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## The European Union's Security Intervention in the Indo-Pacific: Between Multilateralism and Mercantile Interests

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### ABSTRACT

Is the EU raising its political and security profile in the Indo-Pacific solely because of China's assertiveness or US–China strategic competition, as often posited? On the basis of official documentation and elite interviews, this article advances a more nuanced view of the rationale behind the EU's engagement there. Aside from increased European naval involvement the EU and its member states are fostering the capacity building of Indo-Pacific countries concerned with their maritime safety, maritime security and to uphold the rules-based multilateral order. Yet, this article demonstrates how mercantile goals lie behind the EU and its member states' politico-security engagement.

### KEYWORDS

Maritime security; EU–China; South China Sea; capacity building; connectivity; United States

On April 19, 2021, the Council of the European Union approved the *EU Strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific*, a macro-area that extends from Eastern Africa to the island states of the Pacific and East Asia. The European Union (EU) aims to increase its political, economic, and military presence in this mega-region, which is crucial for both economic and geopolitical reasons. The Indo-Pacific accounts for 62 per cent of the world's GDP, it contributes to two thirds of the global economic growth, and it is a region where China and the United States are engaging in 'intense geopolitical competition'. The area is also the scene of 'increasing tensions on trade and supply chains as well as in technological, political and security areas' as well as hosting challenges to 'the universality of human rights' (Council EU 2021, 2). As stressed by Gunnar Wiegand, the Managing Director for Asia and the Pacific at the European External Action Service, this one is a 'strategy to increase cooperation, not competition' (Wiegand 2021). Building on the Council's initiative, and following the Council's guidelines, the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, have presented a Joint Communication defining a strategical framework along the same lines in September (European Commission 2021).

The new European strategy acknowledges China's assertiveness, and it aims, among other things, for the '[EU to] deepen its engagement on the Indo-Pacific in particular with those partners that have already announced Indo-Pacific approaches of their own' (Council EU 2021, 3). 2020 was in many ways an *annus horribilis* for Beijing, starting

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with the COVID19 pandemic. In 2020 China's international image, especially in the eyes of Western countries, has considerably deteriorated considering the numerous territorial and maritime disputes with its neighbours, the confrontational rhetoric employed by Chinese diplomats, the Communist Party of China (CPC)'s crackdown on Hong Kong's autonomy and in the region of Xinjiang, and the so-called 'mask diplomacy'. These trends have been further reinforced in 2021 following Chinese sanctions on European MPs and research institutions, as well as its economic coercion against Lithuania.

The European Union's focus on the Indo-Pacific trails a global trend. From 2016 onwards, Japan, Australia, the United States, India and even the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), as well as some member states such as France, Germany, and the Netherlands, all adopted guidelines on the Indo-Pacific region. However, a more careful analysis of the origins of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific concept and of the ensuing visions by the afore-mentioned players reveals significant differences and peculiarities. An exemplary difference, for instance, is that between the emphasis on cooperation in the European document and the focus on maintaining American primacy within the Free and Open Indo Pacific strategic framework (Rogin 2021, 77–80; US National Security Council 2018). This document, declassified at the end of the Trump presidency, suggests that US–China competition presents zero-sum hegemonic traits.

The dissimilarity between the European and the American documents is eloquent. The deterioration of Sino-American relations suggests that the initial hesitation of Germany and other European countries to adopt an Indo-Pacific strategy was not only driven by the prospect of Chinese grievances, but also by the risks posed by the American push-back, at times echoing containment policies. Accordingly, both the EU strategy for the Indo-Pacific and the German guidelines avoid any mention of the United States (Wacker 2021).

Despite the initial uncertainties, the Biden administration stressed continuity by adopting the Trump administration's Free and Open Indo-Pacific rhetorical bumper sticker and by abandoning the earlier willingness of redefining the Indo-Pacific as Secure and Prosperous (Hosoya 2020). In fact, under Biden the Indo-Pacific region has turned into a key focus area for the American policymaking machine. Within the National Security Council, the Indo-Pacific section is three times the size of the one dedicated to Europe and has competences ranging from Japan to Russia (Green 2021; Interview 2021a). The Indo-Pacific coordinator Kurt Campbell stated that 'we are shifting our strategic focus, our economic interests, and our military might' in the Indo-Pacific, a region 'that will play a crucial role for 21st century history'. While American alliances are a priority for the new administration, Campbell announced a continuance trait regarding Trump administration's policies: 'the period that was broadly described as "engagement" has come to an end, we are now embarking on a new set of strategic parameters, the dominant paradigm is going to be competition' (Campbell and Rosenberger 2021). In sum, China's containment remains a key aspect in defining the United States' Indo-Pacific; differently from their predecessors, for the Biden administration democratic allies are key and its approach to China will possibly include some positive inducements such as those contained in the newly-unveiled Indo-Pacific Economic Framework. On the other hand, the European vision aims to achieve a more inclusive definition than the American one, even compared to the Biden administration's one.

This article presents a composite picture of the EU's engagement in the Indo-Pacific with a specific focus on its security and political engagement. Since the EU's embrace is relatively recent, the academic literature is sparse but is often echoed by policy analyses. US-based think-tank analysts often point at a growing convergence between the US and Europe approach towards the macro-region and China in particular (Small, Glaser, and Mohan 2022). In Europe, scholars Ramon Pacheco-Pardo and Nicola Leveringhaus (2021) posit that the EU is indeed concerned with China's rise and could potentially align with US initiatives. On the contrary, Casarini has demonstrated the EU's growing security interests in the region, as a result of the twin challenges of China's assertiveness and of US–China competition, by also suggesting that the EU aims at navigating a 'third way' between the two actors (Casarini 2020, 78–92; 2022). Meijer instead has emphasised the growing desiderata and threat perceptions of key European states as the driving force behind the EU's (and the UK's) embrace of the Indo-Pacific (2022). In particular, France has played a pro-active security role in the region (Meijer 2021) and some authors claim that its unilateralist security engagement is aimed at a concert of 'middle powers' to respond to the afore-mentioned challenges, one that could trickle down to the EU level especially since France is the largest security actor within the Union (Gare 2020; Spero 2009). Finally, Wirth and Jenne (2022) argue that the composite nature of the 'Indo-Pacific' is representative of the 'multiplex' mixture of cooperation and conflict, typical of East Asian regional politics.

This article builds upon the above-mentioned literature to instead argue that the growing relevance of the Indo-Pacific sits at the intersection of real multilateralism, proactive security engagement and –notably– the growing embrace and relevance of mercantile interests. To better understand these dynamics the article first provides an in-depth analysis of the genealogy of the Indo-Pacific concept to underline its power-political origins and its inherently politicised nature, to then shed light on the EU and its member states' distinctive approach to the region, at the intersection of broad multilateralism aimed at buttressing the international rule of law and the oft-overlooked prioritisation of economic interests.

### Political genealogy of the Indo-Pacific

The Indo-Pacific is a recent political construct which qualified as a strategic narrative to underpin a nascent maritime security strategy amidst a changing regional order (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle 2013). The macro-region was born as a strategic narrative in Japan and was embedded in the concept of an Arc of Freedom and Prosperity during Abe Shinzō's first administration 2006–07, to counterbalance China's rising power. The Arc of Freedom and Prosperity was launched in 2006 and aimed to provide Japan with a grand strategy in-the-making encompassing the Pacific and the Indian Oceans, and complementing the American Arc of Instability (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2007). China was clearly –if oft-denied– the main focus of this grand strategy, since the policy vision was the brainchild of heavyweight hawkish cabinet members and diplomats from the Koizumi Jun'ichirō and first Abe Shinzō administrations. Tokyo's purpose was that of managing bilateral relations through a coordinated employment of military, economic, and political leverage, with an emphasis on maritime security (Insisa and Pugliese 2022). Together with other naval 'like-minded' democracies – mainly the US, Australia

and India, which together with Japan forms the so-called Quad (see below) – and littoral states with maritime concerns over China’s advancement into the seas, the Japanese government therefore aimed to achieve a series of objectives: increasing maritime deterrence and, potentially, coercion vis-à-vis China’s naval power projection; mitigating economic asymmetries between China and third countries as these could have evolved in political influence or even a Chinese sphere of influence; opposing Beijing’s rhetoric through a battle for the domestic and foreign hearts and minds.

The quadrilateral security dialogue (Quad) stood at the core of the Japanese strategy of the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity and of the Indo-Pacific. The prospect of having a more institutionalised Quad with a broader scope represented for Abe an insurance, as well as a strategic leverage for dealing with Beijing from a position of strength. However, the rhetorical emphasis that the strategy of the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity placed on universal values such as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, did not replace the traditional Japanese pragmatism in foreign and security policy. Further to the strengthened links with India, Australia and Southeast Asian countries, the Arc’s strategic vision was meant to bolster the US-Japan alliance with both the neoconservative Bush administration and with a hypothetical future Democratic Party leadership. Abe’s government feared that the increasingly important role that China played on the international chessboard could have prompted a progressive American ‘abandonment’ from its alliance with Japan, in favour of a G2 with China (Interview 2021b). The new Japanese strategic initiatives would have tied Washington, Canberra and even New Delhi, as well as some Southeast Asian countries, to the geopolitical and Mahanian ambitions of Abe’s Japan. These included checking Chinese power projection in the oceans through the so-called ‘rimlands’, that is the littoral states facing the maritime and costal borders of Eurasia around China, as well as make sure that the US remained committed to regional security, possibly also through fellow third actors (Wirth and Jenne 2022).

Upon inputs from the same trusted foreign policy advisors, following his political comeback between 2012 and 2020 Abe promoted a strategic vision similar to that of the Arc of Freedom and prosperity, with a transformed focus on achieving a ‘Free and Open Indo Pacific’ (Yamamoto 2021). The main objective remained that of hampering the political, (para)military, and economic Chinese international projection in the Indian and especially in the Pacific Oceans through an intensified resort to international law – in particular to the freedom of navigation in, and overflight of, high seas – to universal values, and to a peaceful resolution of disputes. In fact, Japanese policymakers advanced the Free and Open Indo Pacific strategic vision in response to China’s Belt and Road Initiative (Yamamoto 2020), and by including explicit reference to its ‘Partnership for Quality Infrastructure’ also to negotiate from a position of strength with Beijing (Yoshimatsu 2021). In this way, development aid, regional security initiatives, and the Japanese foreign policy focused on pivoting against China’s power; all became part of the strategic narrative of the Free and Open Indo Pacific. As evident from the overview on its political genealogy, the concept ‘Indo-Pacific’ was enmeshed with power political considerations.

The term Indo-Pacific became widely used only following its embrace by other governments. China’s increasing assertiveness and the mounting US–China tensions played a role. Yet, the spreading of such a political concept has also been made possible by the skilled and relentless action of Japanese –and to a lesser extent– Australian advocacy activities, especially in Washington DC (Yamamoto 2021; Medcalf 2020). Following the

United States government's appropriation of the concept in late 2017 (US National Security Council 2018), France, the ASEAN countries, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom all adopted, over the past four years, strategies, guidelines, or policies regarding the Indo-Pacific. More recently, at the end of 2020, the European Union adopted a strategy based on a joint initiative led by France, Germany, and the Netherlands (Wacker 2021). Following the EU strategy for cooperation, Italy has also endorsed the concept by unveiling an implementation scorecard that guided the work of its Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (2022). Still, Rome's defence interests in the macro-region are mostly rooted in the Western Indian Ocean.

The above are different Indo-Pacific visions. They vary depending on the dissimilar interests of the above-mentioned actors, and on ever-changing domestic and international political equilibria. Even the Japanese government initially sold its strategy for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific to the Trump administration, in order to prompt a stronger participation of Washington in a whole-of-government pushback against China, and only at a later time, it softened its rhetorical stance to achieve a delicate yet more inclusive balance with ASEAN countries and ease Sino-Japanese relations, at the very least for diplomatic purposes (*Kyodo News* 2018; *The Strait Times* 2018b). The Biden administration too would slightly reformulate the US' Indo-Pacific vision away from their predecessors at the White House to emphasise democratic values as well as functional and economic cooperation with 'like-minded' partners.

Still, the main purpose of the strategic 'vision' by key regional players –first and foremost the United States– remains that of denying China the possibility of building a regional sphere of influence as well as offering alternatives to a potential Chinese hegemony. Tokyo intends to achieve this goal in coordination with its Transpacific ally and its strategic partners, mainly the Quad members, that under the Biden administration consolidated their *entente* and included diplomatic cooperation in agenda items as diverse as vaccines, infrastructure, technology, supply chain cooperation, cybersecurity and the like (White House 2021). The Quad's more recent deliverables are touted as international public goods beneficial to the region (US Indo-Pacific Command 2022). Still, while third parties will mostly benefit from these provisions, much of these are aimed at zero-sum competition with China. For instance, the newly announced Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) initiative – ostensibly aimed at illegal fishing – will effectively track China's military and para-military assets at sea (FNN 2022). Along these very lines, the US government's military approach towards the rise of China has distinctively prioritised deterrence and slowly allowed allies, such as Japan, to embrace deterrence by denial and punishment (Simón 2021).

### The Indo-Pacific goes to Europe

The political heterogeneity of the Indo-Pacific, including the evolving perspective of its main proponent – the Japanese government – demonstrates the contextual political traits of a regional security re-imagination. The geographic distinction and variety of narratives embedded in the imported 'Indo-Pacific' visions are testimony to these political dynamics. For example, in June 2019 ASEAN countries adopted a more constructive and inclusive language, focusing on the centrality of ASEAN, and released an 'Outlook on the Indo-Pacific' (*Nihon Keizai Shinbun* 2019). First-hand testimonies suggest that

the Singaporean government had asked Tokyo to assuage its tones and that Thailand intervened to facilitate Beijing's approval of the language used in the Indo-Pacific vision of Southeast Asian countries (Interview 2019a), which suggests that the Chinese position on the *brand* of the Indo-Pacific has also shifted towards a more conciliatory approach. Only one year earlier, the foreign minister Wang Yi defined the Indo-Pacific as an idea for 'newspaper headlines' destined to 'fade like the sea foam in the Pacific or in the Indian Ocean' (*The Straits Times* 2018a). The escalation of US–China tensions, and Beijing's will to retain leeway in the region, including with its powerful neighbour, Japan, mitigated the Chinese government's adversity towards the Indo-Pacific in favour of a superficial attempt to harmonise it with the Belt and Road Initiative. Yet, Beijing would still view with suspicion a revamped Quad (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC 2020; Wuthnow 2021).

Wiegand, the aforementioned EU Managing Director for Asia and the Pacific, introduced the EU Council's conclusions on the 'EU Strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific' with an accent on the multifaceted nature of the term Indo-Pacific: 'a term to worry about, or one that makes us more interested or even involved in the region' (Wiegand 2021). While the terms used in the Council of the EU's conclusions are inclusive and open to China, the strategy aims to deepen relations with those countries that already possess Indo-Pacific approaches. Yet, it is no coincidence that the strategies of France, Germany, and the Netherlands are based on an open and inclusive vision of the region and avoid any explicit mention of the American version of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific. The US emphasis on decoupling, the omni-comprehensive strategic confrontation that includes asymmetric pressure on China (*The Alexander Hamilton Society* 2021) – a *modus operandi* that became increasingly apparent during Trump's last year at the White House – (Christensen 2020) is met with concern by European allies. Direct testimonies suggest that the German government was particularly suspicious about the concept of the Indo-Pacific, due to the strong anti-Chinese character that Washington gave it (Interview 2021c). Detecting a continuance during the Biden administration of the strategic competition with China, albeit with a softer tone and a desire to cooperate with allies, the EU Council conclusions emphasised the cooperation factor and European Commission officials have been waiting for Washington's new Indo-Pacific approach for potential coordination (Interview 2021d).

It is worth stressing that almost all EU member states have neither the capabilities to project, nor any vital strategic security interests in the macro-region. It is therefore unsurprising that the EU Council's framework – approved by the 27 ministers for foreign affairs of member states – and the Commission and High Representative's Joint Communication are not properly strategic papers. These texts may thus appear like a pile of themes and regions that lack specific definitions of the main geographical areas, the key goals, and the tools needed to achieve them.

A close reading of the strategic documents and first-hand interviews suggests that the European strategy aims to achieve a set of goals including the upholding of international free trade, the export of EU norms and regulations – as well as that of goods and services – sustainable development, countering global warming, and substantial contributions to security and defence, in some cases aimed at offering alternatives to China (Interview 2021c, 2021d, 2021e; Council EU 2021; European Commission 2021). The key point of the European action in the Indo-Pacific is the will to preserve a multilateral order, as

open as possible, while safeguarding, at the same time, EU values and interests. Yet, as the following sections will show, the implicit rationale that allows for increased intervention from Union member states is the economic potential of said security engagement. This is a novel understanding that points at the mercantile baseline of the EU's political and strategic embrace of the Indo-Pacific. This is distinct from purely economic considerations typical of the EU's traditional economic agenda. As will be shown below, security-political intervention is also aimed at serving trade and economic considerations. For this purpose, this paper concentrates its attention on the engagement of key EU member states, such as Italy, to make a broader argument about the Union.

## Multilateralism and the EU's political and security engagement in the Indo-Pacific

Specific to the Pacific side of the Indo-Pacific equation, the conclusions of the EU Council suggest an expansion of the European security engagement in the region. This aspect breaks away from the traditional EU approach to the Asia-Pacific region – focused on trade and tackling transnational challenges (both mentioned in the Strategy) as well as carrying the normative and civilian power flags, with emphasis on its relationship with China and the export of its soft power (Casarini 2009; Christiansen, Kirchner, and Wissenbach 2017; Christiansen, Kirchner, and Tan 2021). The contribution to Asia-Pacific traditional security consists in implementing the UN sanctions on North Korea for developing nuclear weapons, and more recently in operations supporting the freedom of navigation in the South China Sea (Casarini 2020, 78–92). Further to the improved European naval efforts, military cooperation with regional partners has been increased too, including collaboration in new fields such as that of cybersecurity. As will be demonstrated below, EU intervention in the region has turned to an approach that integrates security and political considerations with, and sometimes for, mercantile goals, a pragmatic approach that others have linked to the idea of fostering 'resilience' (Bargués and Morillas 2021).

The South China Sea is potentially one of the new areas for the new EU interest. It is a part of the Pacific Ocean, mostly consisting in international waters, home to a number of territorial and maritime disputes between coastal states and theatre of the acute strategic rivalry between the US and China. These tensions have been reignited by Chinese assertiveness, especially considering Chinese officers' statements that suggested the whole South China Sea was a 'core interest', a continental approach to maritime claims (Yoshihara and Holmes 2011). Despite the announcement, in 2011, of the American pivot to Asia, China has successfully managed to reclaim land in, and militarise, a number of disputed geographical features in the South China Sea. Direct testimonies from the US and Japanese policymakers confirm how the Obama administration was primarily focused on domestic politics, risk-averse in the international arena, and willing to engage with China as a partner and not as a competitor, especially during Obama's first term (Cohen 2018, 99–126; Dueck 2015; Goldberg 2016; Interview 2013; Wang 2016; Y.A. 2020).

Since 2014–2015, the United States bolstered its South China Sea deterrence and coercive diplomacy through the deployment of warships and submarines. The US Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs) saw American warships transiting – and stopping – within the 12 nautical miles line of the geographical elements claimed by Beijing.



Further to American actions, regional allies such as Australia and Japan also increased their military presence and the pace of their military exercises. The Chinese military and paramilitary incursions in the East China Sea and in the South China Sea and its assertive behaviour reportedly prompted Japan to hold an average of two military drills a week, with an increasingly far-reaching scope and together with a growing number of like-minded countries (*Nikkei Asia* 2021a). Renowned experts believed, until a few years ago, that a sustained and significant Japanese naval military engagement in the South China Sea was improbable, and even more so in the Indian Ocean (Midford 2015, 525–47). Similar considerations may thus apply also to EU naval engagement in the Indo-Pacific.

Beyond contributions under the EU flag, in light of the sustained naval engagement performed by maritime powers such as France, it would appear that certain EU member states are also stepping up their security intervention. Still, the direction of travel suggests that the Indian Ocean will be the primary theatre of said intervention. Notably, the Council of the EU document stresses that ‘member states acknowledge the importance of a meaningful European naval presence in the Indo-Pacific’ (Council EU 2021). At the same time, the document suggests to extend the geographic scope of CRIMARIO II –the EU’s maritime capacity building initiative centred on maritime domain awareness– to the Pacific while expanding the EU’s ‘area of operations of EUNAVFOR [operation] Atalanta’ (Council EU 2021). This implies a transition from the cooperation against transnational threats such as piracy, a mission off the Gulf of Aden which had reportedly run its course (Interview 2022a), to cooperation focused on a modicum of maritime deterrence through presence operations and, especially, maritime domain awareness. As will be stressed below, an emphasis on preserving the primacy of international law keeps feeding EU’s engagement (Pesjova 2016). However, it remains to be seen whether there is sufficient scope and appetite to connect the Indian Ocean with the Pacific in that regard.

For years, the EU’s naval presence in the Indo-Pacific has focused on areas off the coasts of Somalia, in the western reaches of the Indo-Pacific, through Atalanta, which aims to deter, prevent, and repress piracy and armed robbery at sea off the coast of Somalia. Atalanta is a significant naval diplomacy tool as it shares much of its area of operations with the Combined Maritime Forces, which is participated by Japan and South Korea. Furthermore, South Korea has been one of the non-EU countries contributing to the operation with a ship. The continued EU naval presence resulting from operation Atalanta also allows joint exercises with third-country navies (including from Indo-Pacific countries) operating in the region. Most recently, this has been the case in 2021 for Japan, India, and South Korea (EAS 2021a, 2021b, 2021c).

Unsurprisingly, however, recent announcements have made clear that the EU’s expanded engagement will be in the North-Western Indian Ocean, showing that this is now a well-established theatre for EU naval deployments and one which, through common security interests, can draw in more than just France (Council EU 2022). These presence operations will develop through voluntary contributions of member states, by also hosting military officers of European countries in warships operating in the area, thus conferring to said interventions a European identity (Odgaard 2019). The maritime presence in the macro-area extending to the North-Western Indian Ocean may well secure maritime and territorial interests of key EU member states (notably France) as

well as the Sea Lanes of Communication that are vital to energy and economic security – an aspect evidenced by the growing reliance on energy imports from Gulf states following the war in Ukraine. The Strait of Hormuz and Gulf of Oman are already witnessing these dynamics as testified by the US-led International Maritime Security Construct's Operation Sentinel, the European-led Maritime Awareness mission in the Strait of Hormuz (EMASoH), as well as South Korea and Japan's naval presence in the surroundings.

Thus, a very important factor to consider when analysing the EU's efforts to increase presence and influence in the Indo-Pacific in general are the national interests of individual Member States, and France in particular. Through its overseas territories in the Indian and Pacific Oceans, Paris oversees the second largest exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in the world (with 93 per cent of it located in the Indo-Pacific) and currently deploys around 7,000 military personnel in the region (Wacker 2021). Paris thus has a huge incentive in projecting a coordinated EU presence in these regions. 1.5 million French citizens reside in the France's Indian and Pacific Ocean territories. Indeed, the Indo-Pacific was even declared to be a priority for France's EU presidency in 2020, after becoming the first EU state to articulate a national strategy for the region, then followed by Germany and the Netherlands (GMF 2022). Paris' very tangible security interests translate into an approach that is much more focused on military presence than those of the Hague and Berlin.

From an Italian perspective, for instance, the Western reaches of the Indo-Pacific are a strategic continuum with the Mediterranean in that they surround the strategically vital chokepoint of the Bab-El-Mandeb strait, through which so much of the EU (and world) trade passes through. While East Asia has historically been (mostly) outside of Italy's traditional strategic horizon, however, the building of a Chinese military base in Djibouti – which has been active since 2017 and is capable of re-supplying PLA Navy ships operating in the region – may well contribute to extending China's naval reach (Ghiselli and Giuffrida 2020), and by consequence increase the hard security concerns of Italy and other Mediterranean states.

Regardless of whether countries have drafted Indo-Pacific strategies or are in the process of doing so, it is clear that the distillation of different European national approaches to the region will be a difficult task in the future. Especially considering the fact that only France is a 'resident power', meaning it can keep a constant naval presence there without unsettling public opinion, while justifying its presence there with territorial defence needs. For all other EU countries, a regular deployment of naval assets beyond the North-Western Indian Ocean might be too expensive an endeavour, not least in light of the need to strengthen Europe's Southern and Eastern flanks following Russia's aggression of Ukraine. This means that the Western Indian Ocean will continue to play a crucial role in drawing more EU naval assets into the Indo-Pacific macro area, especially with China's growing economic and political influence and military presence.

Bolstering a European maritime presence in the North-Western Indian Ocean constitutes a potential minimum common denominator also because of the need to diversify energy imports away from Russia. Specifically, Italy's interest in Liquefied National Gas imports from Qatar and Germany's need to diversify energy sources through Gulf states will make the region potentially more important. Energy security may also legitimize and link South Korea and Japan's maritime presence operations off the Gulf of Oman with the EU's.

The United States government would welcome a growing European security engagement in the region and the EU's approach marks a small yet significant turn in the European foreign policy in Asia and vis-à-vis China, but said change is less inspired by *Machtspolitik*, nor is it fully aligned with Washington. There are a number of reasons why the EU is interested in maintaining a naval presence in highly disputed waters. Firstly, economic incentives. Almost a third of global trade sails through the South China Sea, and the EU is therefore interested in safeguarding the sea routes that link Europe to the rich Asian markets. Secondly, the EU – an intergovernmental and supranational organisation mostly consisting of small and medium powers – is one of the strongest supporters and beneficiary of the so-called liberal international order. Its middle powers are highly dependent on the functioning of global governance dynamics and would otherwise be overshadowed by a titanic competition between the US and China, as evidenced by tensions across the Taiwan Strait and in the South China Sea. To that effect, the EU aspires to navigate the stormy waters of US–China strategic competition and its embrace of the Indo-Pacific narrative ought to be understood as a form of ‘hedging’ not as an appropriation of the US narrative (Hagström and Gustafsson 2021).

The European allies will find themselves increasingly often in the crossfire, as they will have to take sides on a number of matters ranging from technology, trade, and security, regarding China. Accordingly, there is a risk of seeing diplomatic relations between twenty-first century great powers solely through the prism of power politics instead of international law. The EU referred to the arbitration procedures employed in the 2016 case on the South China Sea issue in a timid attempt to avoid the advent of the use of force as a norm in international relations (Council EU 2016). In 2016, the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) – and advisory tribunal set-up within the United Nations Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) framework, which China subscribed to – unanimously condemned China's claims in the South China Sea (PCA 2016). Beijing strongly criticised The Hague's ruling defining it as ‘null’ and questioning the legitimacy of the international tribunal (Perlez 2016; The State Council's Information Office of the PRC 2016). China kept pursuing its territorial objectives through the militarisation of the artificial islands and has been exploiting the fishery resources in the area at the expense of other coastal states.

For these reasons, starting from 2014 the French and British governments deployed maritime forces in the South China Sea. The then French Minister of Defence Jean-Yves Le Drian gave a speech in June 2016, in which he defined the way for a ‘visible and regular’ European presence in the region (French Ministry of Defence 2016). These declarations were followed by French naval missions with a European character: in 2016 they were joined by Danish, Italian, and German officers, and in 2018 the French mission included an officer of the Asia-Oceania Working Party (COASI) of the EU Council. Lastly, in 2019, Paris employed the aircraft carrier *Charles De Gaulle* and held joint operations with the United Kingdom, Portugal, Denmark, Italy, Australia, Japan, India and the United States, among others (Casarini 2020, 78–92). France has also agreed to involve Quad maritime powers in its naval drills during the mission *Jeanne d'Arc*, among others.

Seeing a measly one or two European warships on a mission could suggest that deterrence effects are minimal or, as it has been argued, that such a maritime power projection is almost laughable (*The Diplomat* 2021). Yet, what is noteworthy is the will to uphold a multilateral order through a series of presence operations aimed at safeguarding

international customary law, in support of the principle of freedom of navigation, even in spite of China's different view on UNCLOS (Menegazzi 2015, 56–70). In fact, the growing European military presence in support of freedom of navigation will likely not replicate the afore-mentioned US FONOPs. The objective remains that of protecting UNCLOS, a convention that the US has not ratified, and not simply the broad and undefined goal of containing China's maritime power projection. After all, understandably, Chinese policymakers also want to protect their territory and maritime routes, and Chinese strategists are wary of US intelligence, reconnaissance, surveillance (IRS) and patrolling activities in the neighbouring waters; in fact, China's MDA and IRS capabilities are arguably its weakest point relative to the US and its regional allies, including in the East Asian theatre. The inauguration of an IPMDA will further bolster the US and its allies' MDA capabilities vis-à-vis China. Furthermore, the People's Liberation Army's Navy (PLAN) fears the possibility of strategic encirclement – by hand of the US and some of its regional allies – within the so-called 'first island chain' that separates China from the open seas of the Pacific Ocean. In other words, and to reiterate, the strategic confrontation between the United States and China in the South China Sea is defined by zero-sum geopolitical elements, while the EU aims to strengthen a rules-based system that considers all the parties' interests.

According to some, the European maritime engagement is actually based on the awareness – particularly deep-rooted in Germany and inherited from the Merkel chancellorship – that geopolitical tensions could have a counterproductive effect and exacerbate Chinese assertiveness instead of containing it, thus leading to self-fulfilling prophecies (Interview 2020a; 2021d; Kundnani and Tsuruoka 2021). It must be noted that the Chinese government does not refrain from criticising European operations and maritime presence in the South China Sea. As the French Chief of the Defence Staff (CEMA) disclosed during an interview, Chinese maritime, air, and paramilitary forces are increasingly often deployed to obstruct European warships and vehicles too (*Le Monde* 2021). At the same time, Beijing is undoubtedly more critical of Washington-led activities (Wong 2021).

Three European states in particular have intensified their activities in the South China Sea, thus energising the EU's security engagement there. As previously mentioned, France has been the most active country. If considering the nature and intensity of its operations, the French approach seems to be closer to that of conventional deterrence, somewhat akin to the US and, to an increasing extent, to that of Japan (Hughes 2021), although its territorial and maritime interests are in the outskirts of the so-called Indo-Pacific. In 2021, France ventured into the South China Sea with a nuclear attack submarine (*France 24* 2021). At the same time, two French warships were employed in the above-mentioned *Jeanne d'Arc* mission, with the purpose of training and deploying operational capabilities in the South China Sea, all the way to Japan (*Naval News* 2021a). In this context, the French military conducted urban warfare and military drills together with Japan's Self-Defense Forces and the United States (Yamaguchi 2021). This military exercise focused on a scenario that could take place in Taiwan. In connection to that, French warships have more often transited through the international waters across the Taiwan Strait in recent years, trailing the increased tempo of Chinese assertiveness there since 2016 and a more proactive US response as well (Insisa 2021).

While not a member of the European Union since January 2021, the United Kingdom has grown a renewed interest in the Indo-Pacific, thus informing and potentially

complementing the EU's engagement there as well. This is traceable from the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy published in March 2021 (Cabinet Office 2021). Yet, Boris Johnson's desire to prioritising trade with large Asian economies suggests that British presence operations have a dual purpose of appearing close to the United States while at the same time strengthening its geo-economic position in the area. For example, London wishes to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) through the political backing of its main members, namely Japan and Australia (Interview 2020b). More recently, London presented a new aircraft carrier for an operational deployment of 28 weeks from the Mediterranean to the East China Sea, passing through the South China Sea (*Nikkei Asia* 2021b). The HMS *Queen Elizabeth* – carrying 18 F-35 multirole combat aircrafts equipped with the most advanced sensor suite of any fighter – was accompanied by two destroyers, two frigates and two support vessels. The new British lead ship took part in joint drills with partners and allies in the Indo-Pacific. A Dutch warship was also part of the operational deployment, following the Netherlands' embrace of the Indo-Pacific concept in October 2020.

Lastly, Germany also deployed the Brandenburg-class *Bayern* frigate to the Indo-Pacific from August 2021 to February 2022 (Herzinger 2022). It sailed through the region and made a port call in Tokyo having participated in joint drills with the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense forces. Yet, during its first deployment in the area, the *Bayern* carefully avoided provoking China by focusing its core activities on monitoring compliance with UN sanctions against the DPRK via US-led maritime engagement in the East China Sea. Still, no German warship had sailed through the South China Sea for 20 years and China eventually denied a port call in Shanghai to the (oldish) Teutonic frigate, notwithstanding Berlin's balancing act. Finally, the dispatch of Luftwaffe aircraft in the Indo-Pacific starting in August 2022, and their participation in military exercises with like-minded partners, suggests momentum behind Germany's intervention in the region, the war in Ukraine notwithstanding (Bundeswehr 2022). At the same time, preliminary evidence suggests that Berlin will keep emphasizing the multilateral spirit of its Indo-Pacific intervention while playing out its balancing act vis-à-vis Beijing (Welt 2022).

### The economic rationale behind the EU's engagement in the Indo-Pacific

Despite the cautious and gradual expansion of the European strategic horizons through its contribution to regional security, trade and investments remain the focal points of the EU external action and intervention in the region. China still has a strongly state-run economy aimed at achieving national security and the creation of 'national champions'. In this context are placed the illegal practices of intellectual property theft (an endemic issue even among Chinese companies) and the forced transfer of technology and know-how through a protectionist normative system, or even through state-sanctioned cyber-attacks. As a result, the EU and its member states are pushing for industrial policies and regulations favouring technological sovereignty, as well as defensive mechanisms such as the screening of foreign investments and new anti-dumping measures (Tocci 2021). These actions have gone hand-in-hand with the pursuit of trade and investment agreements with China, such as the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment, to improve market access and level the playing field. It is notable that the Next Generation EU recovery fund directs economic resources towards the digital sector and the energy

transition. A race for the new technologies that are likely to have a critical impact on security and economic competitiveness in the twenty-first century is also taking place, even among allies.

The EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific is very much preoccupied with economic engagement there, in light of the region's economic vitality. This aspect should always be taken into account also to understand the growing politico-security engagement. The EU aims to sign and update free trade and investment agreements with Indo-Pacific countries, and to promote development aid and European investments in a region populated by lively economies, even through a partnership between private companies and public actors. These initiatives perfectly fit the aforementioned technological and commercial competition, and China represents the unmentioned target in this strategy. In fact, the document recognises the growing tensions in commercial trade and supply chains, as well as in technology sectors and therefore promotes a rules-based international order there as well, based on equity and an open and fair system for trade and investment, addressing resilience, climate change and supporting connectivity with the EU (Council EU 2021).

To be sure, the EU has invested its energies in signing bilateral Free Trade Agreements for a very long time and the EU already has FTAs with South Korea and Japan, as well as Vietnam and Singapore, while negotiations with Australia and New Zealand are ongoing. At the same time, aiming to diversify its regional economic partnerships – and taking into account political and strategic dynamics – the EU and its member states are particularly interested in boosting relations with two actors in particular: Southeast Asian economies – represented by ASEAN – and India (Interviews 2020c). For example, in December 2020 the EU and ASEAN transformed their relations into a more important strategic partnership. Only a few months earlier, Italy and France became ASEAN Development Partners following the German lead (Reumann and Murray 2021). Similarly, in May 2021 relations between the EU and India were expanded as a result of a summit held under the Portuguese presidency of the EU Council (Malhotra 2021). Furthermore, it is also interesting to observe the United Kingdom's desire to strengthen relations with the very same Indo-Pacific actors. Only a few days prior to the EU-India summit, the British and Indian Prime Ministers, Boris Johnson and Narendra Modi, agreed on a 'Road Map 2030' for bilateral relations, while the UK and ASEAN became dialogue partners in January 2021 (Nouwens and Mohan 2021).

Further to the cooperation aimed at tackling transnational challenges such as fighting climate change and the pandemic, the EU aims to deepen so-called connectivity with the Indo-Pacific. Again, just like the trade and investment agenda suggests, there are strong mercantile incentives behind the EU's push. According to an Asian Development Bank study, the Asia Pacific economies are in need for investments of roughly 1.7 trillion US dollars per year in order to ensure a sustainable development until 2030 (Asian Development Bank 2017). Accordingly, the main Asian financial powers pushed for a more expansionary development aid policy during the last decade. Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative of 2013 was followed by the Japanese Partnership for Quality Infrastructure in 2015, the New Southbound Policy of Taiwan in 2018, and Seoul's New Southern Policy in 2020. The more advanced economies are looking to direct large sums towards developing countries for clear economic purposes and, possibly, to foster a 'techno-nationalist' identity (Zappa 2020). Through coordination with the policy banks, their own development agencies,

and a more general partnership between the public and private spheres – in light of smaller public budgets— these countries export their overproduction, cultivate new markets, seek higher returns, diversify risks, and aspire to gain control of sizeable market shares for their national champions. This approach, while abiding to OECD DAC standards, resembles China's.

In fact, the EU and its member states are the main global source of public development and connectivity aid, with 410 billion US dollars donated between 2013 and 2018, as opposed to the 34 billion US dollars financed by China over the same period (Borrell 2021a). The High Representative and the Commission defined the elements for a European strategy in a joint communiqué at the end of 2018 (European Commission 2018). The former President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker launched, together with Abe, the EU-Japan Partnership on Sustainable Connectivity and Quality Infrastructure with the declared goal of promoting joint initiatives on connectivity and this was replicated with India more recently (European Commission 2019). Connectivity is a vague buzzword, the definition of which ranges widely: from strategic investment in infrastructure for geopolitical and economic purposes to initiatives aimed at deepened human-to-human interaction, from extra-EU to intra-EU connectivity. This article follows the international strategic declination of connectivity. While EU member states operate in a less mercantilist fashion compared to Asian countries – and China in particular – these governments want to promote the development of emerging economies in the Indo-Pacific by favouring their own industrial and commercial excellencies. For example, the European interest in digital connectivity – mentioned in the EU strategy on the Indo-Pacific – aims to cultivate the potential of the Southeast Asian digital markets, characterised by the presence of billions of internet users and their propensity to use e-commerce and fintech services, favouring in particular Dutch tech players (Dekker, Nachiappan, and Okano-Heijmans 2021). Similarly, the assistance for a sustainable development and a green transition seeks to favour European production excellencies; this aspect is particularly relevant given first-mover advantages at the dusk of a major technological revolution.

Together with the afore-mentioned free trade agreements, that the EU prefers to negotiate bilaterally to leverage its market size, the economic diplomacy of connectivity would also pave the way to exporting European normative standards, with significant impact on trade and politics (Interview 2021e; Bradford 2020). Free trade agreements and connectivity partnerships would allow the EU to work together with advanced economies, such as Japan and South Korea, on themes such as the fight against global warming, data governance, and the creation of international industrial norms and standards in different sectors such as the automotive, the pharmaceutical and the telecommunication ones. The idea is to take these standards to a global level to the benefit of European players. In the author's view, the EU too is increasingly resorting to a 'Europe First' protectionist and unilateralist agenda (European Commission 2022), so much so that effective coordination with extra-EU public actors in the connectivity agenda is lagging behind.

Pledges of cooperation or coordination at the bilateral and minilateral level on connectivity have become more common as a result of the Chinese challenge. At the 2021 G7 summit, the EU and its more advanced economies pledged support to Biden's initiative to finance infrastructure, and especially green infrastructure, in third countries. At the same time, the EU's ambition is that of taking advantage of the incipient US-China

bipolarism by offering an alternative and reliable partnership to ASEAN countries and India by leveraging its ‘third way’ stance. This is evident in the emphasis on the inclusivity and multilateral aspects of the EU’s strategy for cooperation, traits that are both emphasised behind the overall EU engagement and key security initiatives, such as the aforementioned CRIMARIO II. This maritime domain awareness and capacity building initiative has been pitted against the nascent IPMDA, with its more pronounced military emphasis and, potentially, intrusive approach and interface to information access (Interviews 2022c). In fact, the EU and its member states’ security specific capacity building initiatives tend to privilege the transfer of soft skills; thus, empowering maritime law enforcement agencies, as well as police forces in the fight against transnational and criminal activities (e.g. Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Italy 2022). Thus, in dealing with India and ASEAN, the EU also accounts for their desire to ensure a certain degree of autonomous action independently from China and the US, a desire very much resembling the European quest for strategic autonomy (Borrell 2021b). As a side note, Japan’s deepening military involvement in Southeast Asia – both of the soft and hard kind – in close cooperation and coordination with the United States (Bradford 2022) may soothe some governments, such as Vietnam’s, but potentially make other ASEAN countries wary of Tokyo’s China balancing motives, thus opening space for EU engagement. The South Korean government too has tried to occupy this space, with some cajoling from the US *and* -mercantile considerations too, by quietly inaugurating military and constabulary capacity building in Vietnam, the Philippines and Indonesia already under the Moon administration (Naval News 2021b). In sum, the EU seeks to maintain a multilateral system, as open as possible and in coordination with other middle powers, also in order to create for itself a vital room for security, political *and* commercial manoeuvre vis-à-vis Sino-American strategic competition. The emphasis on multilateralism goes hand-in-hand with mercantile considerations.

Further proof of the EU’s willingness to harmonise (geo)political and commercial projection is embodied in the adoption of a soft type of contribution to regional security. The EU has partly funded the French and German development agencies to promote and prolong a four-year project ‘Enhancing Security Cooperation in and with Asia’ (ESIWA), which is being appropriated as a concrete deliverable of the EU’s Indo-Pacific strategy for cooperation (Interview 2022b). The project, which is in its infancy, fits in the economic and security declinations of the European engagement in the Indo-Pacific, with India, Indonesia, Vietnam, Singapore, Japan and South Korea as potential regional partners/targets. Concretely, it aims at contributing to the capability of different Southeast Asian countries and of India through new instruments for Maritime Situational Awareness, and to the international law of the sea, to tackling piracy, policing, counter-terrorism and to cyber security through development aid ultimately benefitting European companies (GIZ 2020). Still, Expertise France and Germany’s GIZ – the two states’ development agencies – are in charge of the implementation of ESIWA with a €15 million budget. Key EU member states will uphold the Union flag through a so-called ‘Team Europe’ approach.

EU member states such as Italy are also moving in the very same direction underlined by this article, at the intersection of politico-security engagement and mercantile commercial considerations. Future initiatives under consideration include further capacity building activities – including the training of military personnel and, especially, the



coast guard and police forces – and concomitant connectivity initiatives focused on its national excellencies. Rome may seemingly walk down this path, also in coordination with friendly countries such as Japan or India (Embassy of Italy – Tokyo 2021). Moreover, in consideration of the aforementioned competitive approaches and economic dynamism in the Indo-Pacific, demand for armaments is in full-on growth (International Institute for Strategic Studies 2021, 218–313). As international weapons procurement and military cooperation traditionally trail politico-diplomatic considerations – and especially so nowadays, at a time of mounting disruption in international politics – the European engagement in upholding maritime and cyber security in Southeast Asia should also favour its exports. For example, the potential sale of Fincantieri frigates to Indonesia, a sale that has not been finalised as of writing, constitutes a sign of a growing Italian effort in contributing to regional security (Milano Finanza 2021). A recent document published by Italy’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (2022) eloquently called *The Italian Contribution to the EU Strategy for the Indo-Pacific* – a document that was overshadowed by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine – spells out the rationale behind Italy’s security engagement in the region along the very lines posited by this article: ‘the dialogue in the field of defence with countries including Vietnam, Malaysia and Indonesia, to strengthen bilateral cooperation and create new opportunities for the Italian economic system’. As suggested above, however, mercantile dynamics are endemic across the globe and within the Union: much of these competitive dynamics may hinder effective jointness in the Union’s engagement in the Indo-Pacific, not to mention coordination of substance with ‘like-minded partners’.

## Conclusions

The documents supporting commitments in the Indo-Pacific approved by the EU Council and European Commission are politically aligned to the March 2019 EU–China Strategy, which openly considered economic competition and systemic rivalry between Brussels and Beijing (along with a role as a cooperation partner in tackling transnational challenges). The pandemic, China’s wolf-warrior diplomacy and coercive posture towards Lithuania –not to mention Beijing’s ‘sitting on the fences’ with regard to Russia’s War in Ukraine– reinforced a tendency in favour of systemic rivalry. Yet, the logic of cooperation and inclusivity regarding China is still part of the European vision, also in its security engagement in the Indo-Pacific.

There are however tensions, from which questions arise. Will European priorities lie in a cooperation with countries with an Indo-Pacific strategy, or in a ‘third way’, evading the potential ruptures of Sino-American strategic competition? And will Europeans accordingly only consider multilateralism, as open as possible, even if its quality will suffer, or will it increasingly engage with popular mini-lateral cooperation possibilities, such as the Quad, or the so-called D10? What role can the Union realistically play in a crisis scenario in the region, for instance across the Taiwan Strait, one of the major flashpoints for regional conflict?

More importantly, what are the prospects for a sustained European engagement on the security and commercial fronts in the Indo-Pacific? The sustainability of maritime engagement is debated, in light of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and its aftermath, the political divisions within the EU, and the US military repositioning in the Indo-Pacific (Meijer

and Brooks 2021, 7–43). France itself will likely prioritise security in the areas where its territories and citizens are located, namely in the Indian Ocean and in the Southern waters of the Pacific, rather than in the East and South China Seas. More importantly, the Mediterranean, Middle East, and Eastern Europe remain the main strategic priorities for Europe, even more so as of writing.

On the economic side it is actually possible to rely on the strategy as Europe enjoys financial, normative, and industrial leverage. An area with plenty of room for growth for the EU is that of developing connectivity between Asia and Europe (Barkin 2020; Interviews 2020d). In fact, big industrial champions will want to move to gain first mover advantage in a macro-region (still) witnessing major economic dynamism and state actors would leverage their security engagement also for that purpose. In light of these considerations, European diplomats suggest that it is difficult indeed to coordinate between different donors and recipient countries because interests do not necessarily align and there is also a strong degree of duplication among ‘like-minded partners’ (Interviews 2019a and 2020e). Perhaps it is better to focus on ongoing capacity building of soft skills because of these competitive dynamics? Which specific capacity building measures are promising for coordination among like-minded partners across the so-called Indo-Pacific? Moreover, China remains a vibrant and growing economy, and despite its unfair economic practices, its market remains crucial for European exports, first and foremost Germany.

As evidenced throughout this article, the composite political nature of the term ‘Indo-Pacific’ must be stressed. The EU is adopting its own unique Indo-Pacific strategy, destined to find different declinations in all of its member states. To be sure, common ground among member states can be found in the maintenance of a multilateral order based on international public goods, such as free trade, and freedom of navigation and overflight. The EU also needs a certain degree of political realism to promote plurilateral fora – with different symmetries and scopes, including those specific to new technologies, maritime security and foreign trade – in order to counter the unilateral pressures from great powers that could contribute to a faster unravelling of the so-called liberal international order. Still, this article has suggested that aside from upholding said order to avoid a world dominated by power political relations alone, the nature of the EU and member states’ engagement in the region presents mercantile rationales that go hand-in-hand with other dynamics.

These mercantile dynamics may however work against the EU’s stated multilateral and liberal agenda. The EU’s promotion of standards and bilateral FTAs is not readily associated with a mercantilist approach (i.e. a markedly protectionist political economy aimed at mercantile goals). In fact, it may well aim at a ‘level-playing field’ and advance an open world economy. However, the growing allure of state-led *dirigisme* (if not protectionism) over free market-oriented models – a siren call hailing from the Global Financial Crisis, the fallout of COVID-19 and current geopolitical disruptions – is also felt by policymakers in Brussels. This is especially true following Brexit and the growing political weight of traditional (economic) interventionist states – such as France, Italy and Germany – within the EU. This article suggests that there is a tension at play there as well: between the EU’s willingness to bear the flag of economic liberalism and the Union and its member states’ growing desire to advance mercantile goals aimed at nurturing, fostering, promoting and possibly protecting their industrial champions. More active state and EU

interventions, both at home and abroad, may well portend a more protectionist and mercantilist turn, rather than a mercantile one, thus a more unilateralist EU and a more disjointed European foreign and security policy.

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## Interviews

Interview 2013. High-ranking officer from the Department of State. July. Tokyo.

Interview 2019a. Senior academic and advisor based in South-East Asia. November. Online.

Interview 2019b. European diplomat. Tokyo December.

Interview 2020a. European diplomat, Washington DC, February.

Interview 2020b. British diplomat. Tokyo. January.

Interviews 2020c. European diplomats posted in Brussels. August.

Interviews 2020d. EU and Member States' diplomats. Tokyo. December.

Interview 2020e. European diplomats. Tokyo. January.

Interview 2021a. Japanese academic and foreign policy advisor, online, June.

Interview 2021b. Former mid-ranking Japanese national security officer. February.

Interview 2021c. European diplomat. online. March.

Interview 2021d. European Commission mid-ranking officer. online. October.

Interview 2021e. European Commission official. online. July.

Interview 2021f. European diplomat. online. March.

Interview 2022a. European Commission policy advisor. online. January.

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