

Opinion – Europe’s Need for an Indo-Pacific Strategy

Written by Julian McBride

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JULIAN MCBRIDE, APR 12 2025

The Indo-Pacific region is emerging as a center-point of trade, innovation, and several brewing conflicts that could intertwine the global community. Various countries in the European continent currently have economic, diplomatic, and military cooperation and trade agreements in the region that will affect them amidst American indecisiveness and rising influence by geopolitical rivals in the Indo-Pacific. Europe, which needs to prepare for autonomous contingencies amidst a rift with the U.S. government, will need a concrete strategy in the Indo-Pacific region. Preparations to enhance partnerships and grow alliances in the defense, trade, and technological center will need to be a priority for European nations.

Several major conflicts are brewing in the Indo-Pacific that will affect Europe. One is China’s military preparations for a potential invasion or naval blockade of Taiwan. Taipei’s semiconductors and geography make the country critical to the First Island Chain strategy and trade with Europe, which hinders Chinese naval (PLAN) operations. Furthermore, PLAN aggression in the South China Sea is creating an existential crisis for Vietnam and the Philippines, which are major traders with Europe. Any armed naval engagement in the South China Sea would drastically affect global trade and embroil much of Southeast Asia and the United States, which holds a mutual defense pact with the Philippines and a strategic partnership with Vietnam.

On the Korean Peninsula, North Korea, under the Kim regime, is becoming more hostile than ever. Not only did peace talks with South Korea end thanks to the Kim regime, but the North also sent several thousand troops (KPA) to Kursk to gain combat experience for future wars. Russia’s and North Korea’s mutual defense clause threatens not only South Korea but also Europe. Two growingly unstable countries with thousands of nuclear weapons and millions of troops between them threaten the current global order. Simultaneously, political instability in South Korea, a major exporter to Europe, threatens Seoul, which Pyongyang could take advantage of. If implemented, a contingency of strategic ambiguity could deter any North Korean or Russian aggression plans.

European countries with growing bilateral ties in the Indo-Pacific project influence and maintain developmental and technological partnerships and cooperation in key security sectors. The United Kingdom is one such country with major trade and enhancements in growing defense. The United Kingdom is a part of the AUKUS trilateral alliance alongside the United States and Australia, in which the latter will receive upgraded nuclear submarines (SSNs) to phase out the older Collins-class subs. Furthermore, London is moving closer to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and participating in major investments and naval calls in Singapore. Britain’s case for greater cooperation and operations in the Indo-Pacific is based on fears that the more Beijing asserts authority over major trading partners in the region, the more it could negatively affect the UK economically and further weaken London’s economic standing and overall security in Asia. As a maritime trading nation historically, any interruption and interdiction by China’s strong-arming policies in the region could become existential to the UK’s economy in the future.

After decades of military stagnation, Germany is preparing to reinvigorate its military and project itself in the Indo-Pacific to enhance security and economic cooperation between the European Union and Asia. Berlin’s growing rapprochement in the region isn’t just for security but also a balancing act to maintain full economic and diplomatic cooperation between China and other countries to keep tensions low. Germany’s navy engaged in its first Indo-Pacific deployment in 2021 to enhance partnerships with Australia, Japan, South Korea, Guam, Pakistan, India,

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Vietnam, Sri Lanka, and Singapore while keeping cordial relations with China by staying alongside maritime routes that Beijing wouldn't see as provocative.

France has the biggest influence among European countries in the Indo-Pacific, and French naval capabilities will be critical to maintaining security and stability. With one of the world's largest Economic Exclusive Zones (EEZ), France's territorial rights extend into Asia, which allows for prominent force projection by the French navy. Before AUKUS was solidified, France was the original go-to for Australian submarine modernization, which the latter could reconsider if Pillar II didn't yield satisfactory results in time. Furthermore, France holds close relations with South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan and recently upgraded ties with Vietnam for closer security and cooperation.

In 2024, France expanded patrols in the South China Sea. In early 2025, a French carrier strike group participated in patrols and operations alongside the U.S. Seventh Fleet and Japan in the Philippine Sea. France also faces challenges with hybrid warfare by Azerbaijan over New Caledonia, and a potential foreign-backed independence movement could give adversaries like China and Russia further influence, which Paris looks to interdict.

In La Réunion, New Caledonia, and French Polynesia, France maintains three key bases that offer support such as logistics, signal, and naval sustainment, which not only helps Paris but can supplement partners in the Indo-Pacific if any armed conflict were to break out. Furthermore, France is a major country that monitors black-market smuggling by North Korea, interdicting them as part of the American-led initiative to uphold the United Nations sanctions.

Major arms exports, such as 40 patrol vessels to the Philippines and 42 Rafale premier fighter jets to Indonesia, enhance arms exports amidst the long queues for American arms, which are backlogged. If the American nuclear submarines do not come in time for Australia, Canberra could also have a contingency for French-made subs. However, confidence and an iron-clad contract would need to be solidified.

Continued deployments of the German navy can give the country more experience amidst remilitarization but also help reassure trading partners that Berlin will help mediate and potentially militarily intervene if adversaries threaten joint trading routes. Furthermore, the joint UK-US Diego Garcia base is critical in maintaining a major logistical supply in the region. With several B2 bombers operating around the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea, the base's strategic importance is tantamount to any Indo-Pacific and Middle East crisis.

Europe's strategy in the Indo-Pacific can and should be defined as a strategically ambiguous deterrent. While France and Britain have independent nuclear programs, regional basing access, and fleets capable of deterring, Germany and other prominent diplomatic soft power European nations can enact diplomacy and intertwine stability for both continents. Germany, Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark have a global presence in diplomacy, international development, and economics, which, if implemented, can give Europe an even more concrete diplomatic presence in the Indo-Pacific, especially as American soft power wanes amidst cuts in USAID and growing isolationist policies. Furthermore, European members of NATO should continue developing defense imports with South Korea, exports with Japan, and overall military liaison offices with both.

Europe should take full control of its security and continue growing its presence in the Indo-Pacific to bridge sustainable and concrete partnerships. If this occurs, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and other growing players on the continent will have a significant role in diplomatic, technological, economic, and security implications to counteract adversaries and rivals strategically.

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