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EU in the Indo-Pacific: Weathering Rough Waters

Abstract

Lying on the other side of the globe, at first glance the Indo-Pacific seems as remote to European interests as it gets. A more careful consideration beyond the geographical distance reflected on the map, however, paints a rather different picture. The growing interconnectedness of the European and the Indo-Pacific theaters in the security realm, as well as trade dependencies in strategic commodities, such as critical minerals and semiconductors, necessitate the formulation of a more intentional EU Indo-Pacific policy recognizing the region's centrality in Europe's defense and economic security. At the same time, acknowledging the structural limitations of the prospective engagement is equally important. The delicate state of affairs in Taiwan and the brinkmanship in the South China Sea should also be factored in. The United States has long called for its European partners to shore up their presence in the Indo-Pacific not least to support Washington in its regional *bras-de-fer* with China. Besides Washington's own agenda, a flare-up in the Indo-Pacific will have far-reaching consequences for the EU partners, both financially and strategically. After mapping the European interests linked to the region, this paper will explore the ways in which the EU may tangibly shift some of its attention to the Indo-Pacific demonstrating why this is critical and what constraints it is bound to face in the process.

Introduction

The Indo-Pacific is the geographical space extending roughly from the eastern coast of Africa to the Western coast of the Americas. It encompasses South Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia, and Oceania. This region hosts more than half of the world's population, accounts for 60% of global GDP¹, and is home to the busiest maritime trade routes, such as the Strait of Malacca, the Taiwan Strait and the East and South China seas, featuring contested security flashpoints.

The region is also the site of an intensifying rivalry between the United States and China, whose outcome will largely shape the future of the international order. For Europe, the Indo-Pacific is a space where economic interests, strategic dependencies, and global

¹ U.S. Department of State, "Indo-Pacific Strategy (2021–2025)", 2021–2025, accessed November 2, 2025, <https://2021-2025.state.gov/indo-pacific-strategy/>.

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stability converge. Approximately 40 percent of the EU's foreign trade passes through the South China Sea², and European industries depend heavily on supply chains rooted in East and Southeast Asia. Export controls on rare earths, disruptions in semiconductor production in Taiwan or delays in shipping through the Strait of Malacca would reverberate across Europe's economy. Beyond economics, a military escalation in the region could fracture the transatlantic alliance and divert U.S. strategic focus away from Europe, leaving the EU more vulnerable on its eastern and southern flanks. But even absent an armed confrontation in Taiwan, the Indo-Pacific is directly tied to Europe's security through the unprecedented dynamics to which the ongoing war in Ukraine has strikingly given shape. With North Korean troops fighting alongside the Russian invaders and with China implicitly bankrolling the beleaguered Russian economy -thus enabling the perpetuation of the Kremlin's war effort- the Indo-Pacific theater appears to gradually become embedded into the security architecture of the Old Continent. Hybrid threats originating in the Indo-Pacific, such as organized crime and irregular migration, complete the heap of security-related matters that tie Europe to the region.

Recognizing these interconnections, the EU ought to turn anemic engagement into tangible presence. In doing so, Europe must navigate internal divisions and resource constraints, while treading carefully the geopolitical minefield of the U.S.-China rivalry. The question is not whether Europe should engage in the Indo-Pacific, but how, and to what extent, it can pursue its engagement effectively.

Skin in the game

Economic Security

As already hinted, Europe's economic prosperity is tightly bound to the Indo-Pacific. The region hosts four of the EU's top ten trading partners, including China, Japan, South Korea, and India³. Further, key European exports (e.g. machinery, automobiles, and pharmaceuticals) flow eastward, while the EU imports a vast array of goods from Indo-

² European External Action Service, "The EU Approach to the Indo-Pacific", June 3, 2021, *European External Action Service*, accessed November 2, 2025, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-approach-indo-pacific_en.

³ European Parliament, "EU – Indo-Pacific Trade Relations (Hearing, INTA, 1 September 2022)," *European Parliament Think Tank*, September 1, 2022, accessed November 2, 2025, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/events/details/eu-indo-pacific-trade-relations-/20220715CHE10501>.

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Pacific countries. Two sectors epitomize this interdependence most prominently: semiconductors and critical minerals.

i) Semiconductors

The EU's economic model is anchored in high-value manufacturing, advanced automotive production, and digital innovation. Maintaining the momentum in these fields hinges on securing an uninterrupted supply of semiconductors. Modern vehicles - particularly electric and hybrid models- integrate hundreds of chips⁴ that control everything from engine management and battery systems to safety sensors and infotainment. Increasingly, the move toward autonomous and connected vehicles depends on higher-performance chips fabricated at advanced nodes. Further, advanced chips are the central components of data centers, 5G and forthcoming 6G networks, and industrial automation systems⁵. The defence industry, too, depends on reliable access to semiconductors for advanced military aircrafts, radar systems, satellite communications, and command-and-control platforms⁶.

Foundries in Indo-Pacific countries account for the bulk of chip manufacturing worldwide. Indicatively, the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) produces more than 60% of the world's semiconductors with a 71% market share and over 90% of the most advanced chips⁷. It is clear that a disruption to Taiwan's semiconductor output would cascade directly into Europe's supply chains resulting in production halts, escalating costs, and loss of competitiveness. It could also impede Europe's digital transformation, compromise the rollout of critical communications networks, and affect sectors vital to national security. Semiconductors are dual-use technologies underpinning both civilian and military innovation. Therefore, any limitation

⁴ Glenn Burm, "Semiconductor and beyond: Global Semiconductor Industry Outlook 2026", *PwC*, 2025, 11–14, accessed November 10, 2025, <https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/industries/technology/pwc-semiconductor-and-beyond-2026-full-report.pdf>.

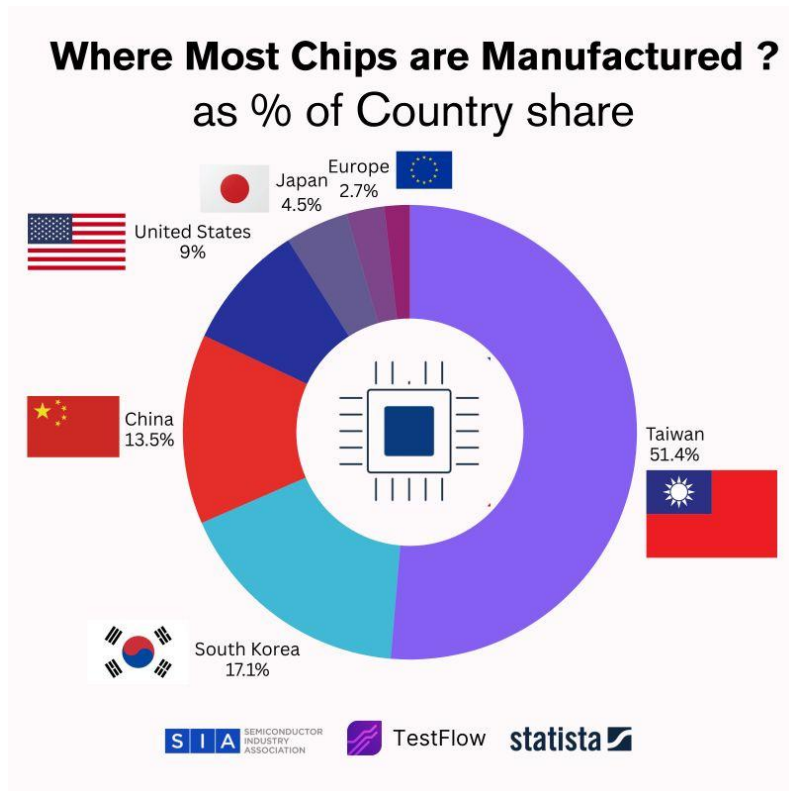
⁵ *Ibid.* 16–20

⁶ Sujai Shivakumar and Charles W. Wessner, "Semiconductors and National Defense: What Are the Stakes?" *CSIS Commentary*, June 8, 2022, accessed November 10, 2025, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/semiconductors-and-national-defense-what-are-stakes>. *csis.org*.

⁷ David Sacks and Seaton Huang, "Onshoring Semiconductor Production: National Security Versus Economic Efficiency." *Council on Foreign Relations*, September 27, 2022. Accessed November 10, 2025. <https://www.cfr.org/article/onshoring-semiconductor-production-national-security-versus-economic-efficiency>. *Council on Foreign Relations*.

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in access to advanced chips would erode Europe’s technological sovereignty and strategic autonomy, leaving it reliant on the policy choices and geopolitical stability of other, non-Western actors. The graph below offers a visualization of Indo-Pacific’s dominance in global chip manufacturing.



Source: Ali Kamaly

ii) *Critical Minerals*

The transition to a low-carbon, technologically advanced economy has placed critical minerals at the centre of EU’s industrial policy. Elements such as rare earths, nickel, cobalt, lithium, graphite and others form the backbone of batteries, electric vehicles (EVs), wind turbines, and advanced electronics. Many of these minerals are mined or processed in Indo-Pacific countries, and the geographic concentration of production and

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refining adds a layer of systemic risk for Europe. First, the role of China is pivotal. While raw mineral deposits exist in many places, China has deliberately captured the downstream part of the value chain, which includes the refining, processing, separation and manufacturing of the final component. For example, China accounts for about 65% of the world’s lithium refining capacity, over 70% for cobalt, and an astonishing 90% for rare earth minerals⁸. Second, Southeast Asia and other parts of the Indo-Pacific supply important raw and intermediate materials. For example, Indonesia is the world’s largest producer of nickel, accounting for more than 50% of global nickel output in 2024 with Australia and New Caledonia also featuring in the list with the top ten global nickel producers⁹. The *ASEAN Scoping Study on Critical Minerals Supply Chains* found that Indonesia and the Philippines together account for approximately 72% of global nickel output and 14% of global cobalt output¹⁰. Crucially, these trends will continue to shape the critical minerals industry in the foreseeable future with Indo-Pacific (especially China) remaining at the epicenter. The tables below show projections about the dominant players in the six main critical minerals in **2030**.

Πίνακας 1: Mining

Top 3 producers:	#1, %	#2, %	#3, %
Copper	Chile, 23%	DRC, 14%	Peru, 10%
Lithium	Australia, 33%	China, 23%	Chile, 12%
Cobalt	DRC, 66%	Indonesia, 10%	Russia, 3%
Rare earths	China, 54%	Australia, 18%	Myanmar, 9%
Nickel	Indonesia, 62%	Philippines, 8%	New Caledonia, 6%
Graphite	China, 82%	Madagascar, 3%	Mozambique, 2%

Source: IEA

⁸ Elvire Fabry, “A looming war for minerals?”, *Jacques Delors Institute*, April 2023, Accessed 23 November, 2025 <https://institutdelors.eu/en/publications/la-guerre-des-minerais-aura-t-elle-lieu-2/>.

⁹ Melissa Pistilli, “Top 9 Nickel-producing Countries”, *INN*, June 04, 2025, Accessed 23 November, 2025 <https://investingnews.com/daily/resource-investing/base-metals-investing/nickel-investing/top-nickel-producing-countries/>

¹⁰IGF on Mining, Minerals, Metals, and Sustainable Development, “The ASEAN Scoping Study on Critical Minerals Supply Chains”, *ASEAN-IGF Minerals Cooperation*, May 2023.

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Πίνακας 2: Processing/Refining

Top 3 processors:	#1, %	#2, %	#3, %
Copper	China, 46%	DRC, 7%	Chile, 5%
Lithium	China, 57%	Chile, 15%	Argentina, 13%
Cobalt	China, 74%	Finland, 6%	Japan, 4%
Rare earths	China, 77%	Malaysia, 12%	Australia, 3%
Nickel	Indonesia, 44%	China, 21%	Japan, 6%
Graphite	China, 93%	Japan, 3%	U.S. 1%

Source: IEA

Needless to say, the implications for Europe’s green transition are multifold. Europe is seeking to electrify transport, scale-up renewable energy and build digitally interconnected and resilient infrastructure (e.g., smart grids). Electrification means batteries. These in turn require nickel-rich chemistries (for higher energy density), cobalt (for stability in many chemistries), and graphite or other anode materials. Because the supply chains for these minerals are globally interlinked, a disruption at any point (mining, refining, transport, processing) can severely undercut the EU’s environmental policies enshrined in the “*Green Deal*”. Consider, for example, the battery value chain. The extraction may be in one country, but the ore is shipped to a refining complex in another country (often China) for conversion into battery-grade materials. The high degree of downstream concentration in one geography makes the supply chain vulnerable. Further, the OECD publication “*The Role of Critical Minerals in Clean Energy Transitions*” shows that China and Myanmar play dominant roles in processing, separation and downstream production of magnets, alloys and components¹¹. From Europe’s perspective, this means that raw-material supply risks are not confined to mining. The biggest risk lies in the “mid-stream” and “down-stream” segments, that is, refining, separation, processing and fabrication of value-added materials.

Because China maintains a tight grip on these segments, Europe and other jurisdictions are exposed to strategic bottlenecks. A mining source thousands of kilometers away becomes vulnerable if the processing plant is in China or if shipments must pass through geopolitical flashpoints in the Indo-Pacific. China’s preeminence in the strategic supply

¹¹ OECD, “The Role of Critical Minerals in Clean Energy Transitions”, May 14, 2021.

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chains of critical minerals affords Beijing the opportunity to weaponize trade to pursue political ends. The placement of export controls on rare earths –a textbook measure taken by China in its bid to afflict the Western economies- has caused manufacturing disruptions, driving up prices and undermining the competitiveness of domestic products.

Similar to semiconductors, critical minerals are also irreplaceable for the European Defense Technological Industrial Base (EDTIB). Critical raw materials, such as graphite, cobalt, beryllium, and germanium are needed for the production of an array of weaponry, including fighter aircrafts, tanks, missiles, torpedoes, artillery, and ammunition, military hardware in which the EU strives to attain self-sufficiency. According to a risk assessment conducted by the Hague Centre for Strategic Studies¹², the supply of many of the aforementioned materials is very likely to incur disruptions due to instability or geopolitical bickering.

Military Security

The globalization of markets is what has made the Indo-Pacific indispensable to Europe’s economic security. The intensified great power competition reminiscent of Cold War era-style establishment of opposing blocks is what renders the Indo-Pacific vital to Europe’s hard security as well.

A military escalation in the Indo-Pacific, especially around Taiwan, would have immediate consequences for Europe by drawing U.S. attention and resources away from the Euro-Atlantic theater. If Washington were forced to reallocate strategic bandwidth to Asia, the EU would face greater pressure to shoulder the security burden on its eastern and southern flanks, where threats from Russia, instability in the Middle East, and irregular migration already test Europe’s resilience. Even without open conflict, developments in the Indo-Pacific increasingly shape Europe’s security landscape, as seen in the Ukraine war. North Korea’s provision of frontline troops and weapons to Russia, along with China’s economic lifeline that sustains Moscow’s war machine, demonstrates that actors in the Indo-Pacific can directly amplify threats to European stability.

¹² Benedetta Girardi, Irina Patrahau, Giovanni Cisco, and Michel Rademaker. 2023. *Strategic Raw Materials for Defence: Mapping European Industry Needs*. January, 2023.

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Hybrid Threats

Equally destabilizing for Europe are hybrid threats emanating from the Indo-Pacific region. The overseas territories of an EU powerhouse are turning into a springboard for irregular migration and organized crime. Criminal groups have established themselves¹³ in the French Polynesia, New Caledonia, and the French West Indies engaging in drug trafficking, illegal fishing, gold smuggling, and arms flows as they exploit the vast exclusive economic zones where maritime surveillance is inadequate. These groups wield substantial control of international migration routes using the French territories as transit nodes for migration flows that ultimately reach Europe. Civil strife, climate change, political instability, and economic disparities in the Indo-Pacific exacerbate this trend. Once migrants enter a French territory, they are closer to gaining access to the European Union’s legal space, creating concerns that organized networks could exploit these territories as stepping-stones or “side doors” into Europe. Combined, these pressures increase border insecurity directly impacting Europe’s internal security.

This growing entanglement shows that Europe cannot compartmentalize the two regions. The Indo-Pacific is now woven into the continent’s security architecture, giving the EU undeniable “skin in the game” in preserving stability and building partnerships across the region.

Pinpointing the main hurdles

To do so, the EU has to step up its involvement in the Indo-Pacific. In formulating its strategy for a more active engagement, Brussels should take into account the limitations it is destined to face.

First, the EU’s Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) is not designed for distant power projection. Unlike the U.S., the EU lacks forward bases, logistical capacity, and naval assets suited for sustained Indo-Pacific operations. Any European military contribution would therefore be limited to symbolic deployments, joint exercises, or capacity-building missions.

Consensus-based decision-making and domestic political fragmentation across Europe also constrain the EU’s ability to act swiftly or decisively as a whole. Some member

¹³ Secrétariat général de la défense et de la sécurité nationale (SGDSN), “Revue Nationale Stratégique 2025”, Paris, 2025, p.20.

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states, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, prioritize transatlantic solidarity and view China with suspicion; others, like Germany and Hungary, emphasize economic pragmatism appearing more conciliatory vis-à-vis Beijing due to their tight ties in trade and investments. Furthermore, defense spending disparities among member states hinder the formation of a unified strategic posture. So does the divergence in threat perception: Austria or Ireland might not view the threats stemming from the Indo-Pacific as immediate as they seem to France with its overseas territories or to the Baltic countries with an aggressive Russia on their borders- backed by Indo-Pacific actors.

Compounding to the constraining factors is China's central role in European trade, which creates strong disincentives for confrontational policies. While the EU recognizes the risks of overreliance, especially after the pandemic and the Ukraine war, full-scale decoupling is neither feasible nor desirable. Consequently, the EU must pursue a policy of de-risking without disengaging, a pursuit requiring deft balancing that might sound straightforward in theory but can prove a herculean undertaking in practice even for the most experienced European bureaucrats.

Finally, Russia's ongoing war in Ukraine consumes Europe's attention and resources. Other challenges facing Europe, though, have not magically disappeared. The EU's southern neighborhood grapples with persistent instability. Climate change, energy security, and migration pressures further stretch European capacities. In this context, sustained Indo-Pacific engagement risks being deprioritized unless directly linked to core European interests. Well-constructed and clearly communicated policy messaging on why the Indo-Pacific matters to Europe can serve in achieving the latter.

Rising to the challenge

Despite these obstacles, Europe, both collectively and at national level, has taken some initial steps toward strengthening its presence in the Indo-Pacific.

The *2021 EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific*¹⁴ marked a watershed. It framed the region as “vital for the EU's interests” and called for cooperation in seven areas: sustainable and inclusive prosperity, green transition, ocean governance, digital partnerships, connectivity, security, and human security. The strategy's ambition is

¹⁴ European Commission & European External Action Service. “Joint Communication on the EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific” *JOIN*(2021) 24 final. Brussels, September 16, 2021.

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evident in its breadth, yet its implementation remains uneven. Unlike the U.S., the EU lacks a hard-power footprint in the Indo-Pacific. The strategy is therefore designed around partnerships leveraging diplomacy, trade, and development tools rather than military presence. The *EU Strategic Compass for Security and Defense (2022)* sought to fix that. Recognizing the growing assertiveness of China in the Indo-Pacific and the strategic importance of the region to Europe, the strategic compass expanded the Coordinated Maritime Presences (CMPs) to the Indian Ocean while calling for more joint exercises and port calls in the Indo-Pacific with the aim to strengthen the EU regional presence.¹⁵

Beyond the collective front some EU member states have forged their own Indo-Pacific policies, contributing to a patchwork of European engagement. France maintains territories in the Indian and Pacific Oceans (La Réunion, New Caledonia, French Polynesia) and a permanent military presence. It views itself as an Indo-Pacific power and a natural anchor for EU engagement. Germany adopted “*Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific*”¹⁶ in 2020, emphasizing diversification of partnerships and a rules-based order. The Netherlands followed suit in 2020¹⁷, focusing on trade and security cooperation. Italy and Spain are expanding defense dialogues with India, Japan, and ASEAN.

Yet, coordination at the EU level remains limited. The EU Naval Mission Atalanta (operating in the western Indian Ocean) and joint exercises or port calls with partners like Japan and India represent embryonic steps toward a coherent European presence. On the other hand, initiatives, such as *Global Gateway*¹⁸, promising €300 billion in sustainable investment, aim to enhance Europe’s soft power and support resilient infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific. However, questions remain about financing, coordination, and visibility compared to China’s extensive network of BRI projects. Given the vitality of the Indo-Pacific to the European economies and to the EU’s strategic autonomy writ large, the moment has come for Brussels to transform its hitherto timid engagement with the region into a vigorous and all-encompassing Indo-Pacific strategy.

¹⁵ Council of the European Union, “A Strategic Compass for Security and Defense”, 21 March, 2022.

¹⁶ Federal Foreign Office (Germany), “Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific”, *Germany–Europe–Asia: Shaping the 21st Century Together*, Berlin: Federal Foreign Office, 2020.

¹⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Indo-Pacific: Guidelines for Strengthening Dutch and EU Cooperation with Partners in Asia”, *Government of Netherlands*, 13 November 2020.

¹⁸ European Commission and European External Action Service, “Global Gateway: European Union Strategy for Sustainable Global Connectivity”, Brussels, 2021.

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The following policy recommendations aim to guide European policymaking in this direction:

- Maritime security

Maritime security represents the most practical entry point for upgraded European involvement; and probably the most instrumental one. Trade routes through the South China Sea and Indian Ocean function as Europe's economic lifelines. The EU's dependence on maritime security in these waters ties its prosperity to the stability of these distant sea lanes. Building on operations like Atalanta and AGENOR, the EU could expand naval patrols into the broader Indo-Pacific under a new Maritime Security Compact with ASEAN and regional partners within the framework of the EU Maritime Security Strategy (EUMSS). It could also reinforce the EU Coordinated Maritime Presences (CMPs) concept in the northwestern Indian Ocean and explore its extension to the western Pacific. Similarly, it can expand joint naval drills with Indo-Pacific partners both in geographical breadth and in scope. In particular, joint exercises may be conducted in more parts of the Indo-Pacific waters, while including training in war scenarios, red teaming, and breaking of potential naval blockades of critical sea lanes. Additionally, the EU could ramp-up investments in information-sharing mechanisms and capacity-building for regional coast guards. Such measures would not only safeguard critical trade routes but also demonstrate Europe's commitment to free navigation and to a rules-based maritime order.

- Supply chain diversification

To reduce strategic dependencies, the EU should diversify semiconductor supply chains by strengthening partnerships with Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan, while supporting EU domestic chip production through the European Chips Act. Developing critical minerals partnerships with Indonesia, Australia, and India under transparent environmental and labor standards could also go a long way in feeding into Europe's image as a global leader in sustainable development, while buttressing the diversification of the continent's supply chains. A credible economic footprint would reinforce Europe's relevance and complement its security engagement.

- Multilateralism and Diplomacy

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Europe's comparative advantage still lies in norm-setting and diplomacy. The EU should try to act as a mediating voice in U.S.-China tensions, emphasizing international law and open trade, while fostering regional crisis prevention initiatives, including confidence-building measures in the South China Sea. Regarding ASEAN, the EU may institutionalize the EU-ASEAN strategic dialogue with a permanent secretariat-level mechanism and build on the EU-ASEAN strategic partnership to revive sincere talks on a region-to-region free trade agreement, which will enhance integration and mutual economic resilience. Further, the EU would do well to upgrade the current format of talks from a ministerial to heads-of-state level dialogue. Such diplomatic activism would underscore Europe's role as a stabilizing actor rather than a partisan power.

- Selected Bilateral Partnerships

The EU should deepen cooperation with established partners (Japan, India, Australia, and South Korea) and initiate partnerships with others through joint exercises, technology synergies, and joint research in critical technologies and cybersecurity. Triangular cooperation (e.g., EU-Japan-ASEAN infrastructure projects) could amplify impact while sharing burdens. A more robust presence would also send a message to China and North Korea that Europe is not a passive spectator of the latter's intercontinental interference on Russia's side in Ukraine. Rather, it will show that Europe can bring the competition to their own neighborhood, reinforcing its bargaining position. By strengthening the capacities of their own regional rivals while keeping channels of communication open, the EU can plausibly have a shot at persuading China and North Korea to dial down support to Moscow switching to a bold, but calculated, sticks-and-carrots approach.

- Leveraging NATO

While the EU should avoid duplicating NATO's structures, closer coordination can align transatlantic and Indo-Pacific strategies. NATO's 2022 Strategic Concept¹⁹ already recognizes China as a systemic challenge. European contributions to Indo-Pacific security can thus complement, rather than compete with, Alliance objectives. For instance, enhanced interoperability between EU naval deployments and NATO partners in the region, along with coordinated sanctions and export-control regimes, can further reinforce collective deterrence.

¹⁹ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "NATO 2022 Strategic Concept", adopted at the Madrid Summit, 29 June 2022

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Conclusion

The Indo-Pacific has emerged as a key node along the chain of the core European interests. Although pressing issues in its immediate neighborhood would not allow the EU to realize a “pivot to Asia” akin to that professed by the Obama administration back in 2011, the EU leadership would do well to formulate a holistic Indo-Pacific policy in its quest for strategic autonomy. Europe’s economic security largely rests upon intricate supply chains of strategic commodities, such as semiconductors and critical minerals. With upstream and downstream segments of these supply chains concentrated in Southeast Asia and even dominated by China, Europe is vulnerable to trade bottlenecks that can cause unmanageable setbacks in EU’s industrial production, green transition, and defense innovation. From a military perspective, the direct and indirect support of certain Indo-Pacific countries to Russia -namely North Korea and China- has laid bare the interconnectedness of the strategic theaters spanning the Eurasian supercontinent, while the Sino-American rivalry, if not tempered, risks to divert Washington’s resources away from Europe leaving the latter exposed to multiple threats. Expanding on the already existing cooperation mechanisms with Indo-Pacific countries and harnessing its central role in global diplomacy and multilateralism, the EU must prop-up its engagement in the region in its bid to safeguard the aforementioned interests. Coordination with NATO is also essential as the two distinct alliances work closely to achieve common goals in the Indo-Pacific complementing each other rather than going circles in an unproductive overlapping. Structural and systemic limitations may hinder deeper involvement, but the EU has the ability to navigate constraints to the degree that its Indo-Pacific engagement does not raise the risks of accentuating intra-EU divisions or exacerbating geopolitical tensions that might bring the region to the precipice of an armed confrontation.

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