), p. 99–110; Harry G. Gelber, Australia as an Indo-Pacific Power, Current History, Vol. 58, No. 344 (APRIL, 1970), p. 223–228.

⁴ Shinzo Abe, Confluence of the Two Seas, speech at the Parliament of the Republic of India, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/pmv0708/speech-2.html>

In October 2012, Australia published the *Australian White Paper in the Asian Century*, which mentioned that “the Indian Ocean is surpassing the Atlantic and Pacific oceans as the world’s busiest and most strategically significant trade corridor.” The Indo-Pacific appears to imply that “the western Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean would come to be considered as one strategic arc.”⁵ Since then, the Australian government has started using the *Indo-Pacific region* concept. In December 2012, Indian Prime Minister Singh, during the India-ASEAN Commemorative Summit, spoke about the importance of the strategic partnership between India and ASEAN for the first time, “Indo-Pacific.”⁶ In early 2013, Singh clarified the tripartite relationship between India, ASEAN and Japan used the term again.⁷ In May of that year, the Australian government issued the *Australian Defence White Paper*, which stated that the “Indo-Pacific region” was an extension of the “Asia-Pacific region,” from the Indian Ocean through Southeast Asia to Northeast Asia forms an arc-shaped region and will become one of Australia’s important strategic focal points.⁸ After that, the word Indo-Pacific was adopted and widely used by the Australian government. In addition, Indonesian Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa repeatedly used the word Indo-Pacific in his statements. Other countries in the region, such as Singapore and Japan, also welcome this concept. Moreover, some scholars and diplomats in the exchanges have gradually associated this word with the two words strategy,” gradually forming the theoretical thinking about the Indo-Pacific Strategy.

The concept of Indo-Pacific was not invented by Americans, in geopolitical meaning, this concept was first introduced by Indian and Japanese scholars and politicians, and Australian scholars vigorously promoted it. However, this concept only quickly spread widely when the strategic vision of the US government gradually shifted to the Indo-Pacific region. On this point, from the direct statements of the US administration on the Indo-Pacific Basin to the Indo-Pacific Partners, the Indo-Pacific Policy, Indo-Pacific Region, Indo-Pacific Vision, Indo-Pacific Dream and then upgraded to the Indo-Pacific Strategy is enough to see the

⁵ Australian Government, *Australia in the Asian Century White Paper*, Department of Defense, October 2012, p. 74.

⁶ Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister’s Address to Japan-India Association, Japan-India Parliamentary Friendship League and International Friendship Exchange Council, May 28, 2013, <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/21754/Prime+Ministers>.

⁷ Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister’s Address to Japan-India Association, Japan-India Parliamentary Friendship League and International Friendship Exchange Council, May 28, 2013, <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/21754/Prime+Ministers>

⁸ Australian Government, *Defence White Paper*, Department of Defense, 2013, p. 7, http://www.defence.gov.au/whitepaper/2013/docs/WP_2013_web.pdf.

development of this concept. In October 2010, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in Hawaii delivered a speech on US Asia policy, referring to the concept of the Indo-Pacific Strategy. She pointed out, "The Indo-Pacific region is essential to global trade and commerce. The United States is adjusting its strategic arrangement for this region, increasing cooperation with the Indian navy in the Pacific region."⁹ On November 2011, Hillary Clinton, in her speech entitled *America's Pacific Century*" once again said that the Indo-Pacific region is strategically important to the US,

*"The Asia-Pacific region was the main driving force for world politics, but the vast region from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific, from the Indian subcontinent to the west coast of the United States, is gradually connecting through strategic and maritime routes. How to translate the growing connection between the Indian and Pacific Oceans into a workable concept is a problem we need to address quickly."*¹⁰

In 2013, Joe Biden, then Vice President of the United States, during his visit to India, also mentioned the critical strategic value of the Indian Ocean to the US's Asia Pacific region.¹¹ In the same year, the Commander-in-Chief of the US Pacific Command, Lieutenant General Samuel Locklear, also expressed that the Indo-Asia-Pacific region is of increasingly crucial strategic value to the United States, calling on countries in this region to strengthen exchanges and implement extensive cooperation.¹² In 2014, the US Department of Defense released the *Quarterly Defense Review 2014*, which reiterated the US' need to strengthen its strategic presence in the Indian Ocean region, deepening the US' rebalancing strategy to the Asia-Pacific region, thereby protecting US interests in this region.¹³ Thus, the US government has gradually realized the importance of the Indian Ocean region and gradually used the Indo-Pacific concept to mix with the traditional Asia-Pacific concept.

⁹ Robert D. Kaplan, *Power Plays in the Indian Ocean: The Maritime Commons in the 21st Century* (Washington, D. C.: Center for a New American Security, 2010), p. 180–191.

¹⁰ Hillary Clinton, *America's Pacific century*, Foreign Policy, October 11, 2011, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/10/11/americas-pacific-century/>

¹¹ United States Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review 2014*, March 2014, p. 17, <https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/quadrennial/QDR2014.pdf?ver=tXH94SVvSQLVw-ENZ-a2pQ%3d%3d>

¹² America Times, *US Commander Locklear Calls for Indo-Asia-Pacific Cooperation*, The America Times, February 8, 2013, <https://www.america-times.com/us-commander-locklear-calls-for-indo-asia-pacific-cooperation/>

¹³ Secretary of Defense, *The 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review*, March 4, 2014, p.g.17, <https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/quadrennial/QDR2014.pdf?ver=tXH94SVvSQLVw-ENZ-a2pQ%3d%3d>

However, after Donald Trump became US president, the US government's concept of Indo-Pacific was used continuously and became the world's focus. The first notable is the keynote speech on Defining Our Relationship with India for the Next Century by former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson on October 18, 2017, at the CSIS center in Washington. Tillerson, in this speech, replaced the traditional concept of Asia-Pacific Region with Indo-Pacific Region, thereby referring to the expanded US geopolitical region, stretching from the Western Pacific Ocean to the Indian Ocean.¹⁴ They also added the words *free and open* in front of the concept. In the same year, President Donald Trump, in his speech at the 25th APEC CEO Summit held in Da Nang, Vietnam, talked about the *Vision of Free and Open Indo-Pacific Region*, stressed that the US has always been and for a long time from now on will be a partner and ally of the Indo-Pacific region.¹⁵ In a trade forum on July 30, 2018, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo also expressed that the US would continue to facilitate the common prosperity of a free and open Indo-Pacific region.¹⁶ By 2019, the US has given a fairly complete explanation of this concept. The term Indo-Pacific refers to a geopolitical space that, in the US interpretation, stretches "from the west coast of the United States to the western shores of India."¹⁷ After these moves by the Trump administration, the term "Indo-Pacific Strategy" has gained worldwide attention.

According to the newly declassified White House document on the U.S. Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific, the country has identified one of its national security challenges as:

"How to maintain the US strategic primacy in the Indo-Pacific region and promote a liberal economic order while preventing China from establishing new, illiberal spheres of influence, and cultivating areas of cooperation to promote regional peace and prosperity."¹⁸

¹⁴ Defining Our Relationship with India for the Next Century: An Address by U. S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, The Center for Strategic and International Studies, October 18, 2017, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/defining-our-relationship-india-next-century-address-us-secretary-state-rex-tillerson>

¹⁵ Remarks by President Trump at APEC CEO Summit, Da Nang, Vietnam, November 10, 2017, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-apec-ceo-summit-da-nang-vietnam/>.

¹⁶ US Department of State, Secretary Pompeo Addresses the Indo-Pacific Business Forum, Washington D.C., July 30, 2018, <https://2017-2021.state.gov/secretary-pompeo-addresses-the-indo-pacific-business-forum/index.html>.

¹⁷ US Department of Defense, Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: preparedness, partnerships, and promoting a networked region, 1 June 2019, p. 1, <https://media.defense.gov/2019/jul/01/2002152311/-1/-1/1/DEPARTMENT-OF-DEFENSE-INDO-PACIFIC-STRATEGY-REPORT-2019.PDF>

¹⁸ NSC declassification review, U.S. Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific, declassified in part by Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs Robert C O'Brien, 1/5/2021, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/IPS-Final-Declass.pdf>

In addition, the US made 14 assumptions, seven of which mentioned China with a pretty harsh attitude. Along with the tough move on all economic, political, diplomatic, and military fronts of the Trump administration and the subsequent Biden administration towards China, it is clear that the free and open Indo-Pacific Strategy of the US is designed primarily to deal with China's rise, and its goal of enticing countries in the region to contain China is evident. However, America's allies, including the European Union, have not fully responded to this strict strategy toward China, including the European Union.

Due to subjective and objective conditions, European countries seem to be more modest than other powers in the race of Indo-Pacific.¹⁹ According to a study by The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, the authors observed:

*"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)."*²⁰

Because of worries that the moves promoted by the US will drive countries away from China until 2020, the European Union is still not active in participating in the formulation of the idea of the Indo-Pacific.²¹ European countries have always avoided participating in forums that have little to do with Europe's economic and strategic interests but risk offending China. After all, China remains the EU's largest bilateral trading partner. However, with China's increasingly aggressive moves in its growing competition with the US and the West, and constantly increasing its impact through diplomacy in Europe during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the European Union and its member states are making significant adjustments in their relations with China. The situation was further reinforced by new sanctions against China after the peak of the pandemic ended in Europe, as

¹⁹ The EU, in June 2016, released the Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy using the term Indo-Pacific for the first time. The report pointed out that "throughout the Indo-Pacific and Northeast Asia, the EU will promote human rights and support the transition to democracy in Burma and other countries." From the content of this report, it can be seen that the EU at this time has not really delved into the distinction between Indo-Pacific and Asia-Pacific. See more: The European Union, Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe-A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy (2016-06-28), https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf.

²⁰ Paul van Hooft, Benedetta Girardi, Tim Sweijts, Guarding the Maritime Commons: What role for Europe in the Indo-Pacific, February 2022, The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, p. 4, <https://hcss.nl/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Guarding-the-Maritime-Commons-HCSS-2022.pdf>.

²¹ Frédéric Grare and Manisha Reuter, Moving Closer: European Views of the Indo-Pacific, European Council on Foreign Relations, 13 September 2021, p. 2, <https://ecfr.eu/special/moving-closer-european-views-of-the-indo-pacific/#the-eu-and-security-in-the-indo-pacific>.

well as Europe's growing perception of the need to diversify its economy, in particular, is about the supply chain. The EU's moves involve "thinking beyond China" which is still their most important market and manufacturing hub. It will require proactively identifying specific issues with which the EU wants to cooperate in the Indo-Pacific region as well as the partners with which the EU wants to cooperate.²²

The essential factor that changed the EU's attitude towards the Indo-Pacific region was Joe Biden's inauguration as the 46th president of the United States. After four years of turbulent relations during President Trump's term, the European Commission announced the *New EU-US Agenda for Global Change* in December 2020, right before the official inauguration of the new US President, supports the two sides can increase "focus on challenges and opportunities in the Indo-Pacific will help deepen cooperation with like-minded partners in the region."²³ Indeed, members of the EU in recent years have rapidly moved from a cautious attitude of observing US moves in the region to adopting the concept of Indo-Pacific, and then actively building a version of the Indo-Pacific strategy in line with its interests. The most active representatives are the three EU member states: France, Germany, and the Netherlands.

France is the most proactive European country. In May 2018, French President Emmanuel Macron, first introduced the strategic idea of the Indo-Pacific region during his visit to Australia, advocating to build a new *France-India-Australia* strategic axis to safeguard the rules-based regional order jointly.²⁴ After that, France has successively issued a series of documents such as France and security in the Indo-Pacific (in 2019), France's defense strategy in the Indo-Pacific (in 2019), France's partnership in the Indo-Pacific region (in 2021), France's Indo-Pacific strategy (in 2021), which presents strategic goals, needs, benefits and implementation measures to become the Indo-Pacific power of France truly.

France' Indo-Pacific Strategy has a key focus on security, with a focus on maritime security, multilateralism, and non-traditional security.²⁵ The Macron

²² Manisha Reuter, Friends in Deed: How the EU and the Quad Can Promote Security in the Indo-Pacific, European Council on Foreign Relations, 16 April 2021, p. 2, <https://ecfr.eu/article/friends-in-deed-how-the-eu-and-the-quad-can-work-together-to-promote-security-in-the-indo-pacific/>.

²³ European Commission, A new EU-US agenda for global change, JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL AND THE COUNCIL, Brussels, 2.12.2020, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/joint-communication-eu-us-agenda_en.pdf.

²⁴ Vision Statement on the Australia-France Relationship, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, May 2, 2018, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/france/Pages/vision-statement-on-the-australia-france-relationship>.

²⁵ 李颖, 陈翔: 法国'印太战略': 内涵、动力及局限, 和平与发展, 2021年第五期, 第53-54页。

administration, in the report *France's defense strategy in the Indo-Pacific*, stated that, in the immediate future, security in the Indo-Pacific region must face many security challenges such as the decline of multilateralism, nuclear proliferation, terrorism...; the security situation in the region is increasingly complicated; the report also pointed out four strategic defensive goals of the country: First is to protect the integrity of its sovereignty, to ensure the safety of its citizens abroad as well as its territory and exclusive economic zone; second, through the promotion of cooperation and joint coordination in the military field, contributing to the security of the regions surrounding the overseas territories; third is to work with partners to preserve free and open access to the common seas jointly; fourth, use global multilateral actions to preserve the strategic stability and security balance of the Indo-Pacific region. From that, it can be seen that France's strategic priorities are still security issues, strategic autonomy, and multilateralism.²⁶ However, some Chinese scholars still believe that even if it raises the flag of autonomy, it is still difficult for France to separate its status as a NATO member state and a major Western country, so following America is inevitable.²⁷

Germany is a country following France, which in September 2020 issued the *Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific*, indicating that Germany in this region has significant economic and security interests and hopes to build a new multipolar international order based on international rules and cooperation.²⁸ The German approach has a few differences compared to the French approach toward the Indo-Pacific region. They focus on the aspect of the rules-based order and how to build governance in the region. They commented that: While the Indo-Pacific region is becoming a strong development area, it is still a blank spot in terms of institutions and norms.²⁹

In December 2020, the Netherlands also launched the *Indo-Pacific: Guidelines for strengthening Dutch and EU cooperation with partners in Asia*, calling on EU members to act together in a unified manner on security and economic

²⁶ France's Defence Strategy in the Indo-Pacific , Ministère des Armées, https://apcss.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/France-Defence_Strategy_in_the_Indo-Pacific_2019.pdf, p. 12-15.

²⁷ 张骥《法国外交的独立性及其在中美竞争中的限度》，载《欧洲研究》2020年第6期，第22页。

²⁸ The Federal Government of Germany, Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific: Germany-Europe-Asia Shaping the 21st Century Together (2020-09-01), p.g.2, <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/aussenpolitik/regionaleschwerpunkte/asien/german-government-policy-guidelines-indo-pacific/2380510>.

²⁹ The Federal Government of Germany, Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific: Germany-Europe-Asia Shaping the 21st Century Together (2020-09-01), p.g.2, <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/aussenpolitik/regionaleschwerpunkte/asien/german-government-policy-guidelines-indo-pacific/2380510>.

governance issues in the Indo-Pacific region, creating a special Dutch-EU vision about the Indo-Pacific region.³⁰ The Netherlands was very straightforward in pointing out the potential for conflict between the two superpowers and Europe's economic interests in the region while promoting the building of a common vision with shared values among countries in the region. This document states:

"The development of a European strategic vision for the Indo-Pacific region, a distinctive European view of the region, must be truly based on the EU's own economic and political interests here. It also needs to help countries in the region keep their interests in the face of a power struggle between the two superpowers, when the EU and most Indo-Pacific countries share common interests in preventing the region from being a pawn of that competition."³¹

Under the push of France, Germany, and the Netherlands, EU member states gradually adopted the concept of Indo-Pacific and began to discuss how to participate more in the region. The EU understands that the bloc has apparent interests in the Indo-Pacific region.

"Much of the EU's international trade is transported by water. Sea transport accounts for 80 per cent of the volume and about 50 per cent of the total value of exports and imports. Almost 90 per cent of the EU's external goods trade is by sea. 75 per cent of goods are shipped to Europe by external partners by sea."³²

The Indo-Pacific region is home to the most crucial shipping lanes, as well as the largest suppliers of goods, raw materials, and the most dynamic markets in the world. The fundamental common perception of the countries here is that Europe needs to find a more proactive way to protect its interests in the Indo-Pacific, because of the following three reasons:

One is that geopolitical competition in the Indo-Pacific region, most notably the US-China competition, continues to be tense. Europe does not want to be caught up in the middle but still needs to show the image and representative of the

³⁰ The Government of Netherlands, Indo-Pacific: Guidelines for strengthening Dutch and EU cooperation with partners in Asia (2020-11-13), <https://www.government.nl/documents/publications/2020/11/13/indo-pacific-guidelines>.

³¹ The Government of Netherlands, Indo-Pacific: Guidelines for strengthening Dutch and EU cooperation with partners in Asia (2020-11-13), p.g.4, <https://www.government.nl/documents/publications/2020/11/13/indo-pacific-guidelines>.

³² Shipping and World Trade: Driving Prosperity, accessed September 1, 2022, <https://www.ics-ship-ping.org/shipping-fact/shipping-and-world-trade-driving-prosperity/>

normative force in the region, becoming a stabilizing factor in the context of increasingly fierce big-power competition in the region.

Second, to respond to the changes in the regional structure because of China's rise, Europe needs to actively approach regional partners, forming a framework to deal with China equitably in a more systematic and balanced way, thereby safeguarding the international order of Western liberalism while continuing to cooperate with China in areas where conditions permit.

Third, there are now too many versions of the Indo-Pacific strategy. Europe also needs to show its strategic independence and come up with its own vision for the Indo-Pacific region. Based on the original designs of France, Germany, and the Netherlands, the European Union has gradually adopted this concept and built a complete Indo-Pacific Strategy in accordance with European interests, power, and values.³³

With a clear common perception as above, after a long process, on September 16, 2021, the EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy was officially born.

2. MAIN CONTENTS OF EU'S INDO-PACIFIC STRATEGY

On September 16, 2021, the European Union issued a policy report entitled *Joint Communication on the EU Strategy for Cooperation the Indo-Pacific*, which states that "the region extending from the east coast of Africa to the Pacific island nations for Europe of growing strategic importance."³⁴ Before this report, the Council already approved conclusions on an EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific in April 2021.³⁵ The publication of the report shows that EU officials have officially and comprehensively published their own Indo-Pacific strategy.

EU Strategy for Cooperation the Indo-Pacific covers many aspects and is highly diverse and complex. They set out seven priority areas for the EU to participate in the region (including sustainable and inclusive prosperity, green transition, ocean governance, digital governance and partnerships, digital connectivity, security, and defence). They also describe an implementation program, detailing how the

³³ 邢瑞林:《欧盟的“印太转向”:动态与评估》,《印度洋经济体研究》,2021年第1期,第34-53页。

³⁴ European Commission, Joint Communication on the EU Strategy for Cooperation the Indo-Pacific, September 16, 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/jointcommunication_indo_pacific_en.pdf.

³⁵ Council of the European Union, Council conclusions on an EU Strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific," April 16, 2021, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7914-2021-INIT/en/pdf>.

EU will work with its Indo-Pacific partners to realize the strategic vision.³⁶ The scope of this strategy is very impressive, given that the EU's previous involvement in the Indo-Pacific region was relatively limited. The EU is no longer interested in being a follower of the United States or merely a spectator in the regional game, and they are seeking to become a player in the Indo-Pacific geopolitical chessboard. Like the United States, the EU hopes to become an extra-regional pillar influencing the Indo-Pacific regional order.

The main content of the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy can be divided into four main aspects, which are:

Strengthening and Enhancing Cooperation Relations with Economic Partners in the Region

The market size and economic development potential of the Indo-Pacific region are constantly increasing, making the EU more and more interested in building relations with economic partners in the region. In their Indo-Pacific Strategy, the EU strengthens cooperation as the core, focusing on issues such as the trade and investment environment, building the resilience of the value chain, and digital innovation. The EU believes that a rules-based free, open, and diverse trade and investment environment is crucial for economic development and supports increased cooperation to improve the efficiency of economic rules, promote the establishment of a fair and open economic environment, and protect international trade from the effects of unfair practices such as industrial protectionism or economic coercion. In recent years, the limitations of the EU's export-oriented economy have gradually been revealed, and the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic has made the EU realize that the resilience of the supply chain is very important for economic recovery.³⁷

In order to diversify economic and trade relations, the EU will actively participate in multilateral economic cooperation organizations such as the G20 and ASEM, consolidating and developing trade and investment, strengthening bilateral relations with Japan, Korea, Australia, and other countries, and at the same time began to develop relations with partners that did not have much economic contact. In addition, the EU is also concerned about the challenges of technological sovereignty and trade security. With the vision of *European Digital Transformation by 2030*, based on the *European Horizon* program, the EU will

³⁶ European Commission, Joint Communication on the EU Strategy for Cooperation the Indo-Pacific, September 16, 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/jointcommunication_indo_pacific_en.pdf.

³⁷ 伍慧萍:《欧洲战略自主构想的缘起、内涵与实施路径》,载《德国研究》,2021年第3期,第23-45页。

continue to enhance its technological innovation capacity, deepening digital cooperation based on the *ASEAN Digital Master Plan 2025* and together with Korea, Singapore, and other countries strengthen cooperation in building digital partnerships, promoting e-commerce, and promoting high-tech development.³⁸

Participating in Regional Political and Security Framework Building

The EU governance model has long become an important foreign policy tool to help them improve their influence and voices in the international arena, with the core content being the terms and conventions. They are the basis for building the world's standards and incline the relations between countries to act in a normative way, thereby reducing the need to solve problems through conflict.³⁹ In addition, the EU is aware that several political and security risks are emerging in the Indo-Pacific region, including increasingly fierce major power competition, the assertiveness and increasing military-building moves of countries in territorial and maritime issues, the crisis of confidence leads to the ideological struggle between totalitarianism and democracy. In addition, there are risks of religious or ethnic conflicts, threatening peace and stability in the region.

In the Indo-Pacific region, the European Union advocates promoting multilateral cooperation based on important values and common principles, actively building a regional political and security framework of the region and strengthening and defending the fundamental rules of the international order. In this region, the EU will make efforts to deepen partnerships with countries such as Japan, Korea, Australia, and New Zealand, maintain close relations and political dialogue with countries in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific islands, actively cooperate in the fields of economic and trade linkages, technological innovation, environmental management.⁴⁰

In addition, the EU attaches great importance to the role of international organizations and multilateral mechanisms, highly appreciating ASEAN's contribution to the development of multilateralism, upholding the principle of ASEAN's central role, advocating to take ASEAN as the central forum to build and establish the diplomatic network and multilateral rules of action of the region,

³⁸ European Commission , Europe's Digital Decade: Digital Empowered Europe by 2030, 09/03/2021, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_983.

³⁹ 洪邮生 :《规范性力量欧洲与欧盟对华外交》, 载《世界经济与政治》, 2010 年第 1 期, 第 52-65 页.

⁴⁰ European Parliament, REPORT on the EU and the security challenges in the Indo-Pacific, 04/04/2022, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2022-0085_EN.html#_ftnref2.

thereby creating and standardizing partnerships, and call for the establishment of the EU-ASEAN Parliamentary Conference and various exchange activities between parliaments in the region. Along with the increasingly aggressive big-power competition in the region, military power is increasingly tied to political influence, which makes the EU more and more focused on building collective security defence. In the future, the EU will continue to promote defence cooperation plans with partners in the region, such as Japan, India, and Pakistan, enhancing the presence of the navy and military operation capacity in the region while continuing to pay attention to security issues such as cybercrime, terrorism, or large-scale lethal weapons.⁴¹

Promote Governance of Non-traditional Security Issues in the Region

The Indo-Pacific region is home to three-fifths of the world's population and many fast-growing economies, carbon emissions in the region are growing rapidly every year, posing major challenges for future global environmental governance. As a leader and norm builder in global environmental governance, the EU is always interested in governance issues in this region. In the Indo-Pacific Strategy, the EU decided to raise the spending target on climate change action to 30 per cent and allocated about 35 per cent of the funding to the European Horizon project for research on climate issues in order to improve the self-governance ability of the region.⁴²

Promoting Human Rights and the EU Value System

In recent years, the EU as a normative power has been widely recognized internationally. Ian Manners believes that a normative Europe must have five core elements: peace, freedom, people sovereignty, the rule of law, and respect for human rights. In the Indo-Pacific strategy, the EU has always attached great importance to promoting the role of normative power, promoting Western democratic values, and collaborating with like-minded partners in the region to prevent any act that violates the law of international humanitarianism. The EU believes that the democratic principles and human rights of the Indo-Pacific region are being threatened by authoritarian regimes in the region, which provides an opportunity to manifest the common norms that are inherent in the Indo-Pacific.

⁴¹ European Parliament, REPORT on the EU and the security challenges in the Indo-Pacific, 04/04/2022, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2022-0085_EN.html#_ftnref2.

⁴² European Commission, Joint Communication on the EU Strategy for Cooperation the Indo-Pacific, September 16, 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/jointcommunication_indo_pacific_en.pdf.

On the issue of democracy and freedom, the EU emphasized that the media in Indo-Pacific countries are subject to information manipulation and interference by state and non-state actors. In this regard, the EU supports combating information manipulation by improving information identification and analysis, supporting independent content for media outlets, and supporting voices from civil society, the private sector, and other stakeholders. The EU also emphasized that it would focus on human rights issues in formulating policies related to the Indo-Pacific region, using all available tools, such as political dialogue and trade preferences, to protect human rights and use sanctions against individuals, entities, and institutions that seriously violate and abuse human rights.

The EU will continue protecting the interests of vulnerable minorities, focusing on the political participation of women and children, ethnic and religious minorities, advocating for the abolition of the death penalty that remains on the books and protecting the legitimate rights and interests of workers.⁴³

In brief, the content of the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy has several unique characteristics that need attention:

- The spatial scope that this EU strategy covers is broader than the Indo-Pacific versions of other great powers. While the US and Pacific countries focus mainly on the region of countries around the Pacific and South Asia, the EU defines the Indo-Pacific as the area stretching from Africa to the archipelago of the Pacific Ocean.
- The EU wants to show its role of independence and strategic autonomy compared to the US. They do not want to be thought by the Indo-Pacific countries that the US intention here is the only one.
- The economic importance of the Indo-Pacific region to the EU is extremely significant, so they are forced to return to participate actively and have their own ways to protect their interests.
- The EU does not want to confront directly but also does not fully support China, so it chooses a strategy that is hedging. However, it can be observed that throughout the process of formulating and developing the Indo-Pacific strategy, the EU is increasingly having a negative attitude towards China, so the language of criticism is also gradually increasing, especially when China did not express its resolute opposition towards Russia after its attack on Ukraine.

⁴³ European Commission, Joint Communication on the EU Strategy for Cooperation the Indo-Pacific, September 16, 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/jointcommunication_indo_pacific_en.pdf.

- The values of democracy and human rights have always been powerful external tools of the EU, and they will continue to use these tools in the development of the Indo-Pacific strategy.

3. CHINA'S RESPONSE TO THE EU'S INDO-PACIFIC STRATEGY

China needed a long gradual process to receive the term Indo-Pacific. Since 2013, Chinese academics have begun describing and commenting on the Indo-Pacific concept in research journals and newspapers. After a few years, scholars mainly discussed the US Indo-Pacific strategy and China's responses, as well as the perception of Australia, India, and Japan about the concept of Indo-Pacific. In 2017, Donald Trump became the US president, and China's interest in the concept of Indo-Pacific increased rapidly. Along with Trump's trip to five Asian countries, especially after the first *US National Security Strategy Report* in his term and the fact that major countries in the Indo-Pacific region are increasing interaction, the Indo-Pacific concept in China is receiving more and more attention. In 2018 alone, research papers on the Indo-Pacific concept amounted to several hundred articles, far exceeding the number of papers in previous years combined. However, most scholars and diplomats are apprehensive about the anti-China implications of the concept and therefore do not welcome the term.

On the official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, the term Indo-Pacific first appeared in 2013, but in content related to marine ecology. The phrase later appeared sporadically in some press releases and responses from the Chinese Foreign Ministry. It was only in 2022 that this phrase was mentioned repeatedly in a series of Chinese responses, especially by Foreign Minister Wang Yi, to the Biden administration's updated Indo-Pacific strategy. When looking up the term Indo-Pacific on this website, the results for the year 2022 are 2,884 of the total 3042 results on the web. It can be seen that it will not be until 2022, when the Biden administration upgrades the Indo-Pacific strategy, that China will focus on using this phrase to replace the traditional Asia-Pacific phrase.

It is worth noting that China seems to only *ruffle its feathers* toward the US version of the Indo-Pacific strategy, which means to contain China's rise quite clearly. However, with other versions, they have a relatively soft attitude.

On February 9, 2018, when jointly meeting the press with Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi of Indonesia in Beijing, Foreign Minister Wang Yi expressed that:

“The framework of the Indo-Pacific region recently proposed by Indonesia emphasizes the principles of openness, transparency, and inclusiveness, upholds the general direction of dialogue and cooperation and conforms to the trend of the world development and progress. China agrees with this framework and believes there will be no market for the Cold War mentality against it.”⁴⁴

The EU version of the Indo-Pacific Strategy does not explicitly generalize the EU-China relationship, but in a speech by European Commission President Von der Leyen during the Raisina Dialogue 2022 on geopolitics and geoeconomics in New Delhi, the European side describes:

“The relationship between the European Union and China is simultaneously strategically important and challenging. All at once, China is a negotiating partner, an economic competitor, and a systemic rival. We will continue our multifaceted engagement, we will continue to cooperate on tackling common challenges, and we will protect our essential interests and promote our values”⁴⁵

As one of the most important countries in the Indo-Pacific region, China is also the main target of the Indo-Pacific concept established by the United States, Japan, and Australia. Similarly, the EU's strategy in Indo-Pacific certainly will have a significant influence on China. In March 2019, the document *EU-China: A Strategic Outlook* released by the European Commission considered China as a “cooperation and negotiation partner”, “economic rival,” and “institutional competitor.” Depending on different issues and events, the EU can make contact with China in different ways, thereby expressing a policy stance that is both cooperative and competitive towards China.⁴⁶ Since then, the EU has maintained a rather pragmatic attitude towards China in terms of the form of consciousness that they cooperate with the US to increase pressure on China and, at the same time, try to maintain cooperation in the areas of global governance needs such as addressing climate change and many economic, trade, and investment sectors. The policy towards China in the EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy clearly inherits the

⁴⁴ Wang Yi, Promote Regional Integration and Build a New Type of International Relations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, February 9, 2018, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/gjhdq_665435/2675_665437/2716_663436/2718_663440/201802/t20180212_514031.html.

⁴⁵ ET Bureau, Raisina Dialogue 2022: EU ties with China strategically important, challenging, says Ursula von der Leyen, The Economic Times, Apr. 25, 2022, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/raisina-dialogue-2022-eu-ties-with-china-strategically-important-challenging-says-ursula-von-der-leyen/articleshow/91082321.cms>.

⁴⁶ European Commission, EU-China – A strategic outlook, 12/03/2019, <https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/communication-eu-china-a-strategic-outlook.pdf>.

direction of the dual hedging policy towards the US and China that the EU has long adopted.

In the published documents on the Indo-Pacific strategy, the EU repeatedly mentioned that this region still has many problems that jeopardize the protection of security interests and the realization of the universal values of the EU. These are the habitual policy tools used by the EU when dealing with China. However, the rhetoric in the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy also has some notable points. Although the EU has borrowed the US's Indo-Pacific Strategy title, it has not completely followed the US Confrontation and restraint are not at the heart of the EU's China policy. The EU in EU Strategy on Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific used 62 words *cooperation* when talking about relations with countries in the region, from which it can be seen that the ease of anxiety and hostility of some countries in the region in general and China in particular. The EU side is still interested in the signing of the *EU-China Comprehensive Investment Agreement* in the immediate future, while China is still very interested in issues of mutual benefit such as digital transformation, green development, and protection. Therefore, although there are still many binding conditions that make the EU still have to participate in the Indo-Pacific region, it can be seen that the EU is trying to show strategic autonomy relative to the US and gradually seek to integrate with the region to ensure the bloc's interests here.

On the one hand, although the EU has always had fundamental differences with China in the areas of human rights and values, the EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy does not identify China as a threat such as the United States, which encourages China to play its role in a peaceful and prosperous Indo-Pacific region. Compared with the US and others, the EU's more tolerant attitude towards China is certainly a strategic opportunity for China. This is mainly due to the difference in priorities and direction between the Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States and Europe. The Indo-Pacific Strategy of the US takes geopolitical competition as its core, makes containment of China a priority, and focuses on traditional security areas, hoping to create an arc of strategic cooperation built from two main pillars, the AUKUS tripartite military alliance and the QUAD.⁴⁷ The EU's version of the Indo-Pacific Strategy, while at the strategic level still very wary of China's rapidly increasing influence, continues to focus on protecting and expanding the economic interests of the EU in this large area, advocates building an open and

⁴⁷ 《外交部:借口所谓“中国威胁 搞印太战略”本身就居心不良》, 澎湃新闻, 2022-02-14, <https://baijiaohao.baidu.com/s?id=1724725251732491220&wfr=spider&for=pc>.

ASEAN-centric multilateral cooperation framework in the region, combined with China's strategic plans in this region.⁴⁸ For China, the EU can become a cooperative partner on many regional issues, or at least without developing into a rival of China.

On the other hand, the EU's desire to increase its influence objectively will complicate the geopolitical game in the Indo-Pacific region, and the EU option will balance China's influence in the region to a certain extent. In December 2021, the EU officially launched the Global Gateway initiative, which aims to support the global recovery by boosting health, education, and research systems worldwide through investments in digital, clean energy and transport networks.⁴⁹ European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said the plan provided a "true alternative" to China's global infrastructure program, which has been accused of saddling some countries with huge debts since its inception in 2013.⁵⁰

In addition, actions in the field of security and defence of the EU are also worthy of China's vigilance. Since the end of 2020, the EU has been actively engaged in Indo-Pacific security affairs, strengthening its strategic partnership with ASEAN and upgrading its maritime security dialogue with India. Ensuring that military operations in the Indo-Pacific region go smoothly, the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy shows that the priority aspect in security and defense is maritime issues while encouraging member states to mobilize and deploy navies, to participate in maritime military exercises, to deepen bilateral security cooperation to enhance national security maritime security to confront the growing threats.⁵¹ Recently, major EU member states such as France, Germany, and the Netherlands have sent frigates and later fighters to the western coast of the Pacific Ocean to conduct strategic patrols. German Defence Minister Christine Lambrecht also stated that they intend to have more military exchanges for 2023 and beyond as "Berlin seeks a continuous and long-term security commitment to the region."⁵² By pushing the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy, it is possible that the EU's presence in the security and

⁴⁸ 《王毅同新加坡外长维文会谈:中方坚定支持以东盟为中心的区域合作架构 中国新闻网, 2021 04 01. <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1695802410304589989&wfr=spider&for=pc>.

⁴⁹ European Commission, The Global Gateway, 01/12/2021, https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/stronger-europe-world/global-gateway_en.

⁵⁰ Europe unveils its \$340 billion answer to China's Belt and Road infrastructure initiative, CNN Business, 2021-12-01, <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/12/01/business/global-gateway-eu-china-belt-road/index.html>.

⁵¹ European Commission, Joint Communication on the EU Strategy for Cooperation the Indo-Pacific, September 16, 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/jointcommunication_indo_pacific_en.pdf.

⁵² GABRIEL DOMINGUEZ, With drills and fighter jets, German defense minister seeks stronger Indo-Pacific ties, The Japan Times, Sep 26, 2022, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2022/09/26/asia-pacific/german-defense-minister-asia-pacific-engagement/>.

infrastructure construction sectors in the Indo-Pacific will continue to increase, posing a challenge to the expansion and development of the Belt and Road Initiative and China's neighbourhood security.

According to analyst Xu Ruojie from the Institute of European Studies under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, in its Indo-Pacific strategy, the EU has positioned China as a *competitor, rival and partner* depending on the issues, which also means that the attitude seems harsh but not really obvious. He pointed out that although the wording of accusations against China, which the EU has always used, is also present in the content of the strategy, this time, it has been obscured, however the relative competitiveness is apparent. Based on the content of the report, the author believes that in the EU's current Indo-Pacific strategy, China's positioning can be summarized as "competitive primarily, increasing strengthen confrontation while not forgetting cooperation"⁵³

Zhang Tengjun, Vice President of Asia-Pacific Studies at the China Institute of International Affairs, has provided a comparative analysis of the Indo-Pacific strategy of the US and EU. Zhang said that the birth of Europe's version of the Indo-Pacific strategy has two layers of meaning. First, this represents the strategic adjustment and unified actions of the US and Europe around regional issues, especially towards China. Second, the interaction between Europe and the Indo-Pacific partners of the US is increasing, thereby helping to enhance Europe's strategic position in this region and at the same time demonstrating trying to join hands with the US to exercise strategic competition with China. Zhang also pointed out the similarities between the two Indo-Pacific strategies, which is the growing unease about losing position in the transformation of the international order, demonstrating that competition between major countries is becoming more and more fierce, at the same time, it also shows that the internal instability of a declining Western world, a consensus view of the importance of the Indo-Pacific region is also increasingly clear; and finally, the strategic needs to respond to China's rise is also growing.⁵⁴

The differences between the two versions of US and EU strategies pointed out by this Chinese scholar include

- Different strategic goals. For the United States, this is a shift from Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific, encompassing the Pacific, Indian Ocean, Asia,

⁵³ 徐若杰, 欧盟印太战略“报告”竞合兼具, WORLD AFFAIRS 2021 第 20 期, 2021 年 10 月 16 日, p. 48.

⁵⁴ 张腾军, 欧盟印太战略, 法国研究 (Etudes Françaises) 2022 年第一期, 总第 124 期, 第 69-87 页.

Australia, and North America, thus excludable and encircling disruptive countries, emphasizing security and economic cooperation to contain China's rising influence in the region. For Europe, the picture of the Indo-Pacific is slightly different, consisting of two layers of goals: firstly, to fully exploit the economic potential of the Indo-Pacific in order to find their development motivation; secondly, to seek regional balance in the strategic autonomy thinking, avoiding too much dependence on the US strategy.

- Strategic methods are not synchronized with each other. Both the US and the EU consider the rise of China to be an important geopolitical event in the Indo-Pacific region, but how to deal with the China challenge is not uniform. The US is basically containing China, while Europe sees China as an economic competitor and a systemic rival" but does not make containing China the primary method in their Indo-Pacific strategy.⁵⁵ The identification of differences between the US and the EU strategies appears in most of the studies on the Indo-Pacific strategy by Chinese scholars, showing that they do not want and try not to push Europe towards the opposite side of China or equate the EU and the US as one. This perception will have a significant influence on their policies towards the EU.

However, recently, the relations between the EU and China have had quite complicated changes. After the Russian attack on Ukraine in February 2022, the EU's attitude towards China has become much more challenging. In the *Report on the EU and challenges in the Indo-Pacific region*, adopted in June 2022, China was mentioned 45 times; with stronger negative terms such as "anti-democratic policy and aggressive behaviour," "assertive and expansionist behaviour in the Indo-Pacific region," "aggressive commercial practices based on diplomatic coercion and belligerent debt diplomacy policies," or "China's economic and financial expansion in the Indo-Pacific."⁵⁶

The report also linked China to Russia, arguing that China chose to side with Russia when in a joint statement of the two countries on February 4, 2022, China declared that the friendship between the two countries has *no limits* and China for the first time officially joined Russia's demand for a halt to NATO's expansion. In addition, the EU alleges that senior Chinese officials had some level of direct knowledge about Russia's war plans or intentions before the aggression started

⁵⁵ 张腾军,《欧盟印太战略,法国研究(Etudes Françaises)2022年第一期,总第124期,第69-87页.

⁵⁶ European Parliament, REPORT on the EU and the security challenges in the Indo-Pacific, 04/04/2022, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2022-0085_EN.html#_ftnref2.

on 24 February. Furthermore, the EU has expressed disappointment about China's abstention. At the same time, not a single country in the Indo-Pacific region voted against the UN resolution ES-11/1 adopted on March 2, 2022, deploring Russia's aggression against Ukraine.⁵⁷

4. SUMMARY

In conclusion, the Indo-Pacific strategy has gradually formed and has gone through many different versions. Although appearing relatively late, the EU's version of the Indo-Pacific strategy still represents the bloc's ambition to participate in the Indo-Pacific region in the future. From a Chinese perspective, the establishment of the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy showed that they had been worried about the rise of China, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic, hoping to reduce its dependence on China and at the same time, bring strategic goals to more cooperative partners, thereby gaining more initiative in international competition. However, China still sees a certain restraint of the EU in its strategy towards China and wishes to keep a particular cooperation space, avoiding pushing each other into confrontation. Undoubtedly, with the Russia-Ukraine situation continuing to be tense and complicated, it seems that China's inaction against Russia will cause the EU to continue to adjust its diplomatic strategy towards China in particular and the Indo-Pacific strategy in generally in a more assertive direction. This trend will certainly significantly impact on EU-China relations and the security environment in the Indo-Pacific region.

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⁵⁷ European Parliament, REPORT on the EU and the security challenges in the Indo-Pacific, A9-0085/2022, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2022-0085_EN.html.

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India's Perception of EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy

Vo Xuan Vinh





India is one of four members of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (or Quad in short), the dialogue established at the end of 2017 *Australia-India-Japan-US Consultations on the Indo-Pacific* held in the Philippines after US President, Donald Trump, shared the USA's *vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific* in his remarks at the APEC CEO Summit in Vietnam in November 2017. Japan deployed a Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy in April 2017 as a part of its Priority Policy for Development Cooperation FY 2017. Japan has then in 2017, 2018 and 2019 respectively released Diplomatic Bluebooks with the main theme of Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy, and recently is Japan's Effort for a *Free and Open Indo-Pacific* (2021). The USA announced a Briefing on the Indo-Pacific Strategy in April 2018, and then documents such as *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region* released by the Department of Defense in June 2019, Department of State's *A Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision* (November 4, 2019), *United States Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific* (January 2021), and *Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States* (February 2002). Australia released its 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper in November 2017, comprising, among others, a chapter on *A Stable and Prosperous Indo-Pacific*. Australia's other significant documents on the Indo-Pacific are its 2016 Defence White Paper, and 2020 Defence Strategic Update. ASEAN, geographical centre of Indo-Pacific, announced its Outlook on the Indo-Pacific

(AOIP) in June 2019. By September 2021, European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy released the Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council which sets out the EU strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. After introducing the evolution of Indo-Pacific concept by having a glance at Indo-Pacific concepts of organizations and countries in the world, the chapter will examine India's Perception of Indo-Pacific Concept, EU's Strategy on Cooperation in Indo-Pacific, and then highlight India's Perception of EU's Strategy on Cooperation in Indo-Pacific.

1. INDO-PACIFIC: AN INTRODUCTION¹

Australia should have been regarded as the first country to initiate the idea of the Indo-Pacific when the Royal Australian Navy was decided to be established as a two ocean Navy.² However, the trans-ocean strategy seems to be revived two decades later by Japanese Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, when he proposed an idea of *the two seas of Indian and Pacific Oceans for a new broader Asia* in his speech at the Parliament of the Republic of India in 22 August 2007. By quoting the title of a book, *Confluence of the Two Seas*, authored by the Mughal prince Dara Shikoh in 1655, Prime Minister Abe emphasised the ambitions of India in a *broader Asia*, and the preparedness of both India and Japan in working together to “carry out the pursuit of freedom and prosperity in the region”.³ Prime Minister Abe affirmed India and Japan's “vital interests in the security of sea lanes” which are “are the shipping routes that are the most critical for the world economy”. Interestingly, the Japanese Prime Minister also identified the key stakeholders of the idea-Japan and India, incorporating with the United States of America and Australia.

After Prime Minister Abe's proposal, in 2008, the Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd initiated an idea envisaging an Asia-Pacific Community in 2020 as “a regional institution which spans the entire Asia-Pacific region-including the USA, Japan,

¹ This content is inherited, and developed from the author's chapter: Vo Xuan Vinh, Maritime Security in India's Perception of the Indo-Pacific Concept, in Lalit Mansingh, Anup K. Mudgal, and Udai Bhanu Singh (eds.), *Purbasa: East meets East-Synergising the North-East and Eastern India with the Indo-Pacific*, New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2019, p. 70–84.

² Department of Defence, *The Defence of Australia 1987*, Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1987, p. viii.

³ *Confluence of the Two Seas*, Speech by H.E.Mr. Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan at the Parliament of the Republic of India, August 22, 2007, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/pmv0708/speech-2.html>.

China, India, Indonesia, and the other states of the region.”⁴ According to Rudd, the community is ‘a regional institution which is able to engage in the full spectrum of dialogue, cooperation and action on economic and political matters and future challenges related to security’.⁵ Although Rudd’s proposal was not named the *Indo-Pacific*, the presence of India in the community indicated that the proposed Asia-Pacific community went beyond the mere geography of the Asia-Pacific, like the East Asia Summit (EAS).

By deploying the balance and then pivot strategy to Asia, whose “dramatic economic growth has increased its connection to America’s future prosperity”,⁶ the USA began paying more attention to the Indo-Pacific region because of the importance of the Indo-Pacific basin to global trade and commerce.⁷ Clinton then reaffirmed the US commitment to expanding its strategy from the Asia-Pacific to the Indo-Pacific by expanding US alliance with Australia from a Pacific partnership to an Indo-Pacific one, and indeed a global partnership.⁸

Inspired and encouraged by the US commitments to Asia, Australia, and Japan, they also began to focus more on the concept of the Indo-Pacific. In his remarks to the Australian Strategic Policy Institute in August 2012, the Australian Minister of Defence, Stephen Smith, clarified his country’s shift towards the Indo-Pacific because the USA believes that the Indo-Pacific will become “the world’s strategic centre of gravity”. He felt that it will be charted by (i) the rise of China, of India, and of the ASEAN economies combined; (ii) the major and enduring economic strengths of Japan and South Korea; (iii) the great individual potential of Indonesia and its importance to Australia; and (iv) greater US military, economic and political engagement in the region through its rebalance strategy.⁹ The Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Australia, Peter Varghese, then identified that “a new Indo-Pacific strategic arc is beginning to emerge, extending

⁴ Kevin Rudd, Address to the Asia Society AustralAsia Centre, Sydney: It’s time to build an Asia Pacific Community, June 04, 2008, <https://pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/release/transcript-15947>.

⁵ Kevin Rudd, Address to the Asia Society AustralAsia Centre, Sydney: It’s time to build an Asia Pacific Community, June 04, 2008, <https://pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/release/transcript-15947>.

⁶ The White House, *National Security Strategy*, Washington, May 2010, p. 43.

⁷ America’s Engagement in the Asia-Pacific, Remarks by Hillary Rodham Clinton, Secretary of State, Kahala Hotel, Honolulu, HI, October 28, 2010, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2010/10/150141.htm>.

⁸ Hillary Rodham Clinton, *America’s Pacific Century*, Foreign Policy Magazine, October 11, 2011, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2011/10/175215.htm>.

⁹ Minister for Defence - To the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), *Australia’s Changing Strategic Circumstances*, 1 August 2012, <http://www.minister.defence.gov.au/2012/08/01/minister-for-defence-to-the-australian-strategic-policy-institute-aspi-australias-changing-strategic-circumstances/>.

from India through Southeast Asia to Northeast Asia, including the sea lines of communication on which the region depends".¹⁰

Japan, for its part, has strongly responded with the idea of Asia's Democratic Security Diamond.¹¹ Facing the challenges caused by China, Prime Minister Abe suggested that "the Indian and Japanese governments ... join together to shoulder more responsibility as guardians of navigational freedom across the Pacific and Indian oceans", because "peace, stability, and freedom of navigation in the Pacific Ocean are inseparable from peace, stability, and freedom of navigation in the Indian Ocean". Under Prime Minister Abe, Japan has also made more efforts to realise the idea on a larger scope. In his address at the Opening Session of the Sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development in Kenya in August 2016, Prime Minister Abe stated that:

Japan bears the responsibility of fostering the confluence of the Pacific and Indian Oceans and of Asia and Africa into a place that values freedom, the rule of law, and the market economy, free from force or coercion, and making it prosperous.¹²

When President Donald Trump, in his remarks at APEC CEO Summit in Danang, Vietnam (10 November 2017), shared his *vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific*,¹³ some thought that the concept was Trump's legacy;¹⁴ but, in fact, Japan was the first country to chart the strategy. In April 2017, the Land of Rising Sun announced the Priority Policy for Development Cooperation–FY 2017, including three key areas. In order to develop "an environment for international peace, stability, and prosperity, and [the] sharing [of] universal values,"¹⁵ Japan charted out the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy which focused on three groups of activities to be implemented: (i) counterterrorism, capacity building of law enforcement

¹⁰ Australia and Asia, Speech of Mr Peter Varghese, Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Australia at Asia Society Luncheon, 29 April 2013, <http://dfat.gov.au/news/speeches/Pages/asia-society-luncheon-australia-and-asia.aspx>.

¹¹ Shinzo Abe, Asia's Democratic Security Diamond, *Project Syndicate*, Dec.27, 2012, <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/a-strategic-alliance-for-japan-and-india-by-shinzo-abe>.

¹² Address by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the Opening Session of the Sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD VI), Nairobi, Kenya, August 27, 2016, http://www.mofa.go.jp/af/af2/page4e_000496.html.

¹³ Remarks by President Trump at APEC CEO Summit, Da Nang, Vietnam, Issued on: November 10, 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-apec-ceo-summit-da-nang-vietnam/>.

¹⁴ Remarks by President Trump at APEC CEO Summit, Da Nang, Vietnam, Issued on: November 10, 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-apec-ceo-summit-da-nang-vietnam/>.

¹⁵ International Cooperation Bureau (MOFA, Japan), *Priority Policy for Development Cooperation FY 2017*, April 2017, p. 3, at <http://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000259285.pdf>.

authorities, and countermeasures against violent extremism; (ii) humanitarian assistance including assistance for refugees, the stabilisation of society, peace building, the removal of landmines; and (iii) strengthening the rule of law through support for capacity building to ensure maritime safety and the establishing of legal systems, and reinforcing the capacity of both law enforcement authorities and their government officials.¹⁶

After Trump's remarks at APEC CEO Summit 2017, the US National Security Strategy 2017 (released December 2017) considered the Indo-Pacific as the first among seven strategic regions, including the Indo-Pacific, Europe, the Middle East, South and Central Asia, the Western Hemisphere, and Africa. The NSS 2017 outlined priority actions in political, economic, military, and security fields in the context of the Indo-Pacific region.¹⁷ In one of the latest developments, the USA has made a clarification about its free and open Indo Pacific strategy when Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Alex N. Wong, in his Briefing on the Indo-Pacific Strategy (2 April 2018) explained that a free Indo-Pacific has two levels. On the international plane, the nations in the region are "free from coercion".¹⁸ At the national level, the societies of countries in the region are "free in terms of good governance, in terms of fundamental rights, in terms of transparency, and anticorruption". According to Wong, an open Indo-Pacific "means open sea lines of communication and open airways", "more open logistics-infrastructure", "more open investment", and "more open trade". In the *2022 Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States*, the US "is committed to an Indo-Pacific that is free and open, connected, prosperous, secure, and resilient".¹⁹

The strategic changes in the region have encouraged Australia to chart its foreign policy in which the concept of the Indo-Pacific emerges as playing an important role. In the 2017 Australian Foreign Policy White Paper (released November 2017), Australia officially defines "the Indo-Pacific as the region ranging from the eastern Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean connected by Southeast Asia, including India, North Asia, and the United States".²⁰ It set(s) out a "vision for a neighbourhood in

¹⁶ International Cooperation Bureau (MOFA, Japan), *Priority Policy for Development Cooperation FY 2017*, April 2017, p. 4, at <http://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000259285.pdf>.

¹⁷ The White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, Washington DC, December 2017, p. 46–47.

¹⁸ Alex N. Wong, Briefing on The Indo-Pacific Strategy, Special Briefing, Washington, DC, April 2, 2018, <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2018/04/280134.htm> (accessed April 4, 2018).

¹⁹ The White House, *The Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States of America*, February 2022, p7.

²⁰ Australian Government, *The 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper*, Canberra: CanPrint Communications Pty Ltd, p. 1.

which adherence to rules delivers lasting peace, where the rights of all states are respected, and where open markets facilitate the free flow of trade, capital, and ideas”.²¹ In the *2020 Defence Strategic Update*, Australia makes “efforts to build a secure, prosperous and inclusive Indo-Pacific of independent, sovereign and resilient states”.²²

Announced in June 2019, ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) is based on the principles of strengthening ASEAN Centrality, openness, transparency, inclusivity, a rules-based framework, good governance, respect for sovereignty, non-intervention, complementarity with existing cooperation frameworks, equality, mutual respect, mutual trust, mutual benefit and respect for international law, such as UN Charter, the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, and other relevant UN treaties and conventions, the ASEAN Charter and various ASEAN treaties and agreements and the East Asia Summit Principles for Mutually Beneficial Relations (2011). The Outlook is also guided by the purposes and principles contained in the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC). In order to gain set goals, areas of cooperation were identified, include maritime cooperation, connectivity, UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030, and economic. Other possible areas of cooperation are also included.²³

To date, there are more individual countries have introduced their own concepts of Indo-Pacific. In March 2021, the UK announced its *Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*. France has also introduced *France's Indo-Pacific Strategy* in October 2018 (revised in July 2021, and February 2022 respectively). In September 2020, Germany released *Policy guidelines for the Indo-Pacific*. Italy for its part announced *The Italian Contribution to the EU Strategy for the Indo-Pacific* in February 2022. Another European country, Netherlands also introduced *Indo-Pacific: Guidelines for strengthening Dutch and EU cooperation with partners in Asia* in November 2020.

²¹ Australian Government, *The 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper*, Canberra: CanPrint Communications Pty Ltd, p. 4.

²² Department of Defence (Australian Government), *2020 Defence Strategic Update*, p. 21.

²³ ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, 22 June 2019, https://asean.org/asean2020/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/ASEAN-Outlook-on-the-Indo-Pacific_FINAL_22062019.pdf .

2. INDIA'S PERCEPTION OF INDO-PACIFIC CONCEPT²⁴

From the second half of the first decade of 21st century, Indian academic circles began to discuss the concept of the Indo-Pacific. The concept was formally introduced and explained in an academic paper²⁵ for the first time, by Captain Gurpreet S. Khurana in January 2007.²⁶ Vice Admiral A.G. Thapliyal even commented that the “spirit of the term Indo-Pacific” was picked up by Japan’s Prime Minister Abe, as reflected in his speech to the Indian Parliament in August 2007.²⁷ The concept of the Indo-Pacific has gained increasing prevalence in geopolitical and strategic discourse since 2011 among Indian policy-makers, analysts, and academics.²⁸

However, India officially launched this concept after MEA’s Secretary (East) Sanjay Singh used the term in an address titled *Geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific Region: Asian Perspectives* at the Asian Relations Conference IV in March, 2013. India’s approach to, and the deployment of the concept have been clarified in documents such as *Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian’s Maritime Security Strategy 2015*; *Joint Statement on India and Japan Vision 2025: Special Strategic and Global Partnership Working Together for Peace and Prosperity of the Indo Pacific Region and the World* (12 December 2015); *India-Australia Joint Statement during the State visit of Prime Minister of Australia to India* (10 April 2017); *Joint Statement by United States and India: Prosperity Through Partnership* (27 June 2017); *Opening Statement by Indian Prime Minister at 15th ASEAN-India Summit* (14 November 2017); and the answers of the Indian Minister of External Affairs to Rajya Sabha question No. 525 on Indo-US-Japan Maritime Security (02 December 2015); question No.653 on

²⁴ This content is partly inherited, and developed from the author’s chapter: Vo Xuan Vinh, *Maritime Security in India’s Perception of the Indo-Pacific Concept*, in Lalit Mansingh, Anup K. Mudgal, and Udai Bhanu Singh (eds.), *Purbasa: East meets East-Synergising the North-East and Eastern India with the Indo-Pacific*, New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2019, p. 70–84.

²⁵ Gurpreet S. Khurana, ‘Security of Sea Lines: Prospects for India-Japan Cooperation’, *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 31 (1), January 2007, p. 139 – 153.

²⁶ Gurpreet S. Khurana, ‘The ‘Indo-Pacific Concept: Retrospect and Prospect’, *CIMSEC*, November 14, 2017, <http://cimsec.org/indo-pacific-concept-retrospect-prospect/34710>.

²⁷ A G Thapliyal, ‘Strategic & Geostrategic Context’, in Sharad Tewari, Roshan Khanijo (eds.), *The Indo-Pacific Region: Security Dynamics and Challenges*, New Delhi: Vij Books India Pvt Ltd, 2016.

²⁸ See more: Shyam Saran, *Mapping the Indo-Pacific* The Indian Express, October 29, 2011; Rukhmani Gupta, *India puts the Indo in ‘Indo-Pacific’*, Asia Times, 2 December 2011; D. Gnanagurunathan, *India and the idea of the ‘Indo-Pacific’*, East Asia Forum, 20 October 2012; D. Gnanagurunathan, *India-Australia in the Indo-Pacific: A blossoming partnership*, Viewpoint, Indian Council of World Affairs, 21 December 2012; Priya Chacko, *India and the Indo-Pacific: An emerging regional vision*, IPGRC Policy Brief, Adelaide, November, 2012; Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, *Indo-Pacific is the new geopolitical reality*, Press Release, 1 November 2012.

Meeting with Officials on the Side-lines of the ASEAN (21 December 2017), and question No.1930 on The Security Partnership with USA, Japan and Australia (4 January 2018), etc.

India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) officially announced by Prime Minister at the 14th East Asia Summit (EAS) held in Bangkok, Thailand on 4th November 2019. It envisages cooperation and collaboration under its seven pillars namely, Maritime Security, Maritime Ecology, Maritime Resources, Capacity Building and Resource Sharing, Disaster Risk Reduction and Management, Science, Technology and Academic Cooperation and Trade, Connectivity and Maritime Transport. IPOI does not envisage creating a new institutional framework, but aims at promoting practical cooperation by drawing on existing regional architectures like the ASEAN-led East Asia Summit (EAS) framework, IORA, BIMSTEC, Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) etc.²⁹

In general, India's perception of the Indo-Pacific concept could be explained as follows. Firstly, India supports and pursues the concept of the Indo-Pacific because "peace, stability and development in the Indo-Pacific region is indispensable to [its] national security and prosperity",³⁰ and "a stable, secure and prosperous Indo-Pacific region is crucial for [India's] own progress and prosperity".³¹ Importantly, the Indo-Pacific comes at a time of significant progress in India's Look East Policy", and is "a logical corollary to India's Look East Policy, and an extension of the region of interest to also include within its ambit the Western Pacific".³² The new phase of India's Look East Policy-the Act East Policy-is "the cornerstone of [India's] engagement in the Indo-Pacific region".³³

²⁹ Riva Ganguly Das, Keynote Address, in Indian Council of World Affairs, IPOI Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative: Towards a Sustainable and Prosperous Indo-Pacific Region, New Delhi: Sapru House, 2022, p. 16.

³⁰ Joint Statement on India and Japan Vision 2025: Special Strategic and Global Partnership Working Together for Peace and Prosperity of the Indo-Pacific Region and the World, December 12, 2015, <http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/26176/joint+statement+on+india+and+japan+vision+2025+special+strategic+and+global+partnership+working+together+for+peace+and+prosperity+of+the+indopacific+region+and+the+worlddecember+12+2015>.

³¹ Valedictory Address by Secretary (East) at the Asian Relations Conference IV: 'Geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific Region: Asian Perspectives', March 22, 2013, <http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/21464/Valedictory+Address+by+Secretary+East+at+the+Asian+Relations+Conference+IV+Geopolitics+of+the+IndoPacific+Region+Asian+Perspectives>.

³² Valedictory Address by Secretary (East) at the Asian Relations Conference IV: 'Geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific Region: Asian Perspectives', March 22, 2013, <http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/21464/Valedictory+Address+by+Secretary+East+at+the+Asian+Relations+Conference+IV+Geopolitics+of+the+IndoPacific+Region+Asian+Perspectives>.

³³ India-Australia-Japan-U.S. Consultations on Indo-Pacific, November 12, 2017, http://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29110/IndiaAustraliaJapanUS_Consultations_on_Indo-Pacific_November_12_2017.

Secondly, although the Indo-Pacific is an inclusive concept, India-like the USA and Japan-are also considered key stakeholders of the concept, along with Australia. The mechanisms of the Indo-Pacific concept are now dialogues, consultations and summits. Recently, the Australia-India-Japan-US Consultations on the Indo-Pacific were held for the first time in the Philippines, on the side-lines of ASEAN Summit in November 2017. The first virtual *meeting* of the *leaders* of the Quadrilateral (Quad) was held on 12 March 2021. Besides, India continues to appreciate the importance of regional forums, such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM+), the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum (EAMF),³⁴ and the East Asia Summit (EAS); seeing all of them as “the premier leaders-led forum[s] to discuss regional peace and security agenda” with ASEAN at its core.³⁵ In other word, ASEAN centrality “resonates with India’s idea of the Indo-Pacific”.³⁶

Thirdly, in order to realise the Indo-Pacific as a peaceful, open, equitable, stable and rule-based order, the viewpoint of India and its partners has been stated in the Joint Statement on India and Japan Vision 2025: Special Strategic and Global Partnership Working Together for Peace and Prosperity of the Indo-Pacific Region and the World (12 December 2015), in the India-Australia Joint Statement during the State visit of Prime Minister of Australia to India (10 April 2017); in the Joint Statement of the United States and India: Prosperity Through Partnership (27 June 2017), are: (i) upholding the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity; (ii) resolving maritime disputes by peaceful means, in accordance with international law, including UNCLOS; iii) sharing a commitment to democratic values, the rule of law, international peace and security, and shared prosperity; and (iv) respecting the freedom of navigation, overflight, and commerce throughout the region.

Fourthly, although India’s approach to the region since the second phase of its Look East Policy (2002) is comprehensive, its emphasis is on “economic and

³⁴ Valedictory Address by Secretary (East) at the Asian Relations Conference IV: ‘Geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific Region: Asian Perspectives’, March 22, 2013, <http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/-21464/Valedictory+Address+by+Secretary+East+at+the+Asian+Relations+Conference+IV+Geopolitics+of+the+IndoPacific+Region+Asian+Perspectives>.

³⁵ Joint Statement on India and Japan Vision 2025: Special Strategic and Global Partnership Working Together for Peace and Prosperity of the Indo-Pacific Region and the World, December 12, 2015, <http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/26176/joint+statement+on+india+and+japan+vision+2025+special+strategic+and+global+partnership+working+together+for+peace+and+prosperity+of+the+indopacific+region+and+the+worlddecember+12+2015>.

³⁶ Riva Ganguly Das, Keynote Address, in Indian Council of World Affairs, IPOI Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative: Towards a Sustainable and Prosperous Indo-Pacific Region, New Delhi: Sapru House, 2022, p. 16.

security cooperation”.³⁷ In the frameworks of bilateral, trilateral, and quadrilateral cooperation between India and its three main partners in the Indo-Pacific, India’s defence and security cooperation is reflected in the utilisation of Malabar Exercises, the 2+2 *Dialogue*, the Defence Policy Dialogue, the Military-to-Military Talks, Coast Guard to Coast Guard cooperation, and Air Force-to-Air Force staff Talks³⁸ which address security challenges in the two oceans. These challenges are partly decided by the “critical importance of the sea lanes of communications in the South China Sea for regional energy security, trade, and commerce which underpin the continued peace and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific”.³⁹ Thus, cooperation in the maritime domain has become one of the key focus areas between not only India and the USA, Australia, and Japan but also India and the ASEAN in the Indo-Pacific region.⁴⁰ Maritime cooperation also dominates India’s IPOI announced in 2019. In the field of economics, “a free, open, prosperous and inclusive Indo-Pacific region”⁴¹ is the shared viewpoint of India, the USA, Japan, and Australia. India itself has participated in some commitment of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF)-a US-led framework for economic cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.⁴²

Fifthly, the support and coordination between the USA, Japan, and Australia is an important impetus for India to get involved in the strategy. After India and the USA established a global partnership⁴³ in July 2005 under the Bush administration, the

³⁷ Indian Navy, Ensuring secure seas: Indian’s Maritime security strategy, New Delhi, 10 October 2015, p. 23.

³⁸ Joint Statement on India and Japan Vision 2025: Special Strategic and Global Partnership Working Together for Peace and Prosperity of the Indo-Pacific Region and the World, December 12, 2015, <http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/26176/joint+statement+on+india+and+japan+vision+2025+special+strategic+and+global+partnership+working+together+for+peace+and+prosperity+of+the+indopacific+region+and+the+worlddecember+12+2015>.

³⁹ Joint Statement on India and Japan Vision 2025: Special Strategic and Global Partnership Working Together for Peace and Prosperity of the Indo-Pacific Region and the World, December 12, 2015, <http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/26176/joint+statement+on+india+and+japan+vision+2025+special+strategic+and+global+partnership+working+together+for+peace+and+prosperity+of+the+indopacific+region+and+the+worlddecember+12+2015>.

⁴⁰ Opening remarks by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Plenary Session of the India- ASEAN Commemorative Summit, New Delhi, January 25, 2018, http://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-State-ments.htm?dtl/29390/Opening_remarks_by_the_PM_at_the_Plenary_Session_of_the_INDIA_ASEAN_Commemorative_Summit_January_25_2018.

⁴¹ India-Australia-Japan-U.S. Consultations on Indo-Pacific, November 12, 2017. http://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29110/IndiaAustraliaJapanUS_Consultations_on_IndoPacific_November_12_2017.

⁴² Surupa Gupta, India and the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, Asia Pacific Bulletin No.618, East West Center, 21 July 2022, https://www.eastwestcenter.org/system/tdf/private/apb-618_pdf.pdf?file=1&type=node-&id=43406.

⁴³ Joint Statement, India-U.S, July 18, 2005, http://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-State-ments.htm?dtl/%1f2617/%1fjoint_Statement_IndiaUS.

USA “wanted India not only to Look East but also Engage East”⁴⁴ during President Obama’s visit to India in November 2010. Under the Trump administration, the USA has welcomed “India’s emergence as a leading global power and a stronger strategic and defence partner”.⁴⁵ The USA has supported “India’s growing relationships throughout the region”⁴⁶ of the Indo-Pacific [author added] as well as supported the latter’s “leadership role in Indian Ocean security and throughout the broader region”.⁴⁷ Japan encouraged India to engage in the Pacific when Prime Minister Abe chose India as the nation to deliver his speech on *the Confluence of the Two Seas* in August 2007. Again, in his idea of Asia’s Democratic Security Diamond announced in 2012, he also included India as one of the four members of the quad. In its Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy (released in April 2017), “Japan will strengthen strategic collaboration with India, which has a historical relationship with East Africa, as well as the USA and Australia”.⁴⁸

Australia, for its part, has affirmed that its “alliance with the United States is central to Australia’s approach to the Indo-Pacific”⁴⁹ on the one hand, and considers India, along with Japan, Indonesia, and Republic of Korea, as central to the agenda on the other.⁵⁰ Importantly, Australia-India-Japan-USA Consultations on the Indo-Pacific commenced, for the first time, on 12 November 2017 in the Philippines, where four countries “discussed measures to ensure a free and open international order based on the rule of law in the Indo-Pacific”.⁵¹ This could be seen as the best example of India’s formal participation in the initiative.

Sixthly, although India has shared interests and strategy with the USA, Japan, and Australia, the approach of this country seems to be very cautious. In practice, India enlarged the scope of its Look East Policy to the Western Pacific and, in 2013 this

⁴⁴ Remarks by President Mr. Barack Obama to Members of both Houses of Parliament in the Central Hall, November 08, 2010, http://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/823/Remarks_by_President_-_Mr_Barack_Obama_to_Members_of_both_Houses_of_Parliament_in_the_Central_Hall.

⁴⁵ The White House, National Security Strategy of the United States of America, Washington DC, December 2017, p. 46.

⁴⁶ The White House, National Security Strategy of the United States of America, Washington DC, December 2017, p. 47.

⁴⁷ The White House, National Security Strategy of the United States of America, Washington DC, December 2017, p. 50.

⁴⁸ International Cooperation Bureau (MOFA, Japan), *Priority Policy for Development Cooperation FY 2017*, April 2017, p. 9, at <http://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000259285.pdf>.

⁴⁹ Australian Government, *The 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper*, Canberra: CanPrint Communications Pty Ltd, p.4.

⁵⁰ Australian Government, *The 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper*, Canberra: CanPrint Communications Pty Ltd, p.4.

⁵¹ Australia-India-Japan-U.S. Consultations on the Indo-Pacific, November 12, 2017, http://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_001789.html.

country, for the first time, publicly announced its point of view on the concept of the Indo-Pacific. However, till 2015, the term Indo-Pacific appeared for the first time in the Joint Statement on India and Japan Vision 2025: Special Strategic and Global Partnership Working Together for Peace and Prosperity of the Indo-Pacific Region and the World (released 12 December 2015). Bilateral documents between India and Australia, and India and the USA used this term from the second half of 2017 onwards. Although India has been considering ASEAN as the centre of its Look East/Act East Policy, the Opening Statement by Indian Prime Minister at 15th ASEAN-India Summit (14 November 2017) was the first Indian document in the framework of the ASEAN-India summit meetings to officially use the term Indo-Pacific.⁵² India has not participated in any joint naval exercises in the framework of US-led Quad. India has also been very cautious in joining Indo-Pacific Economic Forum (IPEF).

3. EU'S STRATEGY ON COOPERATION IN INDO-PACIFIC AND INDIA'S PERCEPTION

Considering “that the EU should reinforce its strategic focus, presence and actions in the Indo-Pacific with the aim of contributing to the stability, security, prosperity and sustainable development of the region, based on the promotion of democracy, rule of law, human rights and international law”,⁵³ on 16 April 2021, the Council of the European Union invited the (European) Commission and the High Representative to present a Joint Communication on the EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific by September 2021. As a result, on 16 September 2021, European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy released the Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council which sets out the EU strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.⁵⁴ The strategy (1) outlines the EU's rationale for strengthening its engagement in the Indo-Pacific; (2) presents the EU's principles guiding its engagement with the Indo-Pacific; (3) sets out the EU's approach to partnership

⁵² Opening Statement by Prime Minister at 15th ASEAN-India Summit, Manila, November 14, 2017, http://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/29113/Opening_Statement_by_Prime_Minister_at_-15th_ASEANIndia_Summit_Manila_November_14_2017.

⁵³ Council of the European Union, Council conclusions on an EU Strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, 16 April 2021, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7914-2021-INIT/en/pdf>.

⁵⁴ European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, *Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council: the EU strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific*, Brussels, 16 September 2021, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/jointcommunication_2021_24_1_en.pdf.

and cooperation in the region, and (4) details how the EU will pursue this vision in cooperation with partners.

The EU's engagement with the Indo-Pacific region will be principled and long-term. It seeks to solidify and defend the rules-based international order, especially EU's commitment to respecting democracy, human rights and the rule of law; promote an open and fair environment for trade and investment; contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); pursue its long-standing multilateral and regional cooperation; support truly inclusive policymaking and cooperation; and foster inclusive economic growth and stability and promote and facilitate connectivity.

In order to set out its approach to partnership and cooperation in the region, EU intends to conclude new Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) with Thailand and Malaysia and to start PCA negotiations with the Maldives in the near future. It will also aim to deepen its engagement with partners that already have their own Indo-Pacific approaches, namely ASEAN, Australia, India, Japan, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The EU would also be interested in engaging with the Quad on issues of common interest such as climate change, technology, or vaccines. The EU will pursue its multifaceted engagement with China. In case of ASEAN, the EU appreciates ASEAN's commitment to effective multilateralism and supports the principle of ASEAN centrality, its efforts to build a rules-based regional architecture, and the multilateral anchor that it provides.

To realise its vision in the Indo-Pacific, EU will work actively with its partners in the seven priority areas, namely

- Sustainable and inclusive prosperity,
- Green transition,
- Ocean governance,
- Digital governance and partnerships,
- Connectivity,
- Security and defence, and
- Human security.

In the EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, India is also mentioned of the importance of India. In the context of the interdependence of the economies and the common global challenges, India as a member of G20 is important partner for the EU. In May 2021, the EU and India agreed to resume trade negotiations

and to launch negotiations for a separate investment protection agreement and for an agreement on geographical indications. This ensures EU's reinforcement of value chains by strengthening and diversifying trade relations, including, among others, the finalisation of ongoing trade negotiations. In the framework of digital governance and partnerships, one of seven priority areas of the strategy, EU seeks to formalize negotiations of Digital Partnership Agreements with like-minded partners in the Indo-Pacific. In this direction, EU and India signed "an agreement to deepen cooperation on emerging technologies, ranging from Artificial Intelligence to High Performance Computing and from Quantum Technologies to secure 5G technology and public sector digitalisation". India is also one of EU's Indo-Pacific partners (including Japan, Pakistan, India and Djibouti) of EU Naval Force Somalia (EU NAVFOR)-Operation Atalanta which has conducted successful joint naval exercises in Indian Ocean. Importantly, India was the only country named in EU's multilateral response to the COVID-19 and future global health crisis. Accordingly, India would be a focus for cooperation, including on the quality of active pharmaceutical ingredients for the future EU Health emergency and preparedness response authority.

For its part, India and EU have shared their views on Indo-Pacific, after EU announced its strategy. In the Joint Statement on India-EU Leaders' Meeting held in hybrid format on 8 May 2021 in Porto, two sides stated:

We emphasised our commitment to a free, open, inclusive and rules-based Indo-Pacific space, underpinned by respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, democracy, and rule of law, transparency, freedom of navigation and overflight, unimpeded lawful commerce, and peaceful resolution of disputes, in accordance with international law, including the United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). In this context, we welcomed the development by the EU of its Strategy for cooperation with the Indo-Pacific and agreed to strengthen our cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region, including in the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) and in relevant regional fora. We recognised the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) unity and centrality and commit to increasing cooperation and exchanges in the ASEAN-led framework such as the ASEAN Regional Forum. The EU also appreciated India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative, which intends

*to promote international coordination and cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region.*⁵⁵

Before the launch of EU's Strategy on Cooperation in Indo-Pacific, India had also expressed its shared perspectives on Indo-Pacific Strategy/Initiative, which are reflected in EU's Strategy on Cooperation in Indo-Pacific, EU-India Strategic Partnership: A Roadmap to 2025, and India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiatives (see Table 1).

Table 1: Shared perspectives between EU and India on Indo-Pacific

<i>EU's Strategy on Cooperation in Indo-Pacific</i>	<i>EU-India Strategic Partnership: A Roadmap to 2025</i>	<i>India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiatives</i>
Sustainable and inclusive prosperity	Trade and investment, Business & Economy: Trade agreement is not mentioned. Engage in the bilateral Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) Dialogue.	Maritime Resources (<i>less relevant</i>)
Green transition	Climate change and clean energy: reinforce cooperation on reducing greenhouse gas emissions and increasing the climate change resilience of cities and towns, as they are key actors in climate change mitigation.	Maritime Ecology (<i>less relevant</i>)
Ocean governance	Ocean Governance	Maritime Security
Digital governance and partnerships	Research and Innovation; Information and communications technology: Continue ICT cooperation under the EU-India Joint Working Group on sustainable	Science, Technology and Academic Cooperation

⁵⁵ Ministry of External Affairs (Government of India), Joint Statement on India-EU Leaders' Meeting, 08 May 2021, https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/33853/Joint_Statement_on_IndiaEU_Leaders_Meeting_May_08_2021.

	digital infrastructure, services, norms and regulatory frameworks; Promote common approaches and standards for digital transformation of industry and society; Make utmost efforts towards reaching an agreement on taxation of the digital economy.	
Connectivity	Connectivity	Trade, Connectivity and Maritime Transport
Security and defence	Security (including to further enhance mutual understanding through seminars, visits and training courses hosted by defence institutions on both sides)	Maritime Security; Capacity Building and Resource Sharing
Human security	Health and Food Security	Disaster Risk Reduction and Management

India and EU share perceptions of Indo-Pacific, which is reflected in cooperation areas between India, especially in *EU-India Strategic Partnership: A Roadmap to 2025*. India totally shares several fields of cooperation in EU's Strategy on Cooperation in Indo-Pacific, including ocean governance, and connectivity. There are some contents of seven priority areas of EU's strategy available in EU-India Roadmap. However, there are gaps between India and EU's perceptions of Indo-Pacific. While EU's Strategy on Cooperation in Indo-Pacific includes wide range of cooperation as reflected in seven priority areas, maritime domain (maritime resources, maritime ecology, maritime security, maritime security, maritime transport) invades India's IPOI.

India was reluctant to publicly criticise Russia's special military operation in Ukraine. The move is completely different from other Quad members and Western European countries that are members of the EU, leaving the EU far from happy.⁵⁶ However, Europe has muted its criticism of India and accepted the latter's

⁵⁶ Stefania Benaglia, The EU and India agree to disagree on Ukraine... and that's ok, CEPS, 11 July 2022, <https://www.ceps.eu/the-eu-and-india-agree-to-disagree-on-ukraine-and-thats-ok/>.

neutrality on the issue⁵⁷ due to the fact that EU's relations with India are far too important to risk serious deterioration.⁵⁸ In other words, EU-India relations appear to be less affected by the war in Ukraine.

4. CONCLUSION

India is the last of the four founding members of the Quad to present its views on the Indo-Pacific, under the name Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative. India's IPOI was announced at the East Asia Summit held in Thailand in 2019 and subsequently interpreted by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, and academia. Despite sharing many common interests and concerns with other Quad members, namely the US, Japan and Australia, India is still very cautious in participating in US-led initiatives or joint activities in the framework of Quad, i.e., IPEF or participating in joint naval exercises in the South China Sea.

EU's Strategy on Cooperation in Indo-Pacific and India's IPOI shared common areas of cooperation focus but, as a cooperative organization of mainly developed countries, the EU has looked to the region with a more specific and ambitious plan than India has done. Even so, as one of the founding countries of the Quad, India supports the EU's Strategy on Cooperation in Indo-Pacific, which is clearly reflected in the Joint Statement on India-EU Leaders' Meeting (May 2021). Previously, *EU-India Strategic Partnership: A Roadmap to 2025* (released in July 2020) also clearly demonstrated a number of cooperation contents between India and EU which later became some of the pillars of the seven priority areas of EU's Strategy on Cooperation in Indo-Pacific (September 2021). The war in Ukraine seems not too much negatively affect India-EU relationship due to the fact that there's so much at stake in the relations between them.

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⁵⁷ Patryk Kugiel, What Modi and Putin's 'unbreakable friendship' means for the EU, euobserver, 3 October 2022, <https://euobserver.com/opinion/156193>.

⁵⁸ Stefania Benaglia, The EU and India agree to disagree on Ukraine... and that's ok, CEPS, 11 July 2022, <https://www.ceps.eu/the-eu-and-india-agree-to-disagree-on-ukraine-and-thats-ok/>.

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**Middle of the Road
Diplomacy?
ASEAN Outlook on
the Indo-Pacific as a
Fluid Position**

Alan Chong



6



European statements on the Indo-Pacific correctly identify China's position in the region as a focus. However, they insufficiently appreciate the achievements of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in sustaining the existing imperfect regional peace. There is no need to name enemies. Instead, pragmatic diplomacy that compartmentalizes contentious issues while pursuing developmental security thwarts pressures for military confrontation. Keeping up an existential, imperfect peace is an art in sustaining a strategic fluidity to act as a positive facilitator in extracting positive energies from areas of overlapping mutual interest, while insulating subjects where Indo-Pacific states remain at loggerheads.

1. SCARE MONGERING

In spite of the pandemic years of 2020-2, China has grown in size as a security threat in western perceptions. France's Indo-Pacific strategy document opens up by stating that the Indo-Pacific is witnessing profound strategic changes. It then sketches this change in threatening tones as follows:

"China's power is increasing, and its territorial claims are expressed with greater and greater strength. Competition between China and the US is increasing, as are tensions at the Chinese-Indian border, in the Taiwan Strait and on the Korean peninsula. All of these elements are changing

regional balances of power and making strategic calculations more complex. To this can be added persistent transnational threats, such as piracy; terrorism; trafficking...” (Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs (Government of France) 2022, 9).

The German equivalent of a document on the Indo-Pacific states also targets China in veiled terms:

“While the Indo-Pacific region is undergoing a dynamic development, it is a fairly blank spot in institutional and normative terms. Things that have been essential to our identity for decades – our integration into the European Union, into pan-European institutions such as the OSCE with its comprehensive understanding of security, the Council of Europe to promote the rule of law, human rights and democracy, and NATO as an alliance of collective defence – are only a feature of the Indo-Pacific to a limited extent, if at all. There are, however, many initiatives and promising structural approaches, especially in the guise of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations” (ASEAN). (Germany 2020, 4)

The reference to ASEAN in the last line is suggesting that the regional organization can be used as a wedge against an aggressive Chinese power. These alarmist premises are not helpful if European states, and the EU collectively, are hoping to strike a positive relationship with the states domiciled in the Indo-Pacific, including China’s neighbours.

From a distance, the Indo-Pacific looks like a freshly politicized geopolitical space if one adopts the decontextualized and unanchored standpoint from *outside* Southeast Asia. Within Southeast Asia, this geopolitical space has been managed by an ASEAN modus operandi of building soft community amongst great powers. It is important to sketch this detour because it is the foundation of how and why the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) is characterized by what I term political fluidity. Southeast Asian regionalism, as a manifestation of what the English School theorists would dub international society, is exceptionally characterized by not only a clear reference to norm adherence to “non-interference” in sovereign matters, but also to a well-honed policy of not naming great powers as “common enemies” during moments of crisis. (Chong, *Society of the Weak, the Medium and the Great* 2011) ASEAN is the embodiment of this mode of regional international society. It is characterized by three elements that can be deduced from any standard book, chapter, or article length account of ASEAN’s diplomatic norms.

2. ASEAN'S DIPLOMATIC CULTURE & THE ASEAN OUTLOOK ON THE INDO-PACIFIC (AOIP)

Firstly, ASEAN member states have pledged themselves to reciprocate tolerance of differences amongst national ideologies and forms of governance. This has served to erect constructive fences between contiguous Southeast Asian states who would otherwise have engaged in internecine armed conflict to resolve postcolonial boundary issues. The reciprocity of tolerance of national differences extends naturally into a longstanding position of obfuscating threat perceptions amongst ASEAN members as well as great powers and all sorts of external partners interested in dialogue with ASEAN. This diplomatic mechanism has ensured that the organization frequently freezes or postpones conflict resolution and thwarts the immediate pressures for a military solution or other diplomatic coercion.

Secondly, there is the practice of *soft balancing* between ASEAN and all the great powers in Asia. ASEAN's diplomatic style is never one to call out publicly a balance of power situation even if this was the precise design of any particular meeting. ASEAN style balancing is to employ discourse to evoke a range of balancing postures that cannot plausibly generate outright hostility from great powers. During the Cold War, ASEAN frequently called upon great powers to participate in annual dialogues while encouraging wavering great powers to commit to bolstering their presence in the region. Likewise, when tensions rise over the South China Sea dispute, ASEAN meetings will frequently call for rule-based behaviour and peaceful settlement of disputes without naming the agent of provocation during the particular crisis point. The employment of specific phrases in the ensuing communique is often adopted to show favour to some great powers and gently shame others without specifically naming the friendly or hostile targets. Through these ways, the great powers cannot openly protest ASEAN's *intransigence*, or overt unfriendliness. From a long-term perspective, ASEAN's refusal to openly take sides builds cache for serving as a neutral meeting ground for the great powers.

The third and final feature of ASEAN's international society is open ended confidence building. This is not exactly analogous to the European experience with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. While ASEAN began its genesis during the Cold War, its members' terms of association as a diplomatic society was heavily coloured by the transition from colonialism. Colonialism had

drawn arbitrary borders from the standpoint of European imperial capitals. The new *postcolonial states* inherited the colonial borders amidst a climate of heightened nationalism leading to public opinion on all sides feeling impassioned over correcting historical injustices. There was little given or automatic empathy with one's neighbours, notwithstanding the initial postcolonial rhetoric about solidarity in a new world order. In the perspective of the original five ASEAN members, what was most urgently needed was to build a climate of flexible, inclusive assurance amongst themselves. ASEAN's initial Declaration of August 1967, along with its now-storied documents such as the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation of 1976 and the two Bali Concord (1976 and 2003), emphasize that members vowed never to resort to force in settling disputes, forswore interference in each member's domestic politics, and recalled that Southeast Asian societies and governments had inherited a rich tradition of mutual assistance and neighbourliness tantamount to resolving disputes locally and amicably instead of invoking external intervention. Additionally, ASEAN documents repeated the principle that all foreign military bases – often a legacy of expedient military reliance upon the departing colonial power or alignments during the Cold War – would ultimately be temporary in nature. Of course, one can accuse ASEAN members of honouring the last feature in the breach, but there is little argument that ASEAN's intramural confidence building measures are open ended in nature and highly dependent upon voluntary compliance and *peer pressure* without the power of institutional sanctions. Hence the OSCE model does not apply to ASEAN on the basis of the latter's weak commitment to explicit institutionalization. But this does not mean ASEAN has been less effective in inhibiting war in its geopolitical region.

The document, AOIP, was adopted in 2019 out of the region's concern about intensified Sino-US rivalry, stoked in no small part by the erstwhile Trump Administration's confrontational postures towards China and continuing thereafter into the Biden Administration. There was also the complicating factor of rivalry between China's Belt and Road Initiative announced in 2011 and the Japan-India-US initiative collectively dubbed the vision of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP). The late Japanese Premier Shinzo Abe had inaugurated the FOIP in a speech to the Indian Parliament in 2007 and followed up with the Partnership for Quality Infrastructure Initiative.

Unsurprisingly, ASEAN wished to act as inclusively as possible, hence the open-ended confidence building language describing the AOIP:

“An initiative that reinforces the ASEAN-centred regional architecture, namely, ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific. This Outlook is not aimed at creating new mechanisms or replacing existing ones; rather, it is an Outlook intended to enhance ASEAN’s Community building process and to strengthen and give new momentum for existing ASEAN-led mechanisms to better face challenges and seize opportunities arising from the current and future regional and global environments. Moreover, the Outlook is intended to be inclusive in terms of ideas and proposals.” (ASEAN 2019, 1)

What is equally notable is that ASEAN creatively fuses international security into human security and developmental security and draws a line of continuity with the organization’s strategic fuzzy logic of including all comers in comprehensively addressing security. Paragraph Seven is worth quoting in full:

“This ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific should support and provide ballast for the current dynamism in the Indo-Pacific region, which should be viewed from the perspective, of encouraging progress. As such, it should also provide added value to the existing regional arrangements. Therefore, the said ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific is aimed at: (1) offering an outlook to guide cooperation in the region; (2) helping to promote an enabling environment for peace, stability and prosperity in the region in addressing common challenges, upholding the rules-based regional architecture, and promoting closer economic cooperation, and thus strengthen confidence and trust; (3) enhancing ASEAN’s Community building process and further strengthening the existing ASEAN-led mechanisms, such as the EAS; and (4) implementing existing and exploring other ASEAN priority areas of cooperation, including maritime cooperation, connectivity, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and economic and other possible areas of cooperation”. (ASEAN 2019, 2)

3. INCLUSIVITY WITH DIFFERENCES IN UNDERSTANDING DEVELOPMENTAL SECURITY

The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific helpfully provides an overlap in its transactional description as follows:

“The futures of the EU and the Indo-Pacific are inextricably linked given the interdependence of the economies and the common global challenges. The region includes seven G20 members, Australia, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, the Republic of Korea and the Republic of South Africa, as well as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), an increasingly important partner for the EU. The region is home to three-fifths of the world’s population, produces 60 per cent of global GDP, contributed two-thirds of

pre-pandemic global economic growth and is at the forefront of the digital economy. The EU outermost regions and overseas countries and territories, constitutionally linked to its Member States, are an important part of the EU's approach to the Indo-Pacific. The EU and the Indo-Pacific are natural partner regions in terms of trade and investment. The EU is the top investor, the leading provider of development cooperation, and one of the biggest trading partners in the Indo-Pacific region. Together, the Indo-Pacific and Europe account for over 70 per cent of the global trade in goods and services, and over 60 per cent of foreign direct investment flows.” (European Commission 2021, 1)

What is significant here is a descriptive assumption of economic interdependence and the unidirectional linearity of integration between the EU region and the Indo-Pacific.

Thereafter, the EU statement diverges by drawing explicit attention to troubling geopolitical dynamics generated in no small part by China's military build-up constituting more than 20 per cent of global arms expenditures in the years before and including the pandemic. Moreover, the EU declares that democracy and human rights are under threat in the Indo-Pacific from the persistence of “authoritarian regimes” in the region. It is implied that the low scores of Indo-Pacific national governments in democracy and human rights indices compound trade disputes and economic inefficiencies in the pan region, stemming from the lack of openness, transparency, and inconsistent rule of law. Economic distortions consequently result in the effort to forge a sound recovery from the COVID19 pandemic. (European Commission 2021, 3)

Much as the EU, French and German statements on the Indo-Pacific attempt to reassure Asians in the Indo-Pacific that they will act constructively, their scripting of the latter into a grand vision of a post-bellum, transactionalist, and economically integrated liberal institutionalist vision misses the mark. Much of the Indo-Pacific remains mired in addressing developmental security. Modernization as development since the wave of decolonization between 1945 and 1984 has meant attempting to scientifically transition traditional organically conceived societies into specific skill-based, technically differentiated, roles. (Black 1967, 7) Democracy remains inadequately understood as an exercise of individual freedoms in the selection of leaders to govern. Those who do comprehend democratic choices in elections, or the role of a liberal civil society acting as a check against government, are mostly an elite educated minority. For the majority of Indo-Pacific populations, government is a delegated affair propped up by

patron-client relationships operating beneath the veneer of a semblance of democracy and constitutional law.

Developmental security for much of the Indo-Pacific littoral and contiguous states has meant assuring populations that reducing poverty and facilitating job creation is the primary function of government. Democratic mechanisms can exist to make that goal easier to achieve, but they are mainly treated as flexible political props, dispensed where necessary when democratic objections act to impede the secular religion of economic growth. Developmental security still reigns in the corridors of power in the Indo-Pacific as a straightforward priority to make the populations feel richer materially through economic and political discipline. It is no great leap to understand that developmental security translates into a foreign policy orientation of avoiding ideological polarization and some version of pronounced nonalignment. This nonalignment is not likely to be rigid. It can operate flexibly with large degrees of political tilt towards the great power(s) offering the most sympathetic assistance towards enhancing developmental security. It is therefore understandable that most Indo-Pacific states have not aligned with hard-line NATO and US positions on sanctioning Russia for its aggression in Ukraine. It is more likely that Indo-Pacific states wish to nurture the Chinese economy as a buffer against economic shocks arising from the Russia-Ukraine war, while hedging for the possibility that Asia might also buy cheap Russian oil to offset against global inflation.

4. CHINA AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

Across the assorted European statements on the Indo-Pacific looms the China-Southeast Asia relationship along with geopolitical shadows cast over China's relations with South Asia. The EU, France and Germany are concerned that the Indo-Pacific states face the constant prospect of being intimidated by Chinese military, political and economic power. The reality is much more complex. Asian states that share land borders with China, principally India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar, Laos, and Vietnam appear to have universally experienced border disputes with Beijing since independence. North Korea and Mongolia may however stand out as the exceptions in the sense that land disputes are either muted or rendered non-existent through arrangements of political convenience. Those that share maritime borders with China in the South China Sea (Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei), or across the Taiwan Straits (Taiwan) and East China Sea (Taiwan and Japan) face pressures from China over historical

claims in tandem with extensions of boundaries arising from the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). These boundary tensions manifest a coercive aspect to Indo-Pacific relations.

Yet, all of China's neighbours have found ways to establish pragmatic relationships with Beijing through the discourse of developmental security. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Maritime Silk Roads vision, in tandem with its subsidiary Digital Silk Roads, have proven attractive to China's Indo-Pacific neighbours. It bears repeating that while the prospect of Chinese *debt trap diplomacy* hangs over any engagement with China's state-owned enterprises and private corporations, Chinese capital is politically appealing for the simple reason that China's economic linkages do not hew towards a corporate culture of treating all contracts as immutable and inviolable as a matter of cold legal calculations. Beijing's economic agents are instead appreciated for their flexibility in renegotiating contracts arising from political expediency and other socio-economic considerations on the part of the recipient of Chinese largesse. Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines and Laos have all availed themselves of Chinese flexibility in BRI projects. Additionally, Chinese construction and other infrastructural firms instinctively empathize with their Asian partners that high end, off-the-shelf technologies do not necessarily suit the needs of Indo-Pacific economies. Instead, free trade zones, all-weather roads, telecommunications facilities, railways, deep harbours for berthing container vessels, condominium housing, and bridges across rivers that dissect teeming urban metropolises serve the primary needs of Asian states eager to kickstart a steady inflow of foreign direct investment. Sri Lanka's current (2022) financial woes are not the direct result of Chinese debt trap diplomacy. The governments in Colombo had long planned for the Hambantota Port and its proximate free trade zone to jumpstart foreign investment from all over the world. Chinese investments in infrastructure serve as important catalysts in this regard.

It is the same picture in Laos, Cambodia, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia and even Singapore. Chinese capital involved in building dams, high speed railways, roads and airports are welcome for their ability to either design and build to order, or their willingness to partner local conglomerations and select western engineering firms for building much needed infrastructure. The latter gets built out of pragmatic considerations rather than out of political correctness. For the Asian state, the construction of middle-class prosperity begins immediately, with an infrastructural platform upon which developmental security can be erected.

This is the politico-diplomatic language that Beijing speaks, and which finds ready listening ears in the Indo-Pacific region. Japan's Partnership for Quality Infrastructure Investment is inclining towards such a frequency. One hopes that the Quad's Indo-Pacific Economic Framework will be framed likewise, with fewer political restraints imposed on recipient economies and partnering companies. The EU, France and Germany should take note.

5. UNDERSTANDING THE ASIAN/INDO-PACIFIC WAY OF FLUIDITY

In the discourse of modernization, Southeast Asian and Indo-Pacific states are always depicted on a continuum between strength and weakness measured against military and economic indices. This allows Realist and Liberal analyses to dominate analyses of the international affairs of the region simply because the contiguous states of the region cannot steer their fate according to such a logic. Neither can they influence the great powers to effectively do their bidding. Realists are completely apposite in lending regional observers their analytical lenses of national interests on a collision course and the relentless pursuit of power. Fear drives states to acquire diplomatic hedging strategies, or armaments with which to practice deterrence in some form. If necessary, band wagoning or allying with great powers augment deterrence against the unreliable intentions of one's neighbours.

Liberals, on the other hand, are relevant but relatively marginal to readings of Indo-Pacific international affairs simply because they emphasise the need for embracing some fundamental notions of human rights and cooperative security that the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations do not either openly or consistently admit to being valid. Neo-liberal regimes of the likes of ASEAN, the ASEAN Regional Forum, and the East Asia Summit, are however a convenient halfway house between the pure rivalry of national interest and the liberal ideal of supranational organization simply because neo-liberals preach the fusion of power and social purpose in organizing expedient cooperative mechanisms that jeopardize sovereignty as little as possible.

Throughout this paper, the Indo-Pacific states are interpreted to be manifesting a transversal diplomatic culture instead, that of embracing fluidity instead of naming enemies or *agents provocateurs*. As some scholars have argued elsewhere, Indo-Pacific states – especially ASEAN members – have tended to avoid the

unproductive tack of assigning direct culpability for disturbing international order. (Chong, Still Searching for a Common Frequency: Silences, Cultural Gaps and Normative Deficits in Asia-Pacific Diplomacies 2014, Chong, Unfinished 'Diplomacy of Encounter' 2016) Instead, developmental security goals require that friend-enemy distinctions be rendered marginal to pragmatic foreign relations. The neighbouring state or regional great power purported to be behaving coercively on conventional disputes involving demarcations of territory and control of raw materials may well turn out to be a mutually beneficial economic partner once *contentious* high political issues become compartmentalised into matters for diplomatic procrastination. China is both nationalistic on territorial claims *and* also being perceived as the more forthcoming aid giver. Likewise, the US, Japan, India, and Australia are never excluded as sources of investment in Indo-Pacific developmental security. In this way, Indo-Pacific states see no benefit in needlessly antagonizing possible benefactors.

What one detects in the spirit of the AOIP today is also what one should expect of European statements on the Indo-Pacific. More fluidity and less zero-sum in diplomatic conduct, extending into the realms of economic and political cooperation. Where Asian states cannot find total and unanimous comity on an issue, the way of diplomatic fluidity is to avoid pinning blame to the point that future breakthroughs cannot be made. Vagary and fuzzy positions are helpful in diffusing acute animosity between diplomatic protagonists. (Chong, Unfinished 'Diplomacy of Encounter' 2016) Keeping up an existential, imperfect peace is a desirable goal unto itself as the ASEAN diplomatic culture sketched earlier suggests. And it is an art in sustaining fluidity to act as a positive facilitator in extracting positive energies from areas of overlapping mutual interest, while compartmentalizing subjects where Indo-Pacific states remain at loggerheads. This should not be thought of as *deadlock*, it is instead an opportunity to convert the diplomacy of ambiguous encounter to attaining developmental security.

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The Perception of Indonesia towards EU's Strategies and Presence in the Indo-Pacific

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The concept of Indo-Pacific is of significance for Indonesia. Being a maritime country located at the intersection of the two oceans, Indonesia claims to have a very strategic position and, therefore, seeks to play a central role in shaping the architecture of cooperation of the region. Given the competitive nature of the interstate relations in the Indo-Pacific, Indonesia has an interest that such competition does not turn into an open or even a military conflict. As the Indonesian Foreign Minister has clearly said, Indonesia seeks to change the logic of interaction among countries from zero-sum game into win-win cooperation, from rivalries into dialogue and cooperation, and from trust deficit into strategic trust. Through its leadership and diplomacy, Indonesia has gained support from other ASEAN member countries and successfully translated its interest into that of ASEAN as reflected in the *ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific* which envisions ASEAN centrality in Indo-Pacific.

With this background in mind, Indonesia responded positively to the adoption of the *EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific*. Consisting of three key instruments, i.e. the diversifying and strengthening partnerships with *like-minded partners*; maintaining its existing engagements in the region to serve Europe's interests and aligning its goals with those its key regional partners; and finally,

contributing to security and stability as well as regional needs for infrastructure investments, resilient supply chains, and emerging technology, the *EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific* is quite compatible with Indonesian interest. In addition, with its *inclusive* and *cooperation-based* approach, the *EU's Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific* fits nicely with the Indonesian approach to Indo-Pacific.

This article will analyse the perception of Indonesia toward EU's engagement in the Indo-Pacific. The first part of the article will look at the Indonesian perspective on the Indo-Pacific. The second part will look at the EU and Strategy for Cooperation. It will be followed by the discussion on the EU policies on the Indo-Pacific. The final part will discuss compatibility between Indonesia and EU's approach to the Indo-Pacific as well as explore the potentials for cooperation between the two in the Indo-Pacific.

1. INDONESIA AND THE INDO-PACIFIC

Indonesian perspective on the Indo-Pacific was developed during the government of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and evolved further with the development of the concept of Indo-Pacific through the introduction of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific by the late Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the opening session of the Sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development on August 27, 2016 (Hosoya 2019, 18). The perspective reflects clearly two important aspects of Indonesian foreign policy namely the principle of *bebas aktif* (independent active) and Indonesian role perception.

Indonesian foreign policy is built upon the principle of *bebas aktif* (free and active), coined by Indonesian first Vice President Mohammad Hatta in his speech with the title *Mendajung di antara Dua Karang* (Rowing between two coral reefs) at the Central Indonesian National Committee on 2 September 1948 (1981). This principle mandates Indonesian foreign policy to become a subject with capacity to make choices and to engage actively in international relations to shape world order characterized by freedom, lasting peace and social justice. At the same time, Indonesia must be free to build relations with any country based on values and their respective benefits without tying themselves to a block. When it was adopted, the free and active principle meant that Indonesia should not be trapped into taking sides among two competing powers, i.e., the US and the Soviet Union.

In today's context in the Indo-Pacific, this principle means that Indonesia should not take sides in the great power rivalry between the US and China.

At the same time, Indonesian role perception has also played an important role in its perspective of the Indo-Pacific. Given its size, in terms of territory and population, Indonesia is undoubtedly very influential in Southeast Asia. But, apart from its size, Indonesia has also projected itself as the leader and gained recognition in its leadership in the region. Indonesian leadership in Southeast Asia can be traced back in the mid-1960s with the establishment of ASEAN. The latter reflects Indonesian willingness to restrain its power and hegemony in order to promote regional cooperation in the region and gave Indonesia "respect and recognition of the other members as a *primus inter pares*" (Anwar 1997, 33). Indonesia also showed its leadership in bringing together ASEAN member countries, which otherwise lack common understanding, on an inclusive Indo-Pacific order with ASEAN on the driving seat (Nabbs-Keller 2020, 26).

Dynamic Equilibrium and the Indo-Pacific Treaty

During the administration of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY), Indonesia began to pay attention to the Indo-Pacific concept. In order to respond to conflictual relations in the region confronting China and the US, Indonesian Foreign Minister Marty introduced a concept called dynamic equilibrium. According to Natalegawa, dynamic equilibrium refers to a harmony in cooperation between countries which interact peacefully and create a sense of mutual benefit without the presence of a single dominant power in the region. It is a condition "where preponderant power is absent not by promotion of bloc politics and often self-fulfilling geopolitical fault lines; rather, due to the emergence of a new kind of international relations with its emphasis on common security, common prosperity, and common stability" (Natalegawa 2011). With the concept, Natalegawa describes three challenges facing in achieving peace and stability in the interstate relations in the Indo-Pacific region: a trust-deficit, unresolved territorial claims and the impact of changes in the Indo-Pacific region.

The doctrine of dynamic equilibrium is the projection of the free and active principle of Indonesian foreign policy into regional level. Known as The Natalegawa Doctrine, the concept has been officially used by Indonesia since 2011 as stated in the annual statement of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (Kementrian Luar Negeri Republik Indonesia 2011) and has frequently been used as Indonesia assumed the ASEAN chairmanship in 2011. It

was also based on the doctrine; Indonesia developed its perspective on the Indo-Pacific by proposing a treaty of friendship and cooperation in the Indo-Pacific (Natalegawa 2013). Different from the concept of the Indo-Pacific known today which rests on the preponderance of power of the US, the concept of the Indo-Pacific assumes an important role of the middle powers in building a series of regional mechanisms. The mechanisms are characterized as inclusive with no single power dominating the order. The idea however never got wider reception in the development of the concept of the Indo-Pacific.

Poros Maritim Dunia (the Global Maritime Fulcrum)

In contrast to Indonesia under Yudhoyono, Indonesia under Joko Widodo, popularly known as Jokowi, tended to be much more domestic-oriented. It did not adopt a specific concept on the Indo-Pacific. The only concept which can be associated with the Indo-Pacific was the idea of Indonesia as the *poros maritim dunia* (the global maritime fulcrum) which positions Indonesia to connect the Indian and the Pacific Oceans. Adopted in 2014, the idea of the global maritime fulcrum is Indonesian response to the development in the Indo-Pacific, based on its awareness of a shift in the centre of gravity of the world's geoeconomics to the east and its Indonesian geographical conditions, which give opportunities for Indonesia, but can also endanger its national security. As such the global maritime fulcrum emphasizes Indonesian identity as an archipelagic country as the basis for its development plan. The global maritime fulcrum encompasses three strategies: to enhance the awareness of Indonesia's maritime domain, to build maritime infrastructure, and to develop frameworks for cooperation with other countries for financial and technological support (Sukma 2014). The global maritime fulcrum is supported by seven pillars. The seven pillars are marine and human resources development; maritime defence, security, law enforcement and safety at sea; maritime governance; maritime economy and infrastructure; maritime spatial management and environmental protection; maritime culture; and maritime diplomacy (Sekretariat Kabinet 2017). Viewed from the contents of the seven pillars, the global maritime fulcrum doctrine reflects a continuation or the application of the doctrine of the dynamic equilibrium into a strategic policy.

Indonesian Perspective for an ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific

The increased competition between China and the US has forced Southeast Asian countries to take sides. This situation is undoubtedly unacceptable for Indonesia with its principle of *bebas aktif*. Especially the fact that Indonesia has strong

economic relations with China to support its infrastructure development and to strengthen its domestic industries on the one hand and the awareness that China has great potential for creating instability in Southeast Asia and threatening ASEAN unity.

The impact of the rivalry between China and the US is quite clear in Southeast Asia. A survey conducted by Nikkei clearly indicated that 73 per cent of the respondents believe that “the region is becoming a staging ground for a major power struggle” (Iwamoto 2020). The survey also shows the preference of the Southeast Asian countries between China and the US. Seven out of ten ASEAN members prefer China over the US. China was chosen by the majority of respondents, with 69 per cent of Brunei respondents favouring China over the US, 58 per cent of Cambodian, 52 per cent of Indonesian, 74 per cent of Laos, 61 per cent of Malaysian, 62 per cent of Myanmar and 52 per cent of Thailand. The US is favourable among the respondents from the Philippines and Vietnam at 83 per cent and 86 per cent respectively, followed by 61 per cent from Singapore. The maritime disputes between the Philippines and Vietnam with Beijing over South China are believed to be the reason for strong preference shown by Filipino respondents and Vietnam to the US.

ASEAN leaders were very uncomfortable with the situation which seems to force Southeast Asian countries to choose among the two competing powers. President Jokowi suggested an inclusive vision of the Indo-Pacific, which includes China and emphasized the need for ASEAN to collaborate (Widodo 2018) with China. The unhappy response was also expressed by the Prime Minister of Singapore, Lee Hsien Loong, when he said that while Singapore supports proposals for the Indo-Pacific cooperation, he reminded that they should not “create rival blocs, deepen fault lines or force countries to take sides” (Loong 2019).

Responding to the unhappy proposals for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, Indonesia proposed a more ASEAN-centric vision. The initiative to have an ASEAN common position on the Indo-Pacific began with the formulation of *Indonesian perspective for an ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific: Towards a Peaceful, Prosperous, and Inclusive Region* (Septiari 2018). The concept was presented by the President, the Foreign Minister and the Indonesian diplomats at formal and informal meetings, such as the 32nd ASEAN Summit held on 27–28 April 2018, ASEAN Foreign Ministers’ Meeting 30 July–4 August 2018, 33rd ASEAN Summit, 13th East Asian Summit, ASEAN Foreign Ministers’ Retreat on 17–18 January 2019 and the

34th ASEAN Summit taking place on 20–23 June 2019 in Bangkok, Thailand. The document was finally adopted at the 34th ASEAN Summit on 20–23 June 2019 in Bangkok as *ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific* (2019). This document is the first official ASEAN view on the Indo-Pacific concept presented to the public amid intense competition between major powers in this area.

The ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific is not a new proposal to replace the existing proposals. Instead, it is an outlook aiming at emphasizing ASEAN centrality in the Indo-Pacific. It seeks to strengthen the existing mechanisms for dialogue and implementation of cooperation in the Indo-Pacific in which ASEAN plays a central role such as the East Asia Summit. In short, *ASEAN Outlook* is an effort by the association to set the rules of the game based on international law, openness, transparency, inclusivity, and the commitment to advance economic engagement amid great powers' competition in the region. In addition, it also proposes four areas of cooperation, i.e., maritime cooperation, connectivity, sustainable development goals and economic development.

President Jokowi commented on *the ASEAN Outlook* as representing “the centrality and force of ASEAN” amid the concern that “trade war is growing into a multi-front war” with serious impact on the region (Septiari 2019). Undoubtedly the adoption of *the ASEAN Outlook* can be seen as reflecting Indonesian leadership ‘in pushing ASEAN to take an active part in the discourse about this new “Indo-Pacific’ strategic concept” (Anwar 2020, 114). Critics, however, see it differently. Instead of seeing it as a case of Indonesian strong leadership, *the ASEAN Outlook* reflects more Indonesian “lack of diplomatic, security, or economic resources to independently shape the region” (Laksmana 2018) In other words, according to the critics, Indonesia uses ASEAN to achieve its goals.

2. THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE INDO-PACIFIC

The adoption of the *EU's Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific* on 16 April 2021 (European Council 2021) signifies a major development in the EU vision of its role in the evolving geopolitical realities. A few years before the adoption of the EU Strategy, the EU did not seem to have interest in responding to the idea when the Free and Open Indo-Pacific was adopted by the Trump administration. With the fact that some of the EU members have close economic ties with China, the *anti-China* character of the concept as part of the US containment strategy has probably prevented the EU from joining the idea enthusiastically. Consequently,

the proposal for Indo-Pacific cooperation did not have a significant echo in Europe except for three countries: France, Germany, and the Netherlands.¹ But, while they adopted different approaches that best suited their national interest, the three countries played an important role in the development and the adoption of the EU approach on the Indo-Pacific. Apart from their differences, the three countries clearly “emphasize the need for coordinated, European action” (Albessard 2021).

The development in the Indo-Pacific, however, has forced the European Union to change its policy. Acknowledging that the world’s centre of gravity is moving towards the Indo-Pacific, both in geo-economic and geo-political terms on the one hand, and “The futures of the EU and the Indo-Pacific are interlinked”, on the other hand, the European Union cannot afford not to increase its presence and engagement in the Indo-Pacific (European Union 2021). With more than 35 per cent of its exports to the region and the fact that more than 90 per cent of them take place through sea lanes of the Indian and the Pacific Oceans, the European Union is undoubtedly an important stakeholder in the Indo-Pacific (Mohan 2018). The adoption of the *EU’s Strategies* therefore does not only reflect the European Union’s recognition of the importance of the region, but also the need for the European Union increased engagement (European Union 2021a). The latter is not only in terms of economy, but also of security (European Council 2018).

The engagement with the Indo-Pacific is of strategic importance for the European Union to guarantee its access to the market as well as to the resources. And the European Union finds it necessary to shape a rule-based international order in the region. The strong influence of China’s Belt and Road Initiative in the region has clearly provided an urgent need for the European Union to promote a rule-based order in the region. A rule-based international order will provide alternative infrastructure cooperation for the one that China through its Belt and Road Initiative has been offering to the region. Apart from promoting a rule-based order, the engagement with the Indo-Pacific will enable the European Union to contribute to “the region’s stability, security, prosperity and sustainable development” (European Union 2021).

¹ France adopted *France’s Defence Strategy in the Indo-Pacific*, May 2018 (Ministere des Armees 2018), Germany adopted its *Policy guidelines for the Indo-Pacific* in September 2020 (The Federal Government 2020) and the Netherlands adopted its *Guidelines for Strengthening Dutch and EU Cooperation with Partners in Asia* in November 2020 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2020).

The *EU's Strategy* approaches the Indo-Pacific with quite different premises from the one offered by the US. While the US approaches the Indo-Pacific with the vision to contain China,² there is no intention of the EU to support such an exclusionary approach and to promote a zero-sum order in the Indo-Pacific. The *EU's Strategy* is promoting cooperation rather than confrontation (European Union 2021a). Consequently, instead of excluding China, the EU Strategy tends to encourage China to contribute to the development and security in the Indo-Pacific. The EU will engage China in multifaceted ways.

Seen from a broader perspective, the *EU's Strategy* can be seen as reflecting the vision of the European Union as expressed through the *EU's Global Strategy* adopted in 2016 (European Union 2016). The *EU's Global Strategy* envisions the European Union strategic autonomy and emphasizes strengthening the European Union's standing as a global player. *The EU's Strategy*, therefore, does not only focus on the economic aspect of the EU engagement in the Indo-Pacific, but also political and security (European Commission 2021).³ Josep Borrell made this need very clear when he wrote, following his visit to Jakarta, "if we want to be a geopolitical actor, we also have to be perceived as a political and security actor in the region, not just as a development cooperation, trading or investment partner" (European Union External Action 2021). The EU is not considered as an important security actor in the region. But, given the dynamic nature of the region, the European Union will inevitably strengthen its engagement with security issues in the region. Presenting itself simply as a normative power (Diz and Manners 2007) will not be sufficient. The EU needs to transform itself into a real global player with autonomous capability. Only with this security autonomy, the European Union can play a more important role and independently in the Indo-Pacific.

3. INDONESIA PERCEPTION TOWARDS THE EU STRATEGY

For the European Union, Indonesia plays quite an important role for the European Union engagement in the Indo-Pacific. This is not only because of Indonesian leadership in bringing ASEAN member countries to a common outlook on the Indo-Pacific, but also because Indonesian perspective on the Indo-Pacific fits well

² The concept of Free and Open Indo-Pacific reflects clearly the containment policy directed against China of the Trump administration. This continues under President Biden albeit in a different tone. China remains viewed as enemy in the Biden's Strategy of Indo-Pacific.

³ Seven priority areas of action have been listed in the Joint Communication: Sustainable and inclusive prosperity; Green transition; Ocean governance; Digital governance and partnerships; Connectivity; Security and defence; Human security.

with that of the European Union (European Union External Action 2021). Indonesia, on the other hand, welcomes the European Union engagement in the Indo-Pacific and the adoption of *the EU's Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific* (Kementrian Luar Negeri 2021). In her speech, the Indonesian Foreign Minister emphasizes the Indonesian perspective of open and inclusive cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. It is this perspective which also underpins the *ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific*.

Seen from this perspective there is a strong compatibility between the Indonesian approach and that of the European Union. While recognizing the conflictual character of the Indo-Pacific dynamic, both Indonesia and the European Union share a view of the need to keep cooperation in the Indo-Pacific open and inclusive. Quite contrast to the US which seeks to exclude China, Indonesia and the European Union are very keen to engage China. Both prefer cooperation to confrontation.

For Indonesia, *the EU's Strategy* does not only recognize but also support the centrality of ASEAN in the Indo-Pacific (European Commission 2021). ASEAN centrality is of importance for ASEAN. In the past, Southeast Asia has been a theatre for great powers competition which forced Southeast Asian countries to choose sides between the competing powers. The establishment of ASEAN was aimed at strengthening Southeast Asian countries collectively as an important regional power. The rivalry between China and the US, however, tends to undermine once again the role and position of ASEAN member countries by forcing them to take sides. Through *the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific*, therefore, ASEAN seeks to regain this position to drive mechanism and process in the Indo-Pacific. Its position at the intersection of the Indo-Pacific clearly justifies this demand.

Another positive perception of Indonesia toward *the EU's Strategy* is its commitment to strengthen existing multilateral rule-based order in addressing the challenges of geopolitical rivalry and competition in the Indo-Pacific (European Commission 2021). This fits nicely with the way in which ASEAN deals with regional challenges. ASEAN initiated several regional mechanisms to facilitate and manage peaceful interactions among major powers in the region such as ASEAN Regional Forum and the East Asia Summit. These mechanisms have given ASEAN a central role and enabled ASEAN to shape regional security and economic processes. Amid the pessimism toward ASEAN-led multilateral mechanisms (Naidu 2000), the commitment of the European Union to promote multilateralism in its strategy in

the Indo-Pacific will undoubtedly empower multilateral mechanisms which ASEAN has established.

Apart from the compatibility between Indonesian and the European Union perspectives on the Indo-Pacific, for Indonesia (both individually and within the context of ASEAN), *the EU's Strategy* offers a wide room for cooperation. There are at least three areas of cooperation that can be pursued further within the context of EU engagement in the Indo-Pacific: maritime, connectivity and economic cooperation (Mohan 2019).

The first area of cooperation is maritime cooperation. The fact that most of the European Union's exports to the region depend on the sea lanes between Indian and Pacific oceans means that it is in the European Union's interest to guarantee safety and security of these sea lanes. Maritime security has also been a serious concern for Indonesia and ASEAN. The European Union and ASEAN have developed cooperation to address transnational maritime threats from criminal activities to the impact of climate change. The European Union and Indonesia have also discussed and explored cooperation to tackle crimes at sea such as hijackings and kidnappings on the maritime borders between Indonesia, Malaysia and Indonesia even long before the European Union showed a strong interest in the Indo-Pacific (Salim 2016). Apart from maritime safety and security, maritime cooperation can also be developed to address maritime disputes which remain mostly unresolved and can turn into open military conflict. The EU-ASEAN High Level Dialogue on Maritime Security has also been established to discuss various issues of maritime security and has taken place regularly. With the dynamic and the volatility of the Indo-Pacific the impetus for maritime cooperation between the European Union and ASEAN will undoubtedly be on the rise.

Connectivity is another potential area for cooperation. Both the European and ASEAN have strong interest in connectivity. For ASEAN, connectivity aims at creating "a seamlessly and comprehensively connected and integrated ASEAN that will promote competitiveness, inclusiveness, and a greater sense of Community" (ASEAN 2016). To realize the goals, many ASEAN member countries depend on China which, through its Belt and Road Initiative, provides support to build their infrastructure projects. The heavy dependence on China makes the ASEAN members vulnerable. The cooperation with the European Union on connectivity will reduce Southeast Asian countries' dependence on and vulnerability against China. The European Union provides an alternative source of

support for the development of connectivity programs to ASEAN. The European Union has promoted internal connectivity for some time and the European Union has also developed a strategy to connect Europe and Asia. The European Union approach to connectivity is characterized as sustainable, comprehensive and rule-based (European Union 2018). As a matter of fact, ASEAN and the European Union have a commitment to promote connectivity within and between ASEAN and the European Union (ASEAN 2020).

Apart from those two areas, *the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific* also touches upon wide ranging areas within the European Union's competencies such as digital economy, disaster risk reduction and climate change. Closer engagement of *the European Union* in the Indo-Pacific will enable Indonesia and ASEAN to benefit from those competencies.

4. CONCLUSION

The adoption of *the EU's Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific* marks a significant change in the European Union's future engagement with the Indo-Pacific region. It envisions a greater engagement beyond areas which the European Union have focused on, i.e., trade and investment. Acknowledging the strong linkage between its prosperity and the dynamic of the region, the European Union cannot afford not to engage more closely with the region. *The EU's Strategy* sends a clear message that the EU is willing to increase its presence in the region.

Indonesia undoubtedly welcomes greater engagement of the European Union in the region. Not only because its presence will diffuse great powers' rivalry in the region, but also because the European Union offers an alternative approach to the region which can reduce rather than increase the tension. In addition, the strategy that the European Union adopted in promoting cooperation in the Indo-Pacific fits nicely with the Indonesian perspective of the Indo-Pacific, which has been adopted as the ASEAN Outlook. A synergy between the EU Strategy and the ASEAN Outlook can be developed to address the problems facing the Indo-Pacific but keeping ASEAN on the driving seat.

However, some issues need to be addressed before the EU Strategy and the ASEAN Outlook can be synergised. On the part of the European Union, self-representation as a normative power can probably limit the capacity of the European Union to assert a greater role in the Indo-Pacific. Different degrees of enthusiasm among the European Union member countries can also limit the

implementation of the EU Strategy. And the impact of war in Ukraine on the implementation of the EU Strategy cannot be underestimated either. Not least the European Union has to give more attention to its own yard and needs to divert a significant number of resources to stop the war as well as to rebuild European order after the war. Indonesia (or ASEAN), on the other hand, needs to translate the outlook into a more concrete strategy. An outlook can serve only as the lowest common denominator. Translating an outlook into a common strategy is not necessarily an easy task. Especially given ASEAN's tradition of hiding differences and conflicts under the carpet, there may be wide gaps behind ASEAN outlook on the Indo-Pacific which could limit the strategies ASEAN can adopt to implement them.

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Thailand's Perception of the EU's Cooperation Strategy in the Indo-Pacific Region

Nguyen Thi Thuy Trang





Since the birth of the concept *Indo-Pacific region*, the Thai government has been quick to get the message and supported the idea at the beginning as Thailand is located between the Pacific and Indian Oceans and considers itself a land bridge between the two. Since then, in one form or another, the country has been promoting all forms of connectivity that would place it at the centre of the emerging regional architecture. Current dynamics in the Indo-Pacific have given rise to intense geopolitical competition adding to increasing tensions on trade and supply chains as well as in technological, political and security areas. For all these reasons, the EU has decided to reinforce the EU's strategic focus, presence and actions in the Indo-Pacific, to contribute to regional stability, security, prosperity and sustainable development, at a time of rising challenges and tensions in the region. Thailand is a dynamic force in Southeast Asia and is one of the important partners of the EU in the region. Understanding Thailand's position on the EU strategy will help provide a deeper insight into the perceptions and reactions of countries to the strategy and plans to increase its presence and role in the region. This article begins with the perception of Thailand on the concept *Indo-Pacific*. It then analyses Thailand's position in the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy and the Kingdom's perception on it.

1. THAILAND AND THE IDEA OF THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION

In August 2007, Japan's Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, delivered a major foreign policy speech in the Indian Parliament about a confluence of the two seas, the Pacific and Indian Oceans. The notion of the Indo-Pacific region was presented for the first time as "a dynamic coupling as seas of freedom and prosperity". PM Abe said that this "broader Asia" concept has already brought down the geographical boundaries of yesteryear and that both India and Japan have the ability and responsibility to ensure the two seas become seas of freedom and of prosperity with more transparency. Since then, PM Abe's speech has laid the groundwork for foreign ministers from the four democracies, or the Quad, to meet informally on the side-lines of the annual ASEAN meeting. Upon his return as prime minister in 2012, he was able to jump start his Indo-Pacific idea.

At the time in 2007, the Thai government, under the leadership of Gen Surayud Chulanont, was quick to get the message and supported the idea at the beginning as Thailand is located between the Pacific and Indian Oceans and considers itself a land bridge between the two. Since then, the country has consistently expressed support for forms of connectivity that could place it at the centre of an emerging region (Chongkittavorn 2018).

When former Indonesian Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa elaborated on the Indo-Pacific region in Washington in 2013, he perceived ASEAN as a new pillar of stability with dynamic equilibrium. He also wanted to expand the ASEAN regional code of conduct, embodied in the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, to include the major powers. Since then, the Indo-Pacific has gradually morphed into a more strategic framework. The *free and open* Indo-Pacific was added and has become the new narrative after US President Donald Trump first mentioned it at the Asia-Pacific Economic Leaders' Meeting in Da Nang, Vietnam and the ASEAN Summit in Manila, the Philippines in November 2017. It was clear then that the region would serve as a countervailing force to China's rise and Chinese President Xi Jinping's mammoth land and maritime connectivity plan, known collectively as the Belt and Road Initiative.

During a bilateral meeting with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2018, Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha said that Thailand is pursuing a five rivers concept – the linkage between the region's Ganges, Brahmaputra, Chao Phraya, Irrawaddy and Mekong Rivers – as the future connectivity networks to enhance

and deepen cooperation within the Indo-Pacific Community (Chongkittavorn 2018).

Thailand will not turn the Indo-Pacific into a bulwark against China or Russia. That helps explain why the government is pushing for closer cooperation with India and for the completion of the Trilateral Highway linking South and Southeast Asia – the first indicator that Thailand will be a physical land bridge between the two great oceans. It is still the work in progress.

2. EU'S COOPERATION STRATEGY IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

After three member states of the EU – France, Germany and the Netherlands – announced their strategies and perspectives on the Indo-Pacific region on 16 September 2021, the Commission and the High Representative adopted a joint communication on the EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy. The joint communication contains more details on the implementation of the EU Strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, approved by the Council on 19 April 2021. Current dynamics in the Indo-Pacific have given rise to intense geopolitical competition adding to increasing tensions on trade and supply chains as well as in technological, political and security areas. For all these reasons, the EU has decided to reinforce the EU's strategic focus, presence and actions in the Indo-Pacific, to contribute to regional stability, security, prosperity and sustainable development, at a time of rising challenges and tensions in the region.

The central theme of the *EU's Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific* is the diversification and expansion of strategic partnerships beyond China, Japan, South Korea, and India, and interregional ties with ASEAN. In doing so, the EU outlines seven priority areas for the Indo-Pacific where it aims to uphold a rules-based international order and fair environment for trade and investment. These priority areas include:

Sustainable and inclusive prosperity; Green transition; Ocean governance; Digital governance and partnerships; Connectivity; Security and defence; Human security (European Commission 2021).

The EU's engagement with the Indo-Pacific region will be principled and long-term, promoting inclusive and effective multilateral cooperation grounded in a rules-based international order, shared values and principles, including a commitment to respecting democracy, human rights and the rule of law (Delegation of European Union to Thailand 2021). The strategy represents a fundamental step

towards the formation of a joint EU policy in the most dynamic and consequential region of the world, bringing in significant resources to address vital challenges such as climate change, openness of sea routes, connectivity and development. Collectively, the EU and its member states have the capacity to deliver on many of their commitments, due to the comprehensive and flexible nature of the strategy. However, the EU will have to navigate a set of challenges on how to mobilise its potential and pursue its strategic goals.

3. THAILAND-EU RELATIONS AND THAILAND IN THE EU'S INDO-PACIFIC STRATEGY

Thailand is a key partner for the EU in Southeast Asia: Thailand is an influential player within the ASEAN and therefore, it can play a significant role in implementing the EU-ASEAN strategic partnership; The EU has considerable economic interests in Thailand, with Bangkok serving as a regional hub for a large number of EU companies (Europa 2021); The Kingdom is an important and committed ally in the defence of multilateralism and a rules-based international order; and Thailand shares the EU's strong political commitment to sustainable development (Europa 2021). The EU temporarily turned away from Thailand after a military coup in 2014 overthrew a democratically elected government, which saw Brussels suspend Bangkok's trade privileges. However, relations were normalized in 2019 after the military junta held fresh elections, which its candidates won.

European investors are increasingly playing a bigger role in the Thai economy, allowing the Southeast Asian country to diversify trade and business away from the United States and China (Hutt 2021). In 2020, European Union investment accounted for 8.2 per cent of all overseas investment in Thailand, compared with 3.8 per cent for the US and 15.4 per cent for China. The figure has increased each year from just 4.4 per cent in 2016. The bloc is also Thailand's fourth-largest trading partner, with bilateral trade worth 29 billion euro (35 billion US dollar) in 2020 (Hutt 2021).

The US is Thailand's largest export market and China, among other things, is its largest source of inbound tourists. Japan had the largest source of FDI stock in 2019, while Singapore is an historic ally (Sasipornkarn 2021). Thailand has had a longstanding pro-free trade policy as part of efforts to expand multilateral economic ties in all directions and reduce reliance on any single actor. This

means the kingdom will be very reluctant to *pick a side*. The EU's investment, including the ongoing negotiations on a free trade agreement, fit into the Thai government's foreign policy framework. For the future, EU-Thai economic relations will continue to be close, if only because Thailand does not want to rely only either on China or the US (Xiyue 2021).

On September 2, 2022, Thailand, and the European Union (EU) formally finalized a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) (European External Action Service 2022). The deal makes sense for both sides. The agreement has potential to develop bilateral relations between the parties which is expected to positively shape their political and economic ties in the coming years. Crucially, the agreement has potential to provide the necessary framework upon which the parties could reach a comprehensive free trade agreement (FTA); if successful, Thailand would become only the third ASEAN nation to partner with the EU in an FTA. The PCA will update the 1980 EU-ASEAN Cooperation Agreement, which currently governs cooperation between Thailand and the EU (ASEAN 2012).

According to Guillaume Rebiere, Executive Director of the European Association for Business and Commerce in Thailand, the PCA is an important vehicle to strengthen the dialogue in the economic and trade domain and Thailand is an important trade and political partner and, therefore, this agreement is also important in strengthening the role of the EU within Southeast Asia; Both businesses and investors will be encouraged by the signing of this agreement (Graafsma 2021).

Thailand has proven itself to be a dynamic force for regional multilateralism through the construction of ASEAN, and more recently through the negotiation of Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). The country will continue to shape modern, comprehensive, high-quality, and mutually beneficial trading rules and can do so on a global scale with its European partners. EU-style free trade agreements have the potential to unlock the largest gains for Southeast Asian economies. A trade agreement with Thailand would allow the EU to obtain binding and enforceable commitments on issues such as sustainability.

For Thailand, long reliant on its vast tourism industry, the decline of Chinese visitors since the pandemic has forced it to rethink its dependence on Beijing and find other sources of growth. Bangkok is also conscious of the need to seek out trade links away from the US and China, two of its main partners. Expanding access to trade and investment with the EU, the largest economic bloc in the

world, is part of that strategy (Sasipornkarn 2021). The EU is also *warming up* to Thailand as it seeks to diversify from China as geopolitical risks rise and as Brussels increasingly views Beijing as a competitor. The willingness to negotiate with Thailand through the signing of the Framework Agreement is part of that growing closer in relations not just to Thailand but also to the rest of Southeast Asia and India (Hutt 2021).

4. THAILAND'S PERCEPTION OF THE EU'S INDO-PACIFIC STRATEGY

Thailand's perception of the EU's cooperation strategy in the Indo-Pacific region can be generalized in three main points:

First, as analysed above, Thailand does not want to be dragged into the strategic competition between the US and China as well as having to *pick a side*, so for them, strengthening relations with other important actors is a good choice. Moreover, after major fluctuations in international relations recently, Thailand is seeking new and varied sources of growth to avoid an over-reliance on its tourism industry, particularly as the country emerges from the Covid-19 pandemic. The EU is Thailand's fourth largest trading partner and the world's largest economic bloc, making a closer relationship ideal.

Second, in the Indo-Pacific region, Thailand focuses on economic cooperation rather than strategic competition in order to overcome the challenges posed by the competition among major powers, while taking advantage of the dynamics of economic development.

The EU has become a vital trade partner for the Asia Pacific region. As trade agreements between Asia and the EU have flourished over the past few years, Asia's exports to the EU have substantially increased. According to the European Commission's Statistics (Eurostat), in 2021, approximately 44 per cent of EU imports came from Asia. More specifically, in 2021, the EU imported over USD 153 billion worth of goods from ASEAN, an increase of 19.11 per cent in imports compared to the previous year. Statistics show ASEAN is the EU's third largest trade partner after the United States and China. According to data from Thailand's Ministry of Commerce, in 2021, Thailand exported over USD 25 billion worth of goods to the EU representing 9.26 per cent of total exports from Thailand in that year (Nam-Ake Lekfuangfu 2022).

Thailand and the EU have the common goal of transitioning to a circular economy and already advanced cooperation on the CEAP by sharing know how, best practices, policies, regulations, and actions. In addition, to encourage sustainable development, Thailand and the EU are in the process of negotiating a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement to enhance cooperation between the nations in the areas of circular economy, plastic waste management, and international bio-economy cooperation (Nam-Ake Lekfuangfu 2022).

Third, there are similarities in views and approaches to multilateralism, a rules-based international order, sustainable development and the UN 2030 agenda of the EU and Thailand.

Thailand's focus on sustainable development is reflected in its international commitments and in national policies. Thailand is an active supporter of the 2030 Agenda and the Thai Chairmanship of ASEAN in 2019 was devoted to the theme of Sustainable development. Sustainable development is a cross-cutting theme in the country's 20-Year National Strategy (2017–2036) (20-Year National Strategy 2017), which provides for long-term direction for the country's development, as well as in the Thailand 4.0 strategy (National Strategy Thailand 4.0), a knowledge-based economic model driven by innovation, creativity and technology. The 4.0 strategy is based on the principle of social and environmental sustainability, which should allow Thailand to become a country of "security, prosperity, and sustainability". Early in 2021, the Royal Thai Government launched the BCG strategy which stands for Bioeconomy, Circular economy and Green economy. It builds upon the Thailand 4.0 strategy, and it is well aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The BCG strategy is also intended to draw on the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP) which is one of the key principles of Thailand's social and economic development (Thailand's Home-Grown Approach to Sustainable Development).

As the country enters the next phase of its development, it seeks to balance progress across economic, environmental, and social dimensions, notably by tackling the outstanding challenges on environment and human and labour rights. The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, multilateral agreements, a possible Free Trade Agreement, and other possible agreements that could establish a legally binding relationship with Thailand are part of the policy framework. Cooperation on specific issues, such as deforestation, should be pursued, including through the possible continuation of the current negotiations

of a Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade Voluntary Partnership Agreement (FLEGT VPA) as well as through the development of a forest partnership (Europa 2021).

5. CONCLUSION

Thailand's perception on the EU's cooperation strategy in the Indo-Pacific region can be generalized in three main points: First, Thailand does not want to be dependent on the US and China's economies and be dragged into the strategic competition between the US and China as well as having to *pick a side*, so for them, strengthening relations with an important partner like the EU is a good choice. Therefore, the country welcomes the presence of the EU in the region as a new factor that can contribute to the stability of the region. Second, Thailand focuses on economic cooperation rather than strategic competition in order to overcome the challenges posed by the competition among major powers, while taking advantage of the dynamics of economic development. Third, there are similarities in views and approaches to multilateralism, a rules-based international order, sustainable development and the UN 2030 agenda of the EU and Thailand. This will actively contribute to promoting cooperation between Thailand and the EU in many fields.

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Australia and EU's Strategy and Presence in the Indo-Pacific Region

Bui Hai Thiem





Australian itself is part of Indo-Pacific region and a key player who embraces special interests in the region as it faces the challenges emerged from the decline of the US-led liberal international order and the rise of China as an economic and geopolitical power. Over the past ten years, Australia has embarked on a new course of policy adjustment towards strategic reliance on the US for security concerns over China. Amid China's growing international assertiveness and intensified China-US strategic rivalry, Australia has started finding it much more difficult to insulate its commercial interests from regional geopolitical tensions. It has increasingly placed a stronger emphasis on security cooperation and bolstering ties with major powers. Most notably, in November 2020, Australia joined for the first time since 2007 the Malabar naval exercises conducted annually by Japan, India and the United States. The AUKUS security pact and technology partnership with the US and the UK reflects both the pace of geopolitical shift in the Indo-Pacific for Australia and the enduring centrality of the US to Australia's defence strategy. With EU's new Indo-Pacific vision, Australia has been in a better position to create more synergies and opportunities in this region.

1. THE NEW CONTEXT FOR AUSTRALIA AND EU'S ENGAGEMENT IN THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION

The term *Indo-Pacific* was first used in Australia's official discourse as early as in 2012 when the idea of the Indo-Pacific served as a point of reference for the Australian government to define the country's foreign and security policy interests and ever since it has become an important line of thought. Indeed, Australia has become a staunch proponent and supporter of the concept of an Indo-Pacific region since the publication of its 2013 Defence White Paper.

While Australia's relations with its traditional allies are being strengthened, the Sino-Australian relationship has faced many challenges, notably record lows in 2020 demonstrated by an extensive trade dispute and a series of tit-for-tat diplomatic reprisals including raids on Chinese journalists' homes in Australia and evacuation of Australian journalists from China. To navigate a "poorer, more dangerous and more disorderly" future as described by Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, Australia's 2020 Defence Strategic Update and Force Structure Plan presents a more active role for the country to defend a stable regional order in the Indo-Pacific.

China's assertive Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), launched in 2013, poses new geo-economic and technological risks as China becomes an infrastructure investor and 5G technology supplier for both the EU and Australia. Moreover, the Covid-19 pandemic clearly demonstrates that health and wellbeing matter as much as economic and technological capabilities in ensuring both Australia and the EU's capacity to protect and promote its shared interests and values. When the pandemic reveals European dependence on supplies of pharmaceuticals, semi-conductors, and critical materials from Asian manufacturing powerhouses, EU member states became interested in combining the promotion of an open economy with the reduction of reliance on third states for key industries.¹ As a result, the European Commission (EC) introduced the concept "open strategic autonomy" in economic policy, which links up EU's economic, geopolitical, and normative goals. Accordingly, in light of EU's Indo-Pacific strategy in which the Indo-Pacific region has appreciated in significance, the pursuit of open strategic autonomy² is tied to the EU's aspiring role as the guardian of liberal values, a rule-

¹ EU strategic autonomy 2013–2023, p. 3: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/733589/EPRS_BRI\(2022\)733589_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/733589/EPRS_BRI(2022)733589_EN.pdf).

² <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/strategic-responsibility-rebalancing-european-and-trans-atlantic-defense/>; and "EU strategic autonomy 2013–2023," p. 5–6.

based order, multilateralism, human rights, and environmental protection and its quest to promote these norms through trade.³ Australian shares keen interest in these norms and values as much as the EU does. Particularly, security and economic concerns returned to centre stage for the EU as Russia's invasion of Ukraine revealed Europe's dependence on the US for its defence and Russia for its energy.

As such EU members' strategic priorities are now leaning towards shoring up the Atlantic Alliance, increasing military spending, improving conventional warfare capabilities, weaning themselves off Russian energy, and improving diplomatic and economic relations with partner third countries.⁴ for European strategists. The EU's 2021 Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific has been seen as an alternative to both China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the US effort to contain China through the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) concept.⁵ Following Australia's unilateral cancellation of submarine deal with France and signing up with the US and UK in a security pact known as AUKUS in 2021, Russia's war against Ukraine in 2022 further convinced the EU of the importance of establishing greater and stronger presence in the Indo-Pacific region.⁶

2. AUSTRALIA'S REVISED VISION OF THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION

Facing with dramatic structural changes in the international system and the increase significance of the Indo-Pacific, Australia has embraced a revised strategy for regional engagement. As argued by Abbondanza (2002), Australia has replaced its convenient *strategic ambiguity* with *strategic alignment* with Washington in order to shape the region according to a rules-based (and US-led) vision.⁷ This new strategy is particularly epitomized by the Quad¹⁹ and AUKUS. One of its striking characteristics is that Australia increasingly prioritizes security and trade over globalist and multilateralist values, thus categorizing it as a pragmatic middle power. As a significant actor in the Indo-Pacific, Australia faces a dilemma or "a

³ Niklas Helwig, "The Ambiguity of the EU's Global Role: A Social Explanation of the Term 'Strategic Autonomy,'" *European Foreign Affairs Review* 27, no. Special Issue (April 1, 2022): 25–26.

⁴ <https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2022C31/>

⁵ <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/articles-commentaries/iseas-perspective/2021-164-the-eu-in-the-indo-pacific-a-new-strategy-with-implications-for-asean-by-joanne-lin/>.

⁶ <https://isdpeu.eu/content/uploads/2021/10/AUKUS-Resetting-European-Thinking-on-the-Indo-Pacific-9.11.21.pdf>.

⁷ Gabriele Abbondanza, "Whither the Indo-Pacific? Middle power strategies from Australia, South Korea and Indonesia", *International Affairs*, Volume 98, Issue 2, March 2022, p. 403–421.

peculiar condition of perceiving itself—and being perceived by others—as being neither inside nor outside the Indo-Pacific.”⁸ First and foremost, Australia has remained its status as a formal ally of the United States through the 1951 ANZUS Treaty. However, it should be noted that Australia has massive economic links with China who is by far Australia's largest two-way trading partner (worth 175 billion US dollar in 2020, a third of Australia's global trade) thanks to a free trade agreement between these two countries since 2015. The fact that Australia is dependent on the US for its security and dependent on China for its trade has enabled a security–trade divide, split between Washington and Beijing respectively. It has become increasingly difficult for Australia to manage this dilemma amid increasing strategic rivalry played out by recent bilateral and regional tensions, and the COVID-19 pandemic. This problem has further strained diplomatic relations to such an extent that Australia’s middle power diplomacy is being significantly challenged.

With its new Indo-Pacific strategy, Australia has embarked on a departure from its *rapprochement* with China and the *laissez-faire* attitudes of the 2007–10 Rudd government. Remarkably, rising tensions in the Indo-Pacific and Putin’s war in Ukraine have left Australia being more *committed* to the US's goals and more determined to pursue a resolute *vision* for the region. Australia’s Indo-Pacific vision is imbued with normative elements and a multilateralist attitude while it concurrently aims to reinforce the existing balance of power through a set of interconnected alliances and unilateral initiatives revolving around the US. Australia has sought to consolidate two types of its formal agreements. The first takes the form of defence treaties. The second is fully fledged alliances between the United States and a number of key Indo-Pacific states, including Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, and Taiwan. Unilateral initiatives are mainly represented by the Quad with the United States, Japan and India, and the recently launched enhanced trilateral partnership with the UK and US (AUKUS), both of which embody a security-orientated vision for the Indo-Pacific. Australia plays a major role in both these agreements and unilateral platforms and is thus an enthusiastic supporter of the US-led Indo-Pacific strategy.

Australia’s resulting regional posture in the Indo-Pacific has clearly indicated that it no longer pursues the policy of *strategic ambiguity*, which was once useful in bolstering its middle power diplomacy because it allowed a great level of flexibility.

⁸ Richard A. Higgott and Kim R. Nossal, 'The international politics of liminality: relocating Australia in the Asia Pacific', *Australian Journal of Political Science* 32: 2, 1997, p. 169–86.

With its new strategy, Australia is pursuing a new and unequivocal *strategic alignment* with the United States. As its national interests increasingly align with those of the US, Australia's regional vision upholds the policy mantra of the *rules-based order*, which well fits in with the US and Japanese FOIP strategies. This priority has been made clearly in its 2020 Defence Strategic Update, in which Australia acknowledged that “the Indo-Pacific is at the centre of greater strategic competition, making the region more contested”, and which was underpinned by “a focus on strengthened international engagement, particularly with the United States, Japan, India, ASEAN and other allies and partners”, with “China's more active pursuit of greater influence in the Indo-Pacific” as one of the core strategic concerns. Before 2017 Australia had been hesitant to make a choice between security and trade interests. However, since 2017, there have been more instances of economic coercion from China over Australia in the trade relations despite the nominal increase in Australian exports to China throughout the pandemic. The concerns over this kind of coercion in its trade relation have left Australia with no better choice but abandon its long cherished strategic ambiguity and embrace a change in terms of its regional posture. This shift, in turn, represents a reinforced perception of Australia's role as a platform for US power projection in the Indo-Pacific region.

Australia's steadfast adjustment to an evolving regional landscape represents a narrowing room for manoeuvring for the country's middle power diplomacy and a limitation of its capacity to pursue its goals. By prioritizing security concerns over trade interests, Australia has successfully coordinated the new course of its foreign policy with Quad partners from 2017 and AUKUS partners since 2021. As such it has strengthened its security pacts but retained less flexibility in dealing with China. Moreover, Australia has been actively supporting the rotation of or ad hoc addition of South Korea, Vietnam and New Zealand to the so-called *Quad Plus*.⁹ They represent intentions and efforts of fostering a multilateral and normative approach with like-minded regional partners in the Indo-Pacific.

Besides, Australia has been well known for its pragmatic middle power tradition and this expanding network of alignments. Strategic security has so far been Australia's main concern in the region, so it has constantly developed and expanded its comprehensive relations with ASEAN countries, with a special

⁹ Ashok Sharma, *The first summit Quad meeting reaffirms a free, open, and secure Indo-Pacific*, Australian Institute of International Affairs, 19 March 2021, <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/the-first-summit-quad-meeting-reaffirms-a-free-open-and-secure-indo-pacific>.

emphasis on cooperation in the field of security and defence. In addition to actively participating in security cooperation mechanisms in the region, Australia also actively proposes many security cooperation initiatives, actively contributing to maintaining peace, strengthening and enhancing the environment. regional security, thereby helping to ensure remote security for Australia.

All of these shows that Australia is attempting to harness the region's multipolarity in order to pursue its regional interests, which take the form of a vision of a rules-based order led by the US for the Indo-Pacific. By virtue of its strategic reliance on the United States, Australia's capacity to enact this vision strongly rests on the continuing containment policies of Quad (Plus) and AUKUS countries over China.

Southeast Asia has a particularly important strategic role for both Australia and the EU, so they attach great importance to strengthening cooperation with countries in the region to ensure freedom of navigation and overflight in the South China Sea. The 2016 Australian Defense White Paper continues to affirm that Australia has deep strategic economic and security interests in Southeast Asia. The South China Sea is Australia's largest and most important trade route with nearly two-thirds of its total export goods transported through the South China Sea every year, especially trade activities with three markets. Australia's largest export markets are China, Japan and South Korea. Australia's economic interests and proximity to Southeast Asia make it possible for any security fluctuations in the region to have a potential impact on Australia's security. Therefore, ensuring maritime security in the South China Sea and stability in Southeast Asia is one of Australia's strategic defense interests. While the EU does not have that kind of proximity to Southeast Asia as Australia does, the former retains a lot of strong historical bonds as part of its colonial legacies and contemporary strong trade interests.

3. HEDGING AGAINST OVER-DEPENDENCY BY AUSTRALIA AND THE EU

The hedging strategy employed by both the EU and Australia in their pursuit of the interests in the Indo-Pacific region is embedded in diversifying and narrowing the supply chain towards a reliable group of countries instead of depending on the countries that the US and its allies are implicated in geopolitical tensions and security concerns such as China and Russia. The common denominator is like-minded and values-sharing countries in terms of norms and values related to the

global economy and world view. Such an establishment helps strengthen the group's strategic autonomy against the pressure from unfriendly countries. The main areas include infrastructure, strategic materials, essential goods and technology associated with national security. The goal is not to let countries like China and Russia interrupt the economic operation of the US and allies, as well as use economic interdependence as a leverage for geopolitical gain.

In terms of infrastructure development, G7 re-calibrated a plan called "Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment" in 2022 which pledged to raise 600 billion US dollar in private and public funds over five years to finance needed infrastructure in developing countries and counter China's older, multitrillion-US-dollar BRI project. Australia and the EU members are committed parties to this plan. For its part, the EU will mobilize 300 billion euros (317.28 billion US dollar) for the initiative over the same period to build up a sustainable alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative scheme. Meanwhile, Australia, together with the US, England, Japan and New Zealand participated in the *Blue Pacific* partner initiative. The US, Japan and Australia expressed their intention to cooperate together to develop a 5G telecommunication network in the South Pacific region, in order to prevent China from controlling the telecommunications infrastructure network in the region. Quad establishes channel 1.5 industrial dialogue to promote 5G telecommunication network diversification. The EU-US Trade and Technology Council formed a Taskforce group to sponsor safe and resilient telecommunications connection in like-minded countries.

In terms of essential raw materials and goods, Australia in cooperation with the US, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, UK, Japan, Korea, Sweden, and the EU established the mineral security partnership. Some important mechanisms such as the Ministerial Meeting on Supply Chain between the US, 17 related countries and the EU and the forum on key materials and materials between the EU, the US, Japan, Australia, and Canada.

The dominance of China in the rare earths space has also encouraged other countries, notably the US, to look further afield for rare earth deposits to diversify their supply of the increasingly vital minerals. With the US eager to ringfence rare earth production within its allies as part of the Inflation Reduction Act, including potentially allowing the US Department of Defense to invest in Australian rare earths, Australia is expected to benefit from this investment.

The US and Australia established partnerships on the development of key raw materials such as rare earth elements. In 2021, against the backdrop of Chinese dominance over rare earth production with almost 60% of total global mining output, according to the US Geological Survey, Australia produced the fourth-most rare earths in the world. Its total annual production of 19,958 tonnes remains significantly less than the gigantic 152,407 tonnes produced by China. Australia's Geoscience organization and the US Geological Survey signed an agreement to promote the supply of these materials. In June 2022, Australia Lynas Company (the only major rare land manufacturer outside the Chinese border) signed a 120 million US dollar contract with the US Department of Defense to build a first-ever facility outside China on rare earth production in Texas.

In terms of technology development, Australia has been a close partner with the US to promote net-Zero technology. The EU-US Trade and Technology Council set up a working group to handle vulnerable points in the US technology supply chain, including establishing early warning mechanisms of semiconductor supply chain broken. The Quad offers semiconductor supply chain initiatives to improve the security and self-resilience of the semiconductor industry. The US has been promoting semiconductor cooperation with South Korea through the framework of the "Chip 4" including the US, South Korea, Japan and Taiwan. The goal is to diversify the source of semiconductor production from Taiwan, preventing the risk of Taiwan surrounded by China leading to a disruption in supply. The US also established a cooperation mechanism with some countries such as Israel through the US-Israeli bilateral committee on technology cooperation and Partners towards the future with Korea in 6G technology. In addition, Australia has developed an International Cyber Engagement Strategy with an aim to leverage digital technologies to achieve sustainable development and inclusive economic growth in the Indo-Pacific. This strategy outlines three main courses of action:

- Improving connectivity and Internet access throughout the region. Facilitating increased connectivity means rolling out key infrastructure and working to ensure the availability, affordability and reliability of energy supply. An emphasis is placed on reducing the digital division between and within countries, by tackling access limitations on the basis of gender, age, ethnicity, religion, ability and socio-economic status.
- Encouraging technologies for e-governance and the digital delivery of services.

- Supporting entrepreneurship, digital skills and integration into the marketplace. They are well in line with the EU's strategy for connectivity in the Indo-Pacific.

The objectives and approach of the European and Australian connectivity strategies have many things in common. They both value and promote an open, transparent, and rules-based approach to connectivity, and what is more, both Australia and the EU “seek to leverage connectivity as a way to achieve the broader goals of sustainable development and social inclusion”.¹⁰ As such, a comprehensive connectivity partnership between the EU and Australia is a likely outcome as it can strike a similar note to that between the EU and Japan. This kind of partnership would contribute to addressing the investment gap in the Indo-Pacific and ensuring the interoperability of connectivity projects that can benefit the entire region, particularly developing countries in Southeast Asia. The synergies between the EU and Australia are also expected to constitute another standard-setting international partnership based on openness, transparency, sustainability, inclusiveness, fair competition, and a rules-based international order that both Australia and the EU stand as champions. As such, Australia and the EU members can work together closely in their joint programs to create more opportunities for this ambitious strategy.

Developing a strong partnership with the EU is a formidable way for enabling Australia to diversify its connectivity diplomacy and enmesh itself within the emerging infrastructure system of the Indo-Pacific without appearing to side with one superpower.¹¹ So far, Australia has struggled to articulate a coherent policy with regards to China's infrastructure and connectivity programmes in the Indo-Pacific. This confusion has been shown by the fact that it has at times described the BRI as having much merit and at times as detrimental to countries' long-term sovereignty. Whilst China's BRI presents an opportunity to close infrastructure gaps in the region, Australia's reticence to fully join the Chinese project are due to fears of over-indebtedness, lack of transparency and security concerns surrounding infrastructure with mixed civilian and military uses. Nonetheless Australia has been enthusiastically collaborating with the United States to develop infrastructure initiatives. While Australia is keen not to be viewed as picking sides

¹⁰ Anne-Eléonore Deleersnyder (2021), European and Australian connectivity strategies for the Indo-Pacific, MDPD KAS in Brussels. <https://www.kas.de/documents/272317/12679622/European+and+Australian+connectivity+strategies+for+the+Indo-Pacific.pdf/94d50953-33bd-aca2-f66b-a3d858af0cc5?version=1.1&t=1620294604399>.

¹¹ Ibid.

in order to maintain its economic ties with China and promote stability in the region, it still needs a strong diversification of credible partners. A partnership with the EU and its members would thus contribute to diversifying Australia's investment portfolio and furthering its strategy of hedging.

The EU-Asia connectivity strategy is but one piece of the puzzle when it comes to the EU's engagement with the Indo-Pacific region. Given shared values and interests as well as broader cooperation avenues between the EU and Australia, both have been keen to expand upon their Pacific Step-up and cyber engagement strategies.

4. CHALLENGES WITH AUSTRALIA'S INDO-PACIFIC STRATEGY

Australia's new vision of the Indo-Pacific has been presenting it with both opportunities and risks. As argued by Taylor (2020), Australia's divergence between rhetoric and the reality of Indo-Pacific strategy threatens to have a negative impact on the concept's broader international appeal and sustainability, particularly among Australia's Southeast Asian neighbours.¹²

In response to new security pact like AUKUS, China has harsh reaction. The representative of the Chinese Embassy in the US considers AUKUS a tripartite alliance against China and calls on the parties to this alliance to abandon the "cold war" mentality and ideological prejudices. A spokesman for the Chinese Foreign Ministry said that the decision of the US, UK and Australia to establish AUKUS was an act of "severely undermining regional peace and intensifying the arms race". China views AUKUS is a clear signal that Australia supports the US position on forming an international system to contain China's rise. Meanwhile, the Quad is perceived as a response to China's growing power and assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific and has been described by China as a type of *Asian NATO*, despite the fact that, unlike NATO, it is not a mutual defence treaty. Thus, it is expected that Sino-Australia relations is on the course of a down-track. While China remains Australia's largest trading partner, over the past few years relations have deteriorated so rapidly that both countries have barely made public high-level communications.

With regards to ASEAN members, there had been mixed reactions to Australia's cancellation of the agreement to purchase conventional submarines from France

¹² Brendan Taylor, 'Is Australia's Indo-Pacific strategy an illusion?', *International Affairs* 96: 1, 2020, p. 95-109.

and their replacement with US or UK nuclear-propelled versions. If Australia is about to acquire nuclear submarines capable of long-range attack – under the AUKUS security agreement, the US and UK will assist Australia in acquiring and maintaining eight nuclear submarines – then the Australian military capability can expand its reach in the Indo-Pacific and be able to counter the threat from within the region.

Indonesia's reaction is cautious, expressing concern about the possibility of a regional arms race and calling on Australia to comply with its nuclear non-proliferation commitments. In October 2021, Indonesia announced that it would seek a review of the 1970 Non-Proliferation Treaty aimed at preventing non-nuclear-armed states like Australia from acquiring nuclear propulsion technology. Malaysia also stated that it was "worried and concerned" about the risks of proliferation, as well as the implications for *ASEAN centrality*, and the associated Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ) and Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN). The Philippines, a US treaty ally and host to US forces, which has taken strategic distance from the US since 2016, took a mixed but ultimately positive response. The responses from Singapore and Vietnam were *measured*, while that from Thailand was *circumspect*. In the South Pacific, New Zealand welcomed the increasing international engagement in the region, whilst at the same time confirming that nuclear-propelled vessels would remain barred from its waters, while some other Pacific island countries, such as Fiji, expressed concern about the implications for the 1985 South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty (SPNFZ). In May 2022, Australia's Pacific neighbour, the Solomon Islands, signed a security agreement with China, signalling new and complicated developments in the region.

In order to manage these risks and challenges associated with a deteriorating strategic environment for Australia, the EU's increasing engagement in the Indo-Pacific has been seen as a positive development as the EU has been Australia's strong like-minded partner.

5. CONCLUSION

Australia has embarked on a foreign policy change towards an unequivocal *strategic alignment* with the US to hedge against China through the Quad and AUKUS and in its new vision of the Indo-Pacific, there will be some formidable challenges and risks with major implications for the region's strategic landscape

due to the rising tensions that permeate the twenty-first century's fractured multipolarity—further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic—and is also representative of the growing security–trade divide epitomized by the bifurcation of geopolitics and geo-economics. The EU's engagement in the Indo-Pacific is likely to offer a credible path of alternatives that can mitigate the negative consequences effected by Sino-American superpower rivalry. EU and Australia's strategy share a number of goals and approach, showing that middle powers can aspire to wield a significant amount of influence in a multipolar world, although they cannot hope to shape superpowers' grand strategies by themselves. Despite their potential they seem unlikely to provide an alternative platform for the region's direction in the near future, owing to growing divisions caused by the very Sino-American strategic rivalry that most of them are trying to offset. Australia and the EU are not in any way competitor in the region but strong like-minded partners that can contribute to building and sustaining the rule-based order in the region that can benefit many important actors here.

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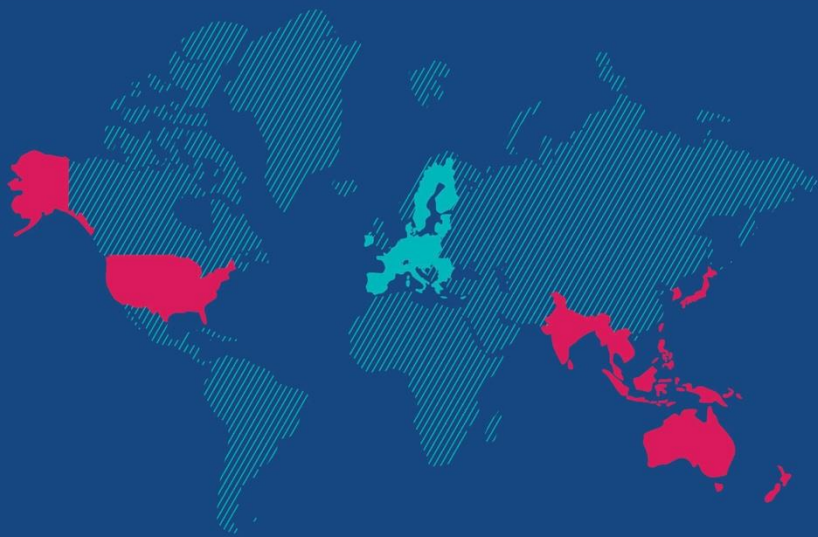
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The EU approach to cooperation in the Indo-Pacific from Strategy to Practice
Perception and involvement of significant actors in the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy