

The European Union Announced Indo-Pacific Strategy

Jyh-Shyang Sheu
Assistant Research Fellow

Division of Chinese Politics, Military and Warfighting Concepts

1. News Highlights

The momentous “EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific” (hereinafter referred to as the “the Communication”) was officially unveiled on September 16, 2021, following the adoption of the “EU Council conclusions on EU Strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific” (hereinafter referred to as the “the Resolution”) by the EU Council of Ministers and released by the European Commission and European External Action Service on April 19, 2021. In the Communication, the EU continues to follow the previous documents to emphasize the importance of Indo-Pacific at all levels, stressing that the EU will strengthen its relations with its partners

and deepen cooperation with organizations in the region; on security issues, the EU will strengthen the naval presence and stabilize traffic lines. At the same time, the EU will also work with China on related issues to find solutions to common challenges and to defend values that are fundamentally at odds with China’s (e.g., human rights)¹.

It is worth noting that just earlier, on September 15, 2021, the US, UK, and Australia announced the formation of AUKUS, a military security partnership, but their relations with France have deteriorated due to the consequent changes in the Australian submarine program. However, it’s believed that the two sides will not part ways. In addition, the EU

1. “Joint Communication on the Indo-Pacific,” *European External Action Service*, September 16, 2021, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/104126/Joint%20communication%20on%20the%20Indo-Pacific.

may further strengthen its relationship with India in order to maintain its role in the Indo-Pacific region.

2. Security Implications

2-1. Documents reflect EU's attempt to engage in Indo-Pacific governance

In the Communication, the EU continued the Resolution previously adopted in April 2021 to emphasize the critical importance of the Indo-Pacific region to the world and the EU in terms of trade, environment, geopolitical stability, democracy and human rights. In the document, the EU also stresses the importance of the rule-based international order to help Indo-Pacific countries to address the current challenges and total governance through cooperation in seven areas: climate change, infrastructure, maritime governance, health, economic and trade, security and information through the principles of democracy, rule of law, human rights and international law. At the same time, the EU is also

escalating its engagement in the Indo-Pacific region to maintain a free and open Indo-Pacific region and build a strong, lasting partnership.²

In terms of security issues, the EU is equally committed to promoting openness and building a “rule-based” regional security structure, despite its relative lack of military intervention capacity in the far-flung Indo-Pacific region. It plans to strengthen the naval presence of EU countries in the Indo-Pacific through the Coordinated Maritime Presences concept implemented in the Gulf of Guinea for its anti-pirate operations for further reviews on the opportunities to establish a “maritime area of interest” and to support Indo-Pacific partners in building their capacity to ensure maritime security and respond to cybercrime. In general, military security and defense are of a lower priority than the overall security issues in the Communication, instead, the EU will focus on force presence, building maritime capabilities and taking advantage of regional mechanisms such

2. “EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific: Factsheets,” *European External Action Service*, September 16, 2021, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/96740/eu-strategy-cooperation-indo-pacific_en.

as the ASEAN, East Asia Summit and the Indian Ocean Naval Forum to expand partnerships and address issues such as cyber security, counterterrorism, weapons proliferation as well as information operations and intervention.

The EU's strategy for the Indo-Pacific region incorporates the objectives of the previous Indo-Pacific strategies of France, Germany and the Netherlands. But compared to the French strategy that focuses more on regional security issues, the EU document is more similar in content to Germany's "Leitlinien zum Indo-Pazifik" (Indo-Pacific Approach), which discusses fewer security topics but mentions a number of possible challenges and has a wider scope on governance. By emphasizing the key position of ASEAN, the EU still sees regional organizations as an important means for participation in the related affairs and considers the Indian Ocean as the key gateway to the EU's entry into the area as well as a strong network of regional partnerships. It means that the EU's involvement in the Indo-Pacific region does not attempt to establish a new order or to take the lead in solving global and regional issues and challenges, but rather plays the role of a

facilitator to help promote comprehensive regional governance. In other words, the EU is not taking a hardline stance on the Indo-Pacific strategy, but rather promoting its goals mainly through dialogue and cooperation.

2-2. From position of safeguarding common values, maintain interaction with China

In contrast to the Resolution, the Communication from the EU further criticizes China's actions, albeit not directly. For instance, China's actions are specifically mentioned in the discussion of geopolitical competition in the Indo-Pacific region in the context of the massive military build-up in the region; and it's also emphasized that the displays of force and tensions in the Indo-Pacific hot spots, such as the South China Sea, East China Sea and Taiwan Strait, could have an impact on Europe's security and prosperity. In addition, the increasing number of "hybrid threats", including cybersecurity, all allude to China. However, on issues such as democracy and human rights, only "threats from authoritarian regimes" are related without directly naming specific countries.

At the level of regional partnership, the EU will seek to engage with China on many fronts in order to find solutions to common challenges and to cooperate on areas of common interest. As described in the Communication, there should be room for further cooperation on global issues such as free trade, climate change, ocean governance and health. However, the EU also underscores that it will work with partners who share common values to counter principles where it fundamentally disagrees with China, such as democracy and human rights.

It is worth noting that the EU will also encourage China to play its own role in a “peaceful and prosperous” Indo-Pacific region. In consideration of the EU’s insistence on a rule-based international order, the importance of regional stability and free trade, and the idea of further strengthening its future naval presence in the Indo-Pacific region, and even establishing a zone of interests, this can be seen as a response to China’s actions in the Indo-Pacific region in recent years with an emphasis on stability of the regional situation and common prosperity.

2-3. Increasing unofficial interaction

with Taiwan

Earlier in the Resolution, Taiwan was not explicitly mentioned; however, the Communication not only mentioned Taiwan in the section discussing how Taiwan Strait tensions would affect Europe but also in the maritime governance section discussing cooperation on preventing illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU). More importantly, the EU will seek to build deeper relationships with partners that it does not have investment and trade agreements, such as Taiwan. The EU plans to work with Japan, South Korea and Taiwan on the semiconductor supply chain to address strategic dependencies; and Taiwan is also referenced on data protection issues.

It can be seen that Taiwan is still mainly a part of trade and semiconductor supply chain considerations to the EU; however, as the Taiwan Strait is one of the Indo-Pacific hotspots, it’s crucial for the EU to pay attention to the security and stability of the supply chain, trade and the rule-based international order. However, since the EU’s Indo-Pacific strategy is mainly driven by communication and cooperation for achieving goals and

solving problems in common, rather than overly challenging the status quo, the Taiwan-related issues mentioned here are mainly about the economic and trade field as well as supply chain. Therefore, the EU is expected to maintain an unofficial relationship with Taiwan and to explore further on this basis.

In fact, Josep Borrell, EU's High Representative of Foreign Affairs, expressed in a dialogue with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on September 28, 2021, that the EU is interested in developing a cooperative relationship, and also shares similar ideas, with Taiwan, but would not recognize Taiwan as a country.³

Finally, “shared values” is a core element repeatedly mentioned in the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy document, as well as in the formulation of the regional strategies of France, Germany and the Netherlands. With similar philosophies, shared values of democracy and human rights, Taiwan has an important advantage in promoting further cooperation with

European countries and even the EU in addition to substantial economic and industrial interests.

3. Trend Observation

3-1. Germany, France and the Netherlands should lead European countries to participate in Indo-Pacific affairs

Looking back at the recent involvement of European countries in the Indo-Pacific region, in addition to the two important Indo-Pacific strategy reports released by the EU this year, France, Germany and the Netherlands have each released their own documents as well, so it can be said that European countries are indeed increasingly concerned about the region. However, compared to the aforementioned three countries, the other European nations are still less interested in participating in the Indo-Pacific affairs due to lack of economic interests or direct security incentives. Therefore, if the EU wishes to further promote or strengthen

3. “China: High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell holds the 11th EU-China Strategic Dialogue with State Councillor/Foreign Minister Wang Yi,” *European External Action Service*, September 28, 2021, https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/togo/104789/china-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-holds-11th-eu-china-strategic-dialogue_en.

its Indo-Pacific role under the foreign and security policy framework, Germany, France and the Netherlands need to step forward to coordinate and encourage other European countries to take similar positions.

In terms of military and security, the EU policies are relatively less integrated compared to the other areas such as economics, so it's crucial for these active countries to take the lead and coordinate the others to adopt common positions and actions.

In fact, looking at the actions of European countries in sending naval vessels to the Indo-Pacific in 2021, we can see that France, the Netherlands and Germany have each sent their own Indo-Pacific expeditions instead of the “joint actions” often emphasized by the EU and its member states: France launched its annual expeditionary training “Mission Jeanne d'Arc 2021”, led by the Classe Mistral amphibious assault ship FS Tonnerre (L9014) to the region on February 18, 2021, and the Netherlands

sent the De Zeven Provinciën klasse cruiser HNLMS Evertsen (F805) to join the 2021 British Navy battle group led by HMS Queen Elizabeth (R08) in the same region, while Germany dispatched FGS Bayern (F217) to the Indo-Pacific on August 2, 2021. In terms of security engagement (e.g., maintaining a naval presence in the Indo-Pacific region), the EU countries with less military power may need further integration for better effectiveness of their operations.

3-2. India and ASEAN to become EU's key strategic partners in Indo-Pacific

As mentioned earlier, the EU has attached importance to the role played by regional organizations in its Indo-Pacific strategy. In recent years, the EU has emphasized strategic autonomy and adopted a different approach than the US; based on its success in regional integration, the EU has focused on regional organizations and attempted to replicate its own experience and promote integration to help shape the institutional framework governing the regional states.⁴

4. Li Junyi, “The Implications of the EU Indo-Pacific Cooperation Strategy Resolution for China,” *Instant Review on Defense Security*, April 26, 2021. https://indsr.org.tw/tw/News_detail/3363/

In this context, ASEAN, which is located around the disputed waters of the South China Sea, is of high regard.

In addition, India's importance may further increase under the current situation. The establishment of the AUKUS military security partnership among the US, the UK and Australia on September 15, 2021, just prior to the formal announcement of the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy document, shows that the UK and the US have chosen Australia as their core ally in the Indo-Pacific region to strengthen their military security intentions; it's also a response to China's rapid military expansion in recent years. However, the founding of AUKUS may inevitably conflict with the interests of European countries at some levels: the US and UK agreed to transfer key technologies to assist Australia in building nuclear-powered attack submarines, causing Australia to suddenly cancel the agreement with France on replacing the existing Collins-class submarine with

French-built Shortfin Barracuda, a next-generation diesel-electric submarine. The incident has strained France's relationship with Australia — and even with the US.

Although the emergence of AUKUS does not mean that UK, the US and the EU will go their separate, or even opposite, ways on security issues in the Indo-Pacific, the dispute over the development of Australia's next-generation submarines has not only brought a serious blow to France, which has always regarded arms sales as an important means of participation to strengthen its relations with regional allies,⁵ but also made France's "France-India-Australia" strategic alliance roadmap advocated in its Indo-Pacific strategy document inevitably affected.⁶ As the EU focuses on strategic autonomy, it is expected that the organization will further enhance its relationship with India in order to maintain its status as a major regional player in Indo-Pacific affairs and to avoid being marginalized. In fact, France

5. Hong Rui-Min, "France's Indo-Pacific Strategy with Long-Range Training and Military Sales as the Backbone," *Instant Review on Defense Security*, February 20, 2021.

https://indsr.org.tw/tw/News_detail/3328/

6. "France's Indo-Pacific Strategy," *France Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs*, July 2021, p.40, https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/en_a4_indopacifique_v2_rvb_cle432726.pdf.

and India announced that they would deepen their partnership soon after the establishment of AUKUS was announced, and the EU and Germany expressed their support for France immediately.⁷ Although India is a key member of the Quadripartite Security Dialogue (QUAD) and a major power in the Indo-Pacific region as well as a long-standing partner of France in arms sales, and AUKUS excluded both India and Japan (both QUAD members) in its establishment; however, as an alliance countering the Chinese military expansion threats, AUKUS's objective is actually in line with the strategic interests of the two uninvited countries. In this case, India can be expected to play a certain role between AUKUS and the EU.

However, as mentioned before, AUKUS and the EU are not going their separate ways in the Indo-Pacific since they are still traditional allies with common ideas and values, and they keep making similar efforts on common goals. As members of the EU, France, Germany and the Netherlands already have their

own Indo-Pacific strategy and will take respective actions, so the cooperation with AUKUS will still be implemented in line with the attitudes of their own. The German ship "Bayern" maintains its original Indo-Pacific voyage plan and will call at Perth, Australia on September 28, 2021, for a visit. On the other side, the US emphasis under the Biden administration on "restoring the transatlantic partnership" may require more effort to make further progress.

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7. "Macron and Modi Vow to 'Act Jointly' in Indo-Pacific as Submarine Row Intensifies," *France 24*, September 21, 2021, <https://www.france24.com/en/asia-pacific/20210921-macron-and-modi-vow-to-act-jointly-in-indo-pacific-as-submarine-row-intensifies>.